A WORLD OF ART

NINTH EDITION

HENRY M. SAYRE

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A World of Art

Ninth Edition

Henry M. Sayre
Oregon State University–Cascades Campus

Pearson

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As always, for my boys, Rob and John, and for Sandy

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Brief Contents

Contents

Dear Student

You might be asking yourself, "Why are they making me take this course? What does art have to do with my engineering, or forestry, or business degree?" In fact, many students come to an art appreciation course thinking of it as something akin to a maraschino cherry sitting atop their education sundae—pretty to look at, but of questionable food value, and of little real use.

But as you come to understand art, I hope you will realize that in studying it, you have learned to *think* better. You might be surprised to learn, for instance, that in 2005 the New York City Police Department began taking newly promoted officers, including sergeants, captains, and uniformed executives, to the Frick Collection, an art museum on New York's Upper East Side, in order to improve their observational skills by having them analyze works of art. Similar classes are offered to New York medical students to help them improve their diagnostic abilities when observing patients, teaching them to be sensitive to people's facial expressions and body language. Art appreciation is not forensic science, but it teaches many of the same skills.

Perhaps more than anything else, an art appreciation course can teach you the art of critical thinking—how to ask the right questions about the visual world that surrounds us, and then respond meaningfully to the complexity of that world. This book is, in fact, unique in its emphasis on the critical thinking process—a process of questioning, exploration, trial and error, and discovery that you can generalize to your own experience and your own chosen field of endeavor. Critical thinking is really a matter of putting yourself in a questioning frame of mind.

Shortly after the first planning sessions for this new edition, the COVID-19 pandemic changed our lives. As on-campus learning came to a halt, the importance of *A World of Art*'s REVEL digital environment to the new world of remote learning became more and more evident. In many ways, REVEL made the shift from on-campus to remote instruction almost seamless. The more than 30 Art21 videos continue to make so many images come to life as the artists themselves address the works at hand. Nearly every image remains pan-zoomable, making it possible for you to study images in detail. Panoramic views of many major monuments allow you explore them both inside and out. Built-in self-testing, journaling assignments, and essay questions allow you to measure your comprehension, and your instructor can track your progress as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic also taught us how much we depend upon digital technologies to communicate with one another, but even before the pandemic, in planning for this new edition, we were aware that digital technologies were transforming the world or art. A new chapter on digital media has been added to this edition. The shift from analog to digital technologies, which has occurred in the last fifteen years, has transformed not only the ease in which we can access images, but also the way we look at images, share them, and understand them. In turn, digital technologies allow for social and political issues to be more readily addressed by the world of art. As this book goes to press, artists have increasingly turned their attention to movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, and to issues like immigration, global warming, and COVID-19 itself. Among the 130 new images in this edition, many have been chosen because they take on the issues we face today as a people.

We can no longer just passively "receive" these images, like watching television, or we will never come to understand them. I hope that you'll find this book to be not just a useful, but an indispensable foundation in learning to negotiate your world.

About the Author

Henry M. Sayre is Distinguished Professor of Art History Emeritus at Oregon State University–Cascades Campus in Bend, Oregon. He is producer and creator of the 10-part television series *A World of Art: Works in Progress*, which aired on PBS in the fall of 1997; and author of eight books, including *The Humanities; Writing About Art; The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams; The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*; *Value in Art: Manet and the Slave Trade*; and an art history book for children, *Cave Paintings to Picasso*.

What's New to this Edition?

A new chapter, "Digital Media," has been added to the book. It contains four main sections: 1) a discussion of how digital technologies have transformed photography as a practice, including how social media (from the selfie to Instagram) have contributed to this transformation; 2) an examination of how the digital has impacted our understanding of artistic space and global culture, from the complexities of "screen space" to "game space" and "marketing space"; 3) a consideration of the possibilities of virtual reality (yet another new digital space); and, finally, 4) a look at how digital technologies have stimulated the creation of archive-based art works.

In Chapter 15, "The Design Profession," significant material has been added relating to the development of typography since 1960, including the invention of 'Supergraphics" by Barbara Stauffacher Soloman and overfall signage systems epitomized by Lance Wyman's logo and signage from the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. In addition, building on the discussion of the Memphis Group, a new section has been added on "The Rise of 'Niche' Markets," including discussion of Droog Design in Holland and Punk fashion in New York and London in the 1970s.

A new section on "Hispanic and Latino Identity in the United States," directly addressing the issue of immigration, has been added to Chapter 25: "The Individual and Cultural Identity."

In response to students asking for more on the subject, Chapter 27, the last chapter, "Science, Industry, and the Environment," now concludes with an extended discussion of the art world's confrontation with issues of global warming, adding eight new images to the already substantial discussion.

New to this edition is a chapter on "The Life Force," Chapter 23, replacing two chapters in the previous edition, "The Life Cycle" and "Love and Sex," but incorporating much material from both. It now concludes with a new "Critical Process" addressing both AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are over 130 new images in this edition. The following address current events that have changed the art world landscape since the last edition:

Black Lives Matter: Figs. 1-17, 5-35, 16-25, 25-20, 25-21, 25-22
#MeToo: Figs. 13-37, 24-13, 24-14
COVID-19: Figs. 1-25, 9-35, 23-23
Immigration: Figs. 21-32, 21-34, 25-12, 25-13, 25-14
Global Warming: Figs. 16-14, 23-22, 27-11, 27-13, 27-14, 27-15, 27-18, 27-19, 27-20

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Over the course of the last decade, as technology has increasingly encroached on the book as we know it—with the explosion, that is, of the Internet, digital media, and new forms of publishing, like the iPad and Kindle—I worried that books like A World of Art might one day lose their relevance. I envisioned them being supplanted by some as-yet-unforeseen technological wizardry, like a machine in a science fiction novel, that would transport my reader into a three- or four-dimensional learning space "beyond the book." Well, little did I know that Pearson Education was developing just such a space, one firmly embedded in the book, not beyond it. From my point of view, REVEL represents one of the most important developments in art publishing and education in decades. I am extremely grateful to the team that has put it together and is continually working to improve it.

— Henry Sayre

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Our art authors have reimagined their content for Revel, embedding interactives throughout the narrative that bring the discipline to life. Instead of simply reading about art, Revel transports students directly in front of key works, and allows them to virtually explore renowned museums, galleries, and even ruins from across the globe. For example, interactive Architectural Panoramas and Students on Site videos let students visit the Pantheon without leaving home. By empowering students to actively participate in learning, Revel boosts engagement and improves results.

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INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL AND TEST ITEM FILE

This is an invaluable professional resource and reference for new and experienced faculty. Each chapter contains the following sections: Chapter Overview, Chapter Objectives, Key Terms, Lecture and Discussion Topics, Resources, and Writing Assignments and Projects. The test bank includes multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions. Available for download from the instructor support section at www.pearsonhighered.com.

MyTest

This flexible online test-generating software includes all questions found in the printed Test Item File. Instructors can quickly and easily create customized tests with MyTest.

Development

Every edition of *A World of Art* has grown over the years, in large part due to the instructors and students who share their feedback, ideas, and experiences with the text. This edition is no different and we are grateful to all who participated in shaping its structure and content. Manuscript reviewers for this nineth and the past editions include the following:

Tim Blunk, Bergen Community College
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Paige Wideman, Northern Kentucky University
Kimberly Winkle, Tennessee Technological University

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Over the years, a great many people have helped make this book what it is today. The contributions of all the people at Oregon State University who originally supported me in getting this project off the ground—Jeff Hale; three chairs of the Art Department, David Hardesty, Jim Folts, and John Maul; three deans of the College of Liberal Arts, Bill Wilkins, Kay Schaffer, and Larry Rodgers; and three university presidents, John Byrne, Paul Risser, and Ed Ray—cannot be forgotten. To this day, and down through this new edition, I owe them all a special debt of gratitude. Finally, in the first edition of this book, I thanked Berk Chappell for his example as a teacher. He knew more about teaching art appreciation than I ever will, and I miss him dearly.

Over these same years, many editors have contributed to the development of this book, but I would like to thank, in particular, Sarah Touborg and Helen Ronan, who together first forged the new direction in art publishing that REVEL represents, and the late Bud Therien, who oversaw the development of most of the earlier editions of this book. Bud was a man of extraordinary fortitude, passion, and vision. He is, in many ways, responsible for the way that art appreciation and art history are taught today in this country. I have had no better friend in the business.

At Pearson, I am especially grateful to the product, content, and production teams who saw this edition through to completion.

Finally, as always, I owe my greatest debt to my colleague and wife, Sandy Brooke. She is present everywhere in this project. It is safe to say she made it possible. I can only say it again: Without her good counsel and better company, I would not have had the will to get this all done, let alone found the pleasure I have had in doing it.

Henry M. Sayre
Oregon State University–Cascades Campus

Student Toolkit

This short section is designed to introduce the over-arching themes and aims of *A World of Art* as well as provide you with a guide to the basic elements of art that you can easily access whenever you interact with works of art—in these pages, in museums, and anywhere else you encounter them. The topics covered here are developed much more fully in later chapters, but this overview brings all this material together in a convenient, quick-reference format.

Why Study the World of Art?

We study art because it is among the highest expressions of culture, embodying its ideals and aspirations, challenging its assumptions and beliefs, and creating new visions and possibilities for it to pursue. That said, "culture" is itself a complex phenomenon, constantly changing and vastly diverse. The "world of art" is composed of objects from many, many cultures—as many cultures as there are and have been. In fact, from culture to culture, and from cultural era to cultural era, the very idea of what "art" even is has changed. It was not until the Renaissance, for instance, that the concept of fine art, as we think of it today, arose in Europe. Until then, the Italian word *arte* meant "guild"—any one of the associations of craftspeople that dominated medieval commerce—and *artista* referred to any student of the liberal arts, particularly grammarians.

But, since the Renaissance, we have tended to see the world of art through the lens of "fine art." We differentiate those one-of-a-kind expressions of individual creativity that we normally associate with fine art—painting, sculpture, and architecture—from craft, works of the applied or practical arts like textiles, glass, ceramics, furniture, metalwork, and jewelry. When we refer to "African art" or "Aboriginal art," we are speaking of objects that, in the cultures in which they were produced, were almost always thought of as applied or practical. They served, that is, ritual or religious purposes that far outweighed whatever purely artistic skill they might evidence. Only in most recent times, as these cultures have responded to the West's ever-more-expansive appetite for the exotic and original, have individual artists in these cultures begun to produce works intended for sale in the Western "fine arts" market.

To whatever degree a given object is more or less "fine art" or "craft," we study it in order to understand more about the culture that produced it. The object gives us insight into what the culture values—religious ritual, aesthetic pleasure, or functional utility, to name just a few possibilities.

The Critical Process

Studying these objects engages us in a critical process that is analogous, in many ways, to the creative process that artists engage in. One of the major features of this text is a series of spreads called The Creative Process. They are meant to demonstrate that art, like most things, is the result of both hard work and, especially, a process of critical thinking that involves questioning, exploration, trial and error, revision, and discovery.

One of the greatest benefits of studying art is that it teaches you to think critically. Art objects are generally "mute." They cannot explain themselves to you, but that does not mean that their meaning is "hidden" or elusive. They contain information—all kinds of information—that can help you explain and understand them if you approach them through the critical thinking process that is outlined below.

Seven Steps to Thinking Critically about Art

1. Identify the artist's decisions and choices.
Begin by recognizing that, in making works of art, artists inevitably make certain decisions and choices—What color should I make this area? Should my line be wide or narrow? Straight or curved? Will I look up at my subject or down on it? Will I depict it realistically or not? What medium should I use to make this object? And so on. Identify these choices. Then ask yourself why these choices were made. Remember, though most artists work somewhat intuitively, every artist has the opportunity to revise or redo each work, each gesture. You can be sure that what you are seeing in a work of art is an intentional effect.

2. Ask questions. Be curious.
Asking yourself why the artist's choices were made is just the first set of questions to pose. You need to consider the work's title: What does it tell you about the piece? Is there any written material accompanying the work? Is the work informed by the context in which you encounter it—by other works around it, or, in the case of sculpture, for instance, by its location? Is there anything you learn about the artist that is helpful?

3. Describe the object.
By carefully describing the object—both its subject matter and how its subject matter is formally realized—you can discover much about the artist's intentions. Pay careful attention to how one part of the work relates to the others.

4. Question your assumptions.
Question, particularly, any initial dislike you might have for a given work of art. Remember that if you are seeing the work in a book, museum, or gallery, then someone likes it. Ask yourself why. Often you'll talk yourself into liking it too. But also examine the work itself to see if it contains any biases or prejudices. It matters, for instance, in Renaissance church architecture, whether the church was designed for Protestants or Catholics.

5. Avoid an emotional response.
Art objects are supposed to stir up your feelings, but your emotions can sometimes get in the way of clear thinking. Analyze your own emotions. Determine what about the work set them off, and ask yourself if this wasn't the artist's very intention.

6. Don't oversimplify or misrepresent the art object.
Art objects are complex by their nature. To think critically about an art object is to look beyond the obvious. Thinking critically about the work of art always involves walking the line between the work's susceptibility to interpretation and its integrity, or its resistance to arbitrary and capricious readings. Be sure your reading of a work of art is complete enough (that it recognizes the full range of possible meanings the work might possess), and, at the same time, that it doesn't violate or misrepresent the work.

7. Tolerate uncertainty.
Remember that the critical process is an exercise in discovery, that it is designed to uncover possibilities, not necessarily certain truths. Critical thinking is a process of questioning; asking good questions is sometimes more important than arriving at "right" answers. There may, in fact, be no "right" answers.

At the end of each chapter in this book you will find a section called The Critical Process, which poses a series of questions about a work or works of art related to the material in that chapter. These questions are designed both to help you learn to ask similar questions of other works of art and to test your understanding of the chapter materials. Short answers to the questions can be found at the back of the book, but you should try to answer them for yourself before you consult the answers.

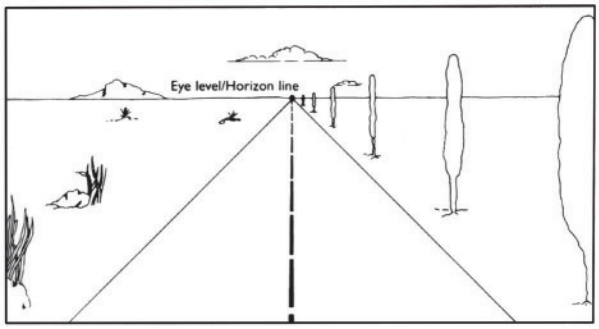
A Quick-Reference Guide to the Elements of Art

Basic Terms

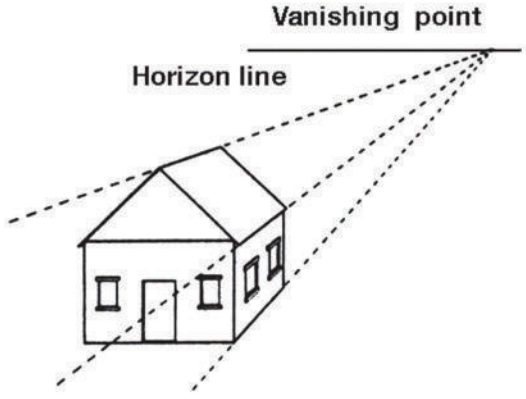
Three basic principles define all works of art, whether two-dimensional (painting, drawing, printmaking, and photography) or three-dimensional (sculpture and architecture):

- Form—the overall structure of the work
- Subject matter—what is literally depicted
- Content—what it means

If the subject matter is recognizable, the work is said to be representational. Representational works that attempt to depict objects as they are in actual, visible reality are called realistic. The less a work resembles real things in the real world, the more abstract it is. Abstract art does not try to duplicate the world, but instead reduces the world to its essential qualities. If the subject matter of the work is not recognizable, the work is said to be nonrepresentational, or nonobjective.



One-point linear perspective Frontal



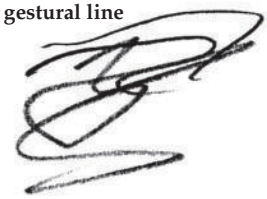
One-point linear perspective Diagonal

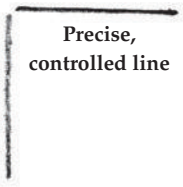
The Formal Elements

The term form refers to the purely visual aspects of art and architecture. Line, space, levels of light and dark, color, and texture are among the elements that contribute to a work's form.

LINE is the most fundamental formal element. It delineates shape (a flat two-dimensional area) and mass (a solid form that occupies a three-dimensional volume) by means of outline (in which the edge of a form or shape is indicated directly with a more or less continuous mark) or contour (which is the perceived edge of a volume as it curves away from the viewer). Lines can be implied—as in your line of sight. Line also possesses certain emotional, expressive, or intellectual qualities. Some lines are loose and free, gestural and quick. Other lines are precise, controlled, and mathematically and rationally organized.

Loose, gestural line

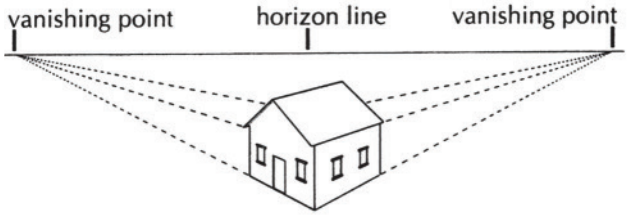




Precise, controlled line

SPACE Line is also fundamental to the creation of a sense of deep, three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, the system known as linear perspective. In one-point linear perspective, lines are drawn on the picture plane in such a way as to represent parallel lines receding to a single point on the viewer's horizon, called the vanishing point. When the vanishing point is directly across from the viewer's vantage point, the recession is frontal. When the vanishing point is to one side or the other, the recession is diagonal.

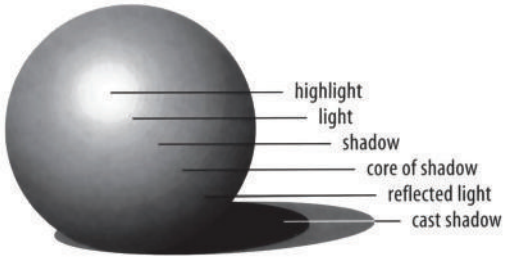
In two-point linear perspective, more than one vanishing point occurs, as, for instance, when you look at the corner of a building.



Two-point linear perspective

LIGHT AND DARK are also employed by artists to create the illusion of deep space on a two-dimensional surface. In atmospheric perspective—also called aerial perspective—objects farther away from the viewer appear less distinct as the contrast between light and dark is increasingly reduced by the effects of atmosphere. Artists depict the gradual transition from light to dark around a curved surface by means of modeling. Value is the relative degree of lightness or darkness in the range from white to black created by the amount of light reflected from an object's surface (the gray scale).

Gray scale



A sphere represented by means of modeling

COLOR has several characteristics. Hue is the color itself. Colors also possess value. When we add white to a hue, thus lightening it, we have a tint of that color. When we add black to a hue, thus darkening it, we have a shade of that color. The purer or brighter a hue, the greater its intensity. Different colors are the result of different wavelengths of light. The visible spectrum—that you see, for instance, in a rainbow—runs from red to orange to yellow (the so-called warm hues) to green, blue, and violet (the so-called cool hues). The spectrum can be rearranged in a conventional color wheel. The three primary colors—red, yellow, and blue (designated by the number 1 on the color wheel)—are those that cannot be made by any mixture of the other colors. Each of the secondary colors—orange, green, and violet (designated by the number 2)—is a mixture of the two primaries it lies between. The intermediate colors (designated by the number 3) are mixtures of a primary and a neighboring secondary. Analogous color schemes are those composed of hues that neighbor each other on the color wheel. Complementary color schemes are composed of hues that lie opposite each other on the color wheel. When the entire range of hues is used, the color scheme is said to be polychromatic.

Conventional color wheel

TEXTURE is the tactile quality of a surface. It takes two forms: the actual surface quality—as marble is smooth, for instance; and a visual quality that is a representational illusion—as a marble nude sculpture is not soft like skin.

Visiting Museums

Museums can be intimidating places, but you should remember that the museum is, in fact, dedicated to your visit. Its mission is to help you understand and appreciate its collections and exhibits.

One of the primary functions of museums is to provide a context for works of art—that is, works are grouped together in such a way that they inform one another. They might be grouped by artist (all the sculptures of Rodin might be in a single room); by school or group (the French Cubists in one room, for instance, and the Italian Futurists in the next); by national and historical period (nineteenth-century British landscape); or by some critical theory or theme. Curators—the people who organize museum collections and exhibits—also guarantee the continued movement of people through their galleries by limiting the number of important or "star" works in any given room. The attention of the viewer is drawn to such works by positioning and lighting.

A good way to begin your visit to a museum is to quickly walk through the exhibit or exhibits that particularly interest you in order to gain an overall impression. Then return to the beginning and take your time. Remember, this is your chance to look at the work close at hand, and, especially in large paintings, you will see details that are never visible in reproduction—everything from brushwork to the text of newsprint incorporated in a collage. Take the time to walk around sculptures and experience their full three-dimensional effects. You will quickly learn that there is no substitute for seeing works in person.

A Do-and-Don't Guide to Visiting Museums

DO PLAN AHEAD. Most museums have websites that can be very helpful in planning your visit. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, for instance, and the Louvre in Paris are so large that their collections cannot be seen in a single visit. You should determine in advance what you want to see.

DO HELP YOURSELF to a museum guide once you are at the museum. It will help you find your way around the exhibits.

DO TAKE ADVANTAGE of any information about the collections—brochures and the like—that the museum provides. Portable audio tours can be especially informative, as can museum staff and volunteers—called docents—who often conduct tours.

DO LOOK AT THE WORK BEFORE YOU READ ABOUT IT. Give yourself a chance to experience the work in a direct, unmediated way.

DO READ THE LABELS that museums provide for the artworks they display after you've looked at the work for a while. Almost all labels give the name of the artist (if known), the name and date of the work, its materials and technique (oil on canvas, for instance), and some information about how the museum acquired the work. Sometimes additional information is provided in a wall text, which might analyze the work's formal qualities, or provide some anecdotal or historical background.

DON'T TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS, unless cameras are explicitly allowed in the museum. The light created by flashbulbs can be especially damaging to paintings.

DON'T TOUCH THE ARTWORK. The more texture a work possesses, the more tempting it will be, but the oils in your skin can be extremely damaging, even to stone and metal.

DO TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE out of courtesy to others.

DON'T TALK LOUDLY, and be aware that others may be looking at the same piece you are. Try to avoid blocking their line of sight.

DO ENJOY YOURSELF, don't be afraid to laugh (art can be funny), and if you get tired, take a break.

A World of Art

Doug Aitken, *sleepwalkers*, 2007. Installation view. Six-channel video (color, sound), 12 min. 57 sec.

Part 1
The Visual World

Understanding the Art You See

Look at the work of art on the opposite page. What is its purpose? What does it "mean"? Does it even look like "art"? How do the formal qualities of the work—such as its color, its organization, its size and scale—affect your reaction? What do you value in works of art? These are some of the questions that this book is designed to help you address. Appreciating art is never just a question of accepting visual stimuli, but it also involves intelligently contemplating why and how works of art come to be made and have meaning. By helping you understand the artist's creative process, we hope to engage your own critical ability, the process by which you create your own ideas as well.

To begin to answer these questions in relation to the accompanying image, you'll need a little context. Just as dark descended on New York City at 5 PM each night between January 16 and February 12, 2007, five 12-minute 57-second films were played on a loop for five hours, until 10 PM, in different combinations across eight different external walls of the Museum of Modern Art. Each film chronicled the nocturnal journeys of five inhabitants of the city from the time they awakened in the evening until dawn the next day—the iconic actors Donald Sutherland and Tilda Swinton as, respectively, a businessman and office worker, the less familiar but still recognizable musicians Chan Marshall (aka Cat Power) and Seu Jorge as, respectively, a postal worker and an electrician, and a busker discovered in the subway by the work's creator, Doug Aitken, named Ryan Donowho, who plays a bicycle messenger.

Aitken called the work *sleepwalkers*. In a very real sense, he turned the museum inside out, opening his art to the surrounding streets at a time of day when the museum itself is normally closed. As each of Aitken's characters simultaneously awaken, greet the coming evening (their "day"), and move into the city's streets—the businessman into his car, the office worker into a taxi, the postal clerk onto a bus, the electrician into the subway, and the messenger onto his bike—a sense of isolation, loneliness, and introspection pervades, even as their movements reveal an almost uncanny commonality. The pace of Aitken's films slowly crescendos as his characters start their work day until finally, walking down the street, the businessman is hit by a car and then jumps on its hood to dance a jig; the office worker imagines herself a violinist in the New York Symphony Orchestra; the postal clerk suddenly begins a tight spin as she sorts the mail; the electrician makes a lariat out of a cable and whirls it above his head; and the bike messenger drums frantically on a bucket in the subway. As the films thus move from a state of virtual somnambulism to a fever pitch of motion, they come to parallel "the city's disparate but fused systems of energy," as curator Peter Eleey puts it in his catalogue essay for the MoMA exhibition. Eleey continues:

> We, like each of Aitken's characters, dream into being a wishful, imaginary architecture to connect us, built of the modest hope that others elsewhere are doing the same thing or thinking the same thoughts as we are. We harbor the secret suspicion, the aching desire, that in this hidden choreography someone else, right now, is picking at a sticker on the window of a cab, getting out of bed, listening to the same song, watching the same movie, and most importantly, sharing that same hope about us.

It is worth suggesting, as we begin this book, that this "modest hope" is what all works of art aspire to create, that they aim to connect us in a "hidden choreography," the secret dance of our common desires, played out before us on the walls of a museum—or even out in the streets, where an increasing amount of art, taking increasingly novel and surprising forms, is being made and displayed.

Chapter 1
Discovering a World of Art

Learning Objectives

1.1 Differentiate between passive and active seeing.

1.2 Define the creative process and describe the roles that artists most often assume when they engage in that process.

1.3 Discuss the different ways in which people value, or do not value, works of art.

Deep in the forests of West Virginia's Allegheny Mountains and Virginia's Blue Ridge, a region of approximately 13,000 square miles comprises the "National Radio Quiet Zone." There, radio transmissions are severely restricted, and high-powered transmissions such as those produced by wireless Internet devices, cell phones, and FM radio stations are banned. Trevor Paglen's photograph *They Watch the Moon* (**Fig. 1-1**), shot with a high-powered lens from a great distance, with a long exposure in the light of a full moon, depicts a classified "listening station" located in the center of the Quiet Zone. First established in the 1960s to take advantage of a phenomenon called "moonbounce"—when signals transmitted from the Earth hit the moon and are reflected back—the listening station eventually became part of a program called ECHELON, a global network of electronic spy stations that eavesdrop on telephone, fax, and computer transmissions operated by the U.S. National Security Agency with the aid of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, together known as the Five Eyes. Although rumored to exist since the early 1970s, by 2000, the *New York Times* admitted that the program was "shrouded in such secrecy that its very existence has been difficult to prove." Not until 2015, when CIA whistleblower Edward Snowden published two internal NSA newsletters from 2011 and 2012 on the website The Intercept, could its existence be confirmed.

They Watch the Moon is part of the series *Limit Telephotography* (ongoing since 2005), photographs of classified government surveillance systems and clandestine military bases—often, unlike the West Virginia listening station, in remote corners of the American West—shot with high-powered lenses from great distance (and thus, perfectly legal). The process resembles the technique that astronomers use to photograph objects millions or even trillions of miles from Earth. But, as Paglen points out, it is easier to photograph Jupiter (500 million miles away) than most secret military installations. Between Earth and Jupiter there are only about five miles of thick atmosphere. But between himself and the sites that he chooses to photograph, there are up to forty miles of atmosphere, laden with particulates, water vapor, dust, pollen, and spores.

As landscape, *They Watch the Moon* is almost idyllic, the listening station's lights gleaming like some welcoming oasis or refuge in a lush sea of green. But Paglen always accompanies the *Limit Telephotography* images with some description of what it is exactly that we are looking at: "This photograph depicts a classified 'listening station' deep in the forests of West Virginia," it begins in this case. The disconnect between what we see and what it is interests Paglen—that and the fact that what we are seeing in his photographs is something we normally cannot see at all. "Secrecy" is not a thing. But Paglen's photographs show us what secrecy looks like.

Fig. 1-1 Trevor Paglen, *They Watch the Moon*, 2010. Chromogenic print; 36 × 48 in. (91.44 × 121.92 cm)
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
Photo: Katherine Du Tiel Accessions Committee Fund purchase © Trevor Paglen. Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco
© Trevor Paglen.

In 2007, he began a series of photographs called *The Other Night Sky* in which he trained his high-powered lens on the orbital paths of surveillance satellites. The night sky today, he points out, is not what it was historically. "If you look at Orion in 2015," he told an interviewer, "there will be a spy satellite in there." We don't see it because our eyes have not been trained to see it.

Or consider a body of work he undertook in 2015 photographing the places where undersea Internet fiber-optic cables come ashore. He shot both from the shoreline, and, having learned to scuba dive, underwater. These are known as "choke points," because all intercontinental Internet traffic flows through them, and NSA is able to tap them easily, harvesting vast amounts of data. Words like "the cloud" or "cyberspace," Paglen points out, are actually metaphors for things—the Internet is literally cables laid on the bottom of the ocean.

Paglen is teaching us how to see structures of power that are normally invisible to us. In a world in which we sometimes feel inundated in images, in the world of Facebook and Instagram and Netflix, we perhaps too easily take images for granted. Through his work, Paglen hopes we learn to see our world differently, with more critical and knowledgeable eyes. This book begins with Paglen's work because it is the act of seeing that must concern us first.

1.1 The World as We Perceive It

What is the difference between passive and active seeing?

Many of us assume, almost without question, that we can trust our eyes to give us accurate information about the world, and one of the things that Trevor Paglen most teaches us that making such an assumption is a mistake. Seeing, as we say, is believing. Our word "idea" derives, in fact, from the Greek word *idein*, meaning "to see," and it is no accident that when we say "I see" we often mean "I understand."

1.1.1 The Process of Seeing

But the act of seeing is not a simple matter of our vision making a direct recording of the reality. Seeing is both a physical and psychological process. Physically, visual processing can be divided into three steps:

reception → extraction → inference

In the first step, reception, external stimuli enter the nervous system through our eyes—we "see the light." Next, the retina, which is a collection of nerve cells at the back of the eye, extracts the basic information it needs and sends this information to the visual cortex, the part of the brain that processes visual stimuli. There are approximately 100 million sensors in the retina, but only 5 million channels to the visual cortex. In other words, the retina does a lot of "editing," and so does the visual cortex. There, special mechanisms capable of extracting specific information about such features as color, motion, orientation, and size "create" what is finally seen. What you see is the inference your visual cortex extracts from the information your retina sends it.

Seeing, in other words, is an inherently creative process. The visual system draws conclusions about the world. It represents the world for you by editing out information, deciding what is important and what is not. We all know that our eyes can deceive us, and for centuries artists have taken advantage of this fact. Consider, for instance, artist Vija Celmins's project *To Fix the Image in Memory* (**Fig. 1-2**). What looks like two identical rocks are instead a rock and a painted bronze cast of that rock. The bronze stone is an example of **trompe-l'oeil**—that is, it "tricks the eye." For this work, Celmins picked eleven different small stones collected on walks along the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico and then arranged them in a line on her windowsill. Knowing that she admired them, and wanting to put them into some sort of art context, she made a bronze cast of each one and then painted it to resemble the original source stone as closely as possible. At the same time, they draw attention to the extraordinary detail—the thousands of specks and flecks—that makes up their surfaces. They challenge us to look carefully at what we might otherwise ignore. They are also, finally, something of a tease, for as closely as we compare the real stone to its bronze partner, we can never be quite sure which is which.

If the eye can be so easily deceived, it is equally true that it does not recall many things it sees even regularly with any measure of accuracy. Consider, for example, what sort of visual information you have stored about the American flag. You know its colors—red, white, and blue—and that it has 50 stars and

Fig. 1-2 Vija Celmins, *To Fix the Image in Memory* (detail), 1977–82. Stones and painted bronze, eleven pairs, dimensions variable. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

13 stripes. You know, roughly, its shape—rectangular. But do you know its proportions? Do you even know, without looking, what color stripe is at the flag's top, or what color is at the bottom? How many short stripes are there, and how many long ones? How many horizontal rows of stars are there? How many long rows? How many short ones? The point is that not only do we each perceive the same things differently, remembering different details, but also we do not usually see things as thoroughly or accurately as we might suppose. As the philosopher Nelson Goodman explains, "The eye functions not as an instrument self-powered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyzes, constructs. It does not so much mirror as take and make." In other words, the eye mirrors each individual's complex perceptions of the world.

1.1.2 Active Seeing

Everything you see is filtered through a long history of fears, prejudices, desires, emotions, customs, and beliefs. Through art, we can begin to understand those filters and learn to look more closely at the visual world. Jasper Johns's *Flag* (**Fig. 1-3**) presents an opportunity to look closely at a familiar image. According to Johns, when he created this work, the flag was something "seen but not looked at, not examined." *Flag* was painted at a time when the nation was obsessed with patriotism, spawned by Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist hearings in 1954, by President Eisenhower's affirmation of all things American, and by the Soviet Union's challenge of American supremacy through the Space Race. Many of the painting's first audiences were particularly disturbed by the lumps and smears of the painting's surface and the newspaper scraps visible beneath the

Fig. 1-3 Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954–55. Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood (three panels) 42¼ × 60⅝ in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

stars and stripes. While contemporary viewers may not have experienced that Cold War era, the work still asks us to consider what the flag represents. At another level, because we already "know" what a flag is, Johns asks us to consider not what he represents but how he represents it. In other words, he asks us to consider it as a painting.

Faith Ringgold's *God Bless America* (**Fig. 1-4**) has as its historical context the Civil Rights Movement. In it, the American flag has been turned into a prison cell. Painted at a time when white prejudice against African Americans was enforced by the legal system, the star of the flag becomes a sheriff's badge, and its red and white stripes are transformed into the black bars of the jail. The white woman portrayed in the painting is the very image of contradiction: At once a patriot, pledging allegiance to the flag, and a racist, denying blacks the right to vote. She is a prisoner of her own bigotry. While the meaning of the work is open to interpretation, there is no question of its power to draw us into a closer examination of our perceptions and understandings of our world.

Fig. 1-4 Faith Ringgold, *God Bless America*, No. 13 from the series *American People*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 31 × 19 in.

1.2 The World as Artists See It

What is the creative process and what roles do artists most often assume when they engage in that process?

At the edge of the Gobi Desert, in northwestern China, is the oasis town of Dunhuang where, beginning in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the cultures of the East and West first intersected. It lies at the terminus of the Silk Road. Western linen, wool, glass, gold, Persian pistachios, and mustard originating in the Mediterranean were exchanged in the city for Chinese silk, ceramics, fur, lacquered goods, and spices, all carried on the backs of Bactrian camels (**Fig. 1-5**), animals particularly suitable for the cold, dry, and high altitudes of the deserts and steppes of central Asia, across which the Silk Road traversed. In fact, the camels can go for months at a time without water.

Fig. 1-5 Caravaneer on a camel, China, Tang dynasty (618–907). Polychrome terracotta figure, 17⅛ × 14⅛ in. Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris

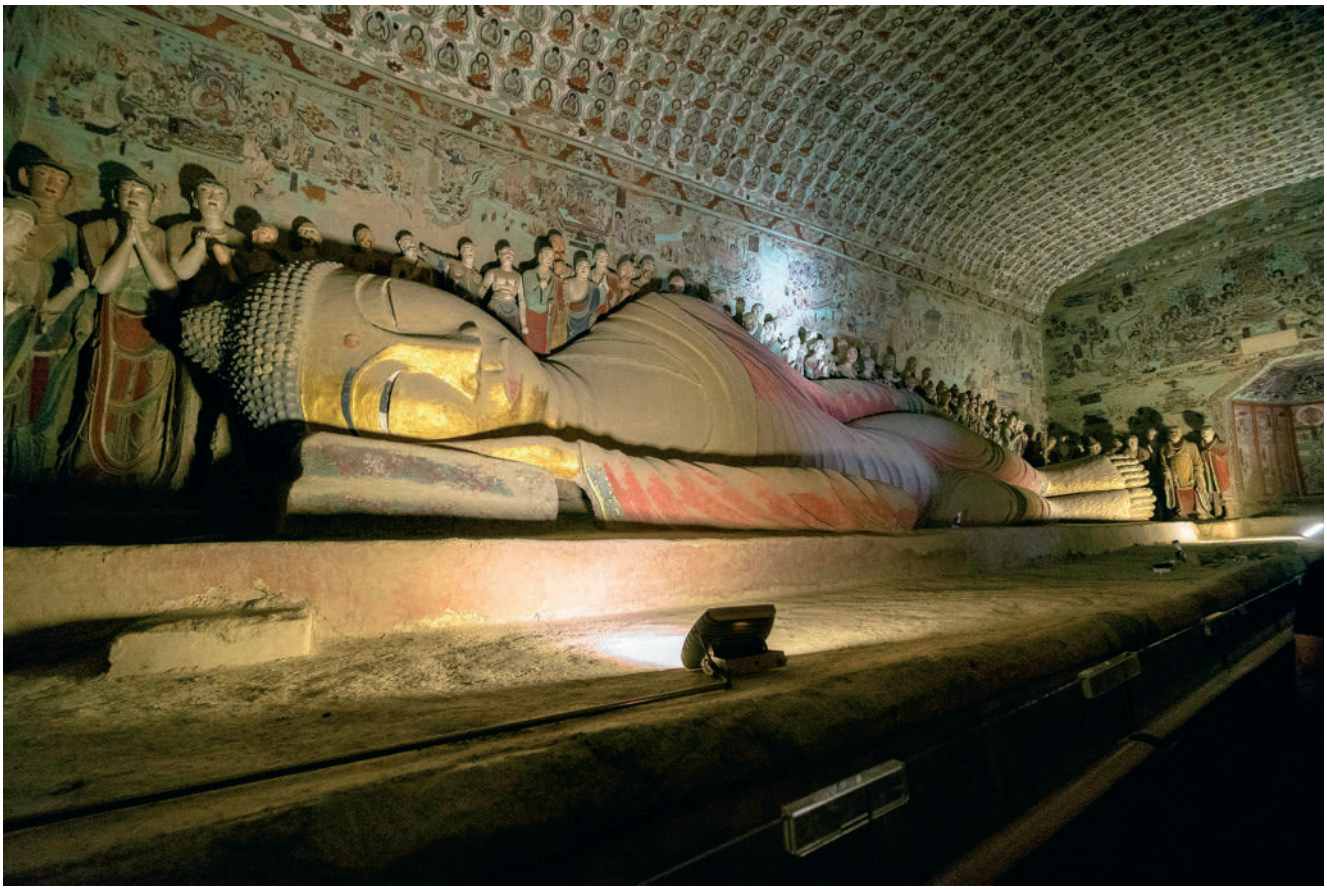


Fig. 1-6 Reclining Buddha, Mogao Caves, Cave 148, Dunhuang, China, Middle Tang dynasty (781–847). Length: 51 feet. Zhang Peng/LightRocket/Getty Images.

Dunhuang is also the site of the greatest collection of early Chinese art to be found anywhere. The story goes that, in 366 CE, a Buddhist monk named Le Sun traveling on the Silk Road had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in a golden, flaming light flickering across the face of a mile-long sandstone cliff near the city. He was inspired to dig a cave-temple on the site. For centuries after, travelers and traders, seeking safety and prosperity, commissioned more caves, decorating them profusely. By the fourteenth century, the resulting Mogao Caves (*Mogaoku* in Chinese, meaning "peerless caves") consisted of some 800 separate spaces chiseled out of the cliff. Of these, 492 caves are decorated with murals that cover more than 484,000 square feet of wall space (about 40 times the expanse of the Sistine Chapel in Rome), and some 2,000 sculptures fill the grottoes (**Fig. 1-6**). Today a World Heritage Site—and an increasingly popular tourist destination, despite that fact that it is some 1,150 miles from the Chinese capital of Beijing—the Mogao Caves are a monumental testament to human creativity.

1.2.1 The Creative Process

All of the innumerable artists who have worked in Dunhuang have shared the fundamental desire to *create*, and in order to create, artists have to engage in *critical thinking*. The creative process is, in fact, an exercise in critical thinking. All people are creative, but not all people possess the energy, ingenuity, and courage of conviction that are required to make art. In order to produce a work of art, the artist must be able to respond to the unexpected, the chance occurrences or results that are part of the creative process. In other words, the artist must be something of an explorer and inventor. The artist must always be open to new ways of seeing. The landscape painter John Constable spoke of this openness as "the art of seeing nature." This art of seeing leads to imagining, which leads in turn to making. Creativity is the sum of this process, from seeing to imagining to making. In the process of making a work of art, the artist also engages in a self-critical process—questioning assumptions, revising and rethinking choices and decisions, exploring new directions and possibilities.

Exploring the creative process is the focus of this book. We hope you take from it the knowledge that the kind of creative and critical thinking engaged in by artists is fundamental to every discipline. This same path leads to discovery in science, breakthroughs in engineering, and new research in the social sciences. We can all learn from studying the creative process itself.

1.2.2 Art and the Idea of Beauty

For many people, the main purpose of art is to satisfy our aesthetic sense, our desire to see and experience the beautiful. The question of just what constitutes "beauty" has long been a topic of debate. In fact, it is probably fair to say that the sources of **aesthetic** pleasure—"aesthetic" refers to our sense of the beautiful—differ from culture to culture and from time to time. In Western culture, beauty has long been associated with notions of order, regularity, right proportion, and design—all hallmarks of Classical art and architecture in the Greek Golden Age, the era in which, for instance, the Parthenon in Athens was constructed (see Chapter 17). As a result, for centuries, mountain ranges such as the Alps or the American Rockies, which today rank among our greatest sources of aesthetic pleasure, were routinely condemned. As late as 1681, Thomas Burnet, writing in his *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, could quite easily dismiss them: "They are placed in no Order one with the other. . . . There is nothing in Nature more shapeless or ill-figured. . . . They are the greatest examples of Confusion that we know in Nature." But by the middle of the nineteenth century, great stretches of just such landscapes were being preserved as National Parks in the United States, precisely as testaments to nature's beauty.

The human body has been a similarly contested site. In contrast to the tall, statuesque models we associate with contemporary fashion design, the seventeenth-century artist Peter Paul Rubens preferred fleshier, more rounded models. No one would think of Pablo Picasso's representations of women in the late 1920s and early 1930s as beautiful; rather, they are almost demonic in character. Most biographers believe images such as his *Seated Bather* (*La Baigneuse*) (**Fig. 1-7**) to be portraits of his wife, the Russian ballerina Olga Koklova, whom he married in 1918. By the late 1920s, their marriage was in a shambles, and Picasso portrays her here as a skeletal horror, her back and buttocks almost crustacean in appearance, her horizontal mouth looking like some archaic mandible. Her pose is ironic, inspired by Classical Greek representations of the nude, and the sea behind her is as empty as the Mediterranean sky is gray. Picasso means nothing in this painting to be pleasing, except our recognition of his extraordinary ability to invent expressive images of tension. Through his entire career, from his portrayal of a brothel in his 1907 *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see *The Creative Process*, pp. 11–12), he represented his relation to women as a sort of battlefield between attraction and repulsion. There can be no doubt which side has won the battle in this painting.

But from a certain point of view, the experience of such dynamic tension is itself pleasing, and it is the ability of works of art to create and sustain such moments that many people value most about them. That is, many people find such moments aesthetically pleasing. The work of art may not itself be beautiful, but it triggers a higher level of thought and awareness in the viewer, and the viewer experiences this intellectual and imaginative stimulus—this higher order of thought—as a form of beauty in its own right.

1.2.3 Roles of the Artist

Most artists think of themselves as assuming one of four fundamental roles—or some combination of the four—as they approach their work: 1) They create a visual record of their time and place; 2) they help us to see the world in new and innovative ways; 3) they make functional objects and structures more pleasurable by imbuing them with beauty and meaning; and 4) they give form to immaterial ideas and feelings.

1) ARTISTS MAKE A VISUAL RECORD OF THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS OF THEIR TIME AND PLACE Sometimes artists are not so much interested in seeing things anew as they are in simply recording, accurately, what it is that they see. In fact, this was precisely the purpose of the artist who created the Bactrian camel carrying goods across the Silk Road (see Fig. 1-5). The art of portraiture is likewise a direct reflection of this desire, and of all the forms of art portraiture is, in fact, one of the longest-standing traditions. Until the invention of photography, the portrait—whether drawn, painted, or sculpted—was the only way to preserve the physical likeness of a human being.

Mickalene Thomas specializes in portraits of African-American women, often posed in reclining positions amidst décor dating from the 1960s and

Fig. 1-7 Pablo Picasso, *Seated Bather* (*La Baigneuse*), 1930. Oil on canvas, 5 ft. 4¼ × 4 ft. 3 in. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. (82.1950). The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Creative Process

From Sketch to Final Vision: Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*

No one could look at Picasso's large painting of 1907, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (**Fig. 1-10**) and call it aesthetically *beautiful*, but it is, for many people, one of his most aesthetically *interesting* works. Nearly 8 feet square, it would come to be considered one of the first major paintings of the modern era—and one of the least beautiful. The title, chosen not by Picasso but by a close friend, literally means "the young ladies of Avignon," but its somewhat tongue-in-cheek reference is specifically to the prostitutes of Avignon Street, the red-light district of Barcelona, Spain, Picasso's hometown. We know a great deal about Picasso's process as he worked on the canvas from late 1906 into the early summer months of 1907, not only because many of his working sketches survive but also because the canvas itself has been submitted to extensive examination, including X-ray analysis. This reveals early versions of certain passages, particularly the figure at the left and the two figures on the right, which lie under the final layers of paint.

An early sketch (**Fig. 1-8**) reveals that the painting was originally conceived to include seven figures—five prostitutes, a sailor seated in their midst, and, entering from the left, a medical student carrying a book. Picasso probably had in mind some anecdotal or narrative idea contrasting the dangers and joys of both work and pleasure, but he soon abandoned the male figures. By doing so, he involved the viewer much more fully in the scene. No longer does the curtain open up at the left to allow the medical student to enter. Now it is opened by one of the prostitutes as if she were admitting us, the audience, into the bordello. We are implicated in the scene.

And an extraordinary scene it is. Picasso seems to have willingly abdicated any traditional aesthetic sense of beauty. There is nothing enticing or alluring here. Of all the nudes, the two central ones are the most traditional, but their bodies are composed of a series of long lozenge shapes, hard angles, and only a few traditional curves. It is unclear whether the second nude from the left is standing or sitting, or possibly even lying down. (In the early drawing, she is clearly seated.) Picasso seems to have made her position in space intentionally ambiguous.

We know, through X-rays, that all five nudes originally looked like the central two. We also know that, sometime after he began painting *Les Demoiselles*, Picasso visited the Palais du Trocadéro, now the Museum of Man, in Paris, and saw its collection of African sculpture, particularly African masks. He was strongly affected by the experience. The masks seemed to him imbued with power that allowed him, for the first time, to see art, he said, as "a form of magic designed to be a mediator between the strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires." As a result, he quickly transformed the faces of three of the five prostitutes in his painting into African masks. The masks freed him from representing exactly what his subjects looked like and allowed him to represent his idea of them instead.

Fig. 1-8 Pablo Picasso, *Medical Student, Sailor, and Five Nudes in a Bordello* (Compositional study for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*), Paris, early 1907. Black chalk and pastel over pencil on Ingres paper, 18½ × 25 in. Kupferstichkabinett, Kunstmuseum, Basel, Switzerland.

Fig. 1-9 Pablo Picasso, *Study for Les Demoiselles d'Avignon: Head of the Squatting Demoiselle*, 1907. Gouache and Indian ink on paper, 24¾ × 18⅞ in. Musée Picasso, Paris.

That idea is clearly ambivalent. Picasso probably saw in these masks something both frightening and liberating. They freed him from a slavish concern for accurate representation, and they allowed him to create a much more emotionally charged scene than he would have otherwise been able to accomplish. Rather than offering us a single point of view, he offers us many, both literally and figuratively. The painting is about the ambiguity of experience.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the squatting figure in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. She seems twisted around on herself in the final version, her back to us, but her head is impossibly turned to face us, her chin resting on her grotesque, clawlike hand. We see her, in other words, from both front and back. (Notice, incidentally, that even the nudes in the sketch possess something of this "double" point of view: Their noses are in profile though they face the viewer.) But this crouching figure is even more complex. An early drawing (**Fig. 1-9**) reveals that her face was originally conceived as a headless torso. What would become her hand was initially her arm. What would become her eyes were her breasts. And her mouth began as her navel. Here we are witness to the extraordinary freedom of invention that defines all of Picasso's art, as well as to a remarkable demonstration of the creative process itself.

Fig. 1-10 Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907. Oil on canvas. 8 ft. × 7 ft. 8 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1970s (**Fig. 1-11**). (The furniture and textile designs in Thomas's works derive, in fact, from an 18-volume set of books she found in a thrift shop titled *The Practical Encyclopedia of Good Decorating and Home Improvement*, published in 1970.) Her reclining figures are designed to evoke the nineteenth-century paintings of **odalisques**—the Turkish word for "harem slave girl" or "concubine"—such as Édouard Manet's famous portrait of a Parisian courtesan, *Olympia* (**Fig. 1-12**). But where Manet's figure is nude, Thomas's women are clothed. Where most nineteenth-century odalisques are submissive (the forthright stare of Manet's is one of the single exceptions to the rule), Thomas's figures exude a certain authority and self-assurance. They evoke, in fact, the superstar African-American divas of the 1970s, actresses like Tamara Dobson and Pam Grier, who starred in such films such as *Cleopatra Jones* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), so-called "blaxploitation" films that in the 1970s were in many ways as controversial as hip-hop and rap in the 1980s and 1990s. As Mia Mask described these women in her study of black female film stars, *Divas on Screen*, they "combined brazen sexuality, physical strength, and Black Nationalist sentiment . . . representing black women as both sexually and intellectually self-determined."

Portrait of Mnonja was first exhibited at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in 2010 as part of the U.S. Department of State's "Art in Embassies" program. Originally, a different portrait had been on display, but when it was sold to the Akron Art Museum, Thomas replaced it with a painting rather appropriately featuring the colors red, white, and blue. Hundreds of rhinestones decorate the surface of *Portrait of Mnonja*. Thomas's model's red high-heel shoes seem perched, notably, on an **anamorphic** projection of a white cat. (Anamorphic representations require the viewer to look at the object from an odd angle—from the far right or left, for instance. From a frontal point of view, the image appears vastly distorted.) Thomas's howling cat is a reverse-image of

Fig. 1-11 Mickalene Thomas, *Portrait of Mnonja*, 2010. Rhinestones, acrylic, and enamel on wood panel, 8 × 10 ft. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 1-12 Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 4 ft. 3 in. × 6 ft. 2¾ in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

the black cat hissing at the viewer at Olympia's feet. It is as if over the hundred-plus years since the black maid delivered the bouquet of flowers to Manet's courtesan—brought to her, presumably, by a man (in whose place you, as the viewer, stand and at whom the black cat hisses)—the black maid has displaced the white courtesan to become a contemporary American woman of unmistakable sex appeal but now unburdened by the fetters of sexual and racial exploitation that haunt Manet's earlier work.

For just as surely as Thomas's *Portrait of Mnonja* is a visual record of the artist's own late twentieth-century world, Manet's *Olympia* reflects Parisian life in the 1860s. Manet was something of a professional observer—a famous *flâneur*, a Parisian of impeccable dress and perfect manners who strolled the city, observing its habits and commenting on it with great subtlety, wit, and savoir-faire. Wrote Manet's friend Antonin Proust: "With Manet, the eye played such a big role that Paris has never known a *flâneur* like him nor a *flâneur* strolling more usefully." Nevertheless, as accurately as *Olympia* may reflect its time and place, Manet's audience in the 1860s found the painting appalling. Proust explains that the public at the time thought of "a courtesan in terms of the preconceived idea of an opulent woman displaying her abundant flesh on luxurious sheets," while Manet represented the reality of Parisian brothels, which were instead full of girls of desperate and "indigent nudity." Thus, even though Manet believed that he was depicting his time and place with the utmost fidelity, his audience was unwilling to recognize the veracity of his vision.

2) ARTISTS HELP US TO SEE THE WORLD IN NEW OR INNOVATIVE WAYS This is one of the primary roles that Trevor Paglen assumes in creating works like *They Watch the Moon.* In fact, almost all of his work is designed to transform our experience of the world, jar us out of our complacency, and create new ways for us to see and think about the world around us.

This is equally one the roles assumed by the unknown Tang artist who carved the reclining Buddha in Cave 148 at Mogao (see Fig. 1-6). The Buddha reclines to await his death, when he will pass serenely into nirvana, the perfect peace of mind at which the spirit arrives when it no longer clings to the desires and aversions of worldly life. Standing before the giant reclining form, not only are we made acutely aware of the enormity of the Buddha's achievement, but we also come to recognize how diminutive we are before it.

We understand just how small we are in the great scheme of things.

In 2003, Ken Gonzales-Day began researching the history of lynching in nineteenth-century California by assembling as complete a record of the practice in the state that he could. He was particularly interested in revealing how, when taken collectively, Native Americans, African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and Latinos were lynched more often than persons of Anglo or European descent—and Latinos more than any other group. His goal was to visit as many of the 353 lynching sites he identified as he could. The project resulted in two separate bodies of work—a book, titled *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935*, published in 2006, and a series of photographs titled *Searching for California Hang Trees*. His photograph *"At daylight the miserable man was carried to an oak . . ."* (**Fig. 1-13**), from the series, transforms the way we see the magnificent oak. Shot from below, the tree is represented as a tangle of branches that rise upward to the light as if in testimony to its very longevity (upwards of 300 years). Its gnarled trunk is covered with living moss; in itself it is something of a symbol of the life force. And yet it is the very site of violent death, unseen but—in Gonzales-Day's work—revealed.

3) ARTISTS MAKE FUNCTIONAL OBJECTS AND STRUCTURES (BUILDINGS) MORE PLEASURABLE AND ELEVATE THEM OR IMBUE THEM WITH MEANING

This painted sculpture of a chicken (**Fig. 1-14**) is actually a coffin. It may seem surprising that the family of the deceased should order so elaborately decorative a final resting place, but the African sculptor Kane Kwei and his workshop have been designing and producing coffins such as this one for over 40 years. Trained as a carpenter, Kwei first made a decorative coffin for a dying uncle, who asked him to produce one in the shape of a boat. In Ghana, coffins possess a ritual significance, celebrating a successful life, and Kwei's coffins delighted the community. Soon he was making fish and whale coffins for fishermen, hens with chicks for women with large families, Mercedes-Benz coffins for the wealthy, and, as here, a chicken for a farmer. In 1974, an enterprising San Francisco art dealer brought examples of Kwei's work to the

Fig. 1-13 Ken Gonzales-Day, *"At daylight the miserable man was carried to an oak . . . "* from the series *Searching for California Hang Trees*, 2007. Inkjet print, 35 × 45 in. Smithsonian American Art Museum. Washington, D.C.

Fig. 1-14 Workshop of Kane Kwei, Farmer's coffin in the shape of a chicken, Teshi area, Ghana, Africa, 2001.
Photograph: Carol Beckwith & Angela Fisher. Robert Estall photo agency.

United States, and the artist's large workshop now makes coffins for both funerals and the art market. Today, Kwei's workshop is headed by his grandson, Anang Cedi.

Almost all of us apply, or would like to apply, this aesthetic sense to the places in which we live. We decorate our walls with pictures, choose apartments for their visual appeal, ask architects to design our homes, plant flowers in our gardens, and seek out well-maintained and pleasant neighborhoods. We want city planners and government officials to work with us to make our living spaces more appealing.

Public space is particularly susceptible to aesthetic treatments. One of the newest standards of aesthetic beauty in public space is its compatibility with the environment. A building's beauty is measured, in the minds of many, by its self-sufficiency (that is, its lack of reliance on nonsustainable energy sources such as coal), its use of sustainable building materials (the elimination of steel, for instance, because it is a product of iron ore, a nonrenewable resource), and its suitability to the climate and culture in which it is built (a glass tower, however attractive in its own right, would seem out of place rising out of a tropical rainforest). These are the principles of what has come to be known as "green architecture."

The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa, New Caledonia, an island in the South Pacific, illustrates these principles (**Fig. 1-15**). The architect is Renzo Piano, an Italian, but the principles guiding his design are anything but Western. The Center is named after a leader of the island's indigenous people, the Kanak, and it is dedicated to preserving and transmitting Kanak culture. Piano studied that culture thoroughly, and his design blends Kanak tradition with green architectural principles. The buildings are constructed of wood and bamboo, easily renewable regional resources. Each of the Center's ten pavilions represents a typical Kanak dwelling. In a finished dwelling, however, the vertical staves would rise to meet at the top, and the horizontal elements would weave in and out between the staves, as in basketry. In his version, Piano left the dwelling forms unfinished, as if under construction, but to a

Fig. 1-15 Renzo Piano, Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, Nouméa, New Caledonia, 1991–98.
John Gollings/Arcaid Images/Alamy Stock Photo..

purpose—they serve as wind scoops, catching breezes off the nearby ocean and directing them down to cool the inner rooms, the roofs of which face south at an angle that allows them to be lit largely by direct daylight. As in a Kanak village, the pavilions are linked with a covered walkway. Piano describes the project as "an expression of the harmonious relationship with the environment that is typical of the local culture. They are curved structures resembling huts, built out of wooden joists and ribs; they are containers of an archaic appearance, whose interiors are equipped with all the possibilities offered by modern technology."

4) ARTISTS GIVE FORM TO THE IMMATERIAL—HIDDEN OR UNIVERSAL TRUTHS, SPIRITUAL FORCES, PERSONAL FEELINGS Picasso's treatment of women in both *Seated Bather* and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* gives form to his own, often tormented, feelings about the opposite sex. In *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the power of these feelings was heightened by his incorporation of African masks into the composition.

When Westerners first encountered African masks in the ethnographic museums of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they saw them in a context far removed from their original settings and purposes. In the West, we are used to approaching everyday objects made in African, Oceanic, Native American, or Asian cultures in museums as "works of art." But in their cultures of origin, such objects might serve to define family and community relationships, establishing social order and structure. Or they might document momentous events in the history of a people. They might serve a simple utilitarian function, such as a pot to carry water or a spoon to eat with. Or they might be sacred instruments that provide insight into hidden or spiritual forces believed to guide the universe.

A fascinating example of the latter is a type of magical figure that arose in the Kingdom of Kongo in the late nineteenth century (**Fig. 1-16**). Known as *minkisi* ("sacred medicine"), for the Kongo tribes such figures embodied their own resistance to the imposition of foreign ideas as European states colonized the continent. Throughout Central Africa, all significant human powers are believed to result from communication with the dead. Certain individuals can communicate with the spirits in their roles as healers, diviners, and defenders of the living. They are believed to harness the powers of the spirit world through *minkisi* (singular *nkisi*). Among the most formidable of *minkisi* is the type known as *minkonde* (singular *nkonde*), which are said to pursue witches, thieves, adulterers, and wrongdoers by night. The communicator activates an *nkonde*

Fig. 1-16 *Nkisi nkonde*, Kongo (Muserongo), Zaire, late 19th century. Wood, iron nails, glass, resin, height 20 in. The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, Iowa.
The Stanley Collection, X1986.573. Image courtesy of the University of Iowa Museum of Art.

by driving nails, blades, and other pieces of iron into it so that it will deliver similar injuries to those worthy of punishment.

Minkonde figures stand upright, as if ready to spring forward. In many figures, one arm is raised and holds a knife or spear (often missing, as here), suggesting that the figure is ready to attack. Other *minkonde* stand upright in a stance of alertness, like a wrestler challenging an opponent. The hole in the stomach of the figure illustrated here contained magical "medicines," known as *bilongo*—sometimes blood or plants, but often kaolin, a white clay believed to be closely linked to the world of the dead, and red ocher, linked symbolically to blood. Such horrific figures—designed to evoke awe in the spectator—were seen by European missionaries as direct evidence of African idolatry and witchcraft, and the missionaries destroyed many of them. More accurately, the *minkonde* represented a form of **animism**, a belief in the existence of souls and conviction that nonhuman things

Fig. 1-17 Vanessa German, *Delia on the Plane, or Cabbage Slicer*, 2012. Mixed-media assemblage 32 × 17 × 15 in. Spelman College Museum of Fine Art. Atlanta.
Purchased with support from the Wish Foundation, 2017.4. Pavel Zoubok.

can also be endowed with a soul that serves as the foundation of many religions. However, European military commanders saw them as evidence of an aggressive native opposition to colonial control.

The multidisciplinary artist and activist Vanessa German draws on the *nkonde* tradition to create what she calls "contemporary power figures" that fight racial and patriarchal oppression. The nails driven into the red, white, and blue dress of *Delia on the Plane, or Cabbage Slicer* (**Fig. 1-17**) are intended to release the same power as a Kongolese *nkonde.* The head of the figure is a cabbage slicer with a photograph of a slave named Delia taken on a South Carolina plantation in 1850 as part of a project to demonstrate the inferiority of African Americans (for a full discussion of the 1850 project see Chapter 26, "Power," Fig. 26-22). German has specified the materials that compose her mixed-media assemblage much more fully—and much more powerfully—on the Spellman College Museum website: "old baby doll body, tar, red and white and black paint, bird salt and pepper shaker, cabbage slicer, iron on of Delia the slave, hot iron, rage, nails, wood, plaster gauze, wood glue, fire in her eyes, small print of the holy mother on her back, meanness, clarity, how much pain to be quantified, the legacy, the legacy, the legacy." For German, art objects such as this one are a healing force against the history of violence and oppression in America.

In the West, the desire to give form to spiritual belief is especially apparent in the traditions of Christian religious art. For example, the idea of daring to represent the Christian God has, throughout the history of the Western world, aroused controversy. In seventeenth-century Holland, images of God were banned from Protestant churches. As one contemporary Protestant theologian put it, "The image of God is His Word"—that is, the Bible—and "statues in human form, being an earthen image of visible, earth-born man, [are] far away from the truth." In fact, one of the reasons that Jesus, for Christians the son of God, is so often represented in Western art is that representing the son, a real person, is far easier than representing the father, a spiritual unknown who can only be imagined.

Nevertheless, one of the most successful depictions of the Christian God in Western culture was painted by Jan van Eyck nearly 600 years ago as part of an altarpiece for the city of Ghent in Flanders (**Figs. 1-18** and **1-19**). Van Eyck's God is almost frail, surprisingly young, apparently merciful and kind, and certainly richly adorned. Indeed, in the richness of his vestments, van Eyck's God apparently values worldly things. The painting seems to celebrate a materialism that is the proper right of benevolent kings. Behind God's head, across the top of the throne, are Latin words that, translated into English, read: "This is God, all-powerful in his divine majesty; of all the best, by the gentleness of his goodness; the most liberal giver, because of his infinite generosity." God's mercy and love are indicated by the pelicans embroidered on the tapestry behind him, which in Christian tradition symbolize self-sacrificing love, for pelicans were believed to wound themselves in order to feed their young with their own blood if other food was unavailable. In the context of the entire altarpiece, where God is flanked by Mary and John the Baptist, choirs of angels, and, at the outer edges, Adam and Eve, God rules over an earthly assembly of worshipers, his divine beneficence protecting all.

1.3 Seeing the Value in Art

How does the public come to value art—or not?

In 2005, a consortium of art experts purchased a badly worn, dark and gloomy portrait of Christ in his role as Salvator Mundi—Savior of the World—for $10,000 at an auction at the St. Charles Gallery in New Orleans. It was widely believed to be a copy of a Leonardo da Vinci original—no other of his works was so often copied—long believed to have disappeared in the mid-seventeenth century. The consortium thought that it was worth seeing what lay beneath this painting's heavily overpainted surface. They hired Dianne Dwyer Modestini, of New York University, to restore it.

In the course of her work, Modestini discovered a **pentimento**—the presence or emergence in a painting of earlier elements in a painting that have been changed

Fig. 1-18 Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, ca. 1432. Oil on panel, 11 ft. 5 in. × 15 ft. 1 in.
Church of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium.
Photo Scala, Florence.

Fig. 1-19 Jan van Eyck, *God*, panel from *The Ghent Altarpiece*, ca. 1432. Church of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium.
Photo Scala, Florence.

Fig. 1-20 Leonardo da Vinci, *Salvator Mundi*, ca. 1500.
Oil on panel, 15¾ × 17⅞ in. Private collection.
Fine Art/Corbis Historical/Getty Images.

and painted over—of Christ's right-hand thumb in a straight rather than curved position. Because no copier would have any reason to change the original's composition, this discovery suggested that the painting was indeed an authentic Leonardo. Modestini's restoration was subsequently compared side-by-side with the National Gallery of London's *Madonna of the Rocks* (see Fig. 5-3), leaving little doubt of its authenticity. It was finally exhibited over the Christmas and New Year holidays in 2011–12 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. as Leonardo's long lost *Salvator Mundi* (**Fig. 1-20**).

In May 2013, the painting sold in a private sale for just over $75 million, and shortly after for $127.5 million. Finally, in a public auction at Christie's in New York on November 15, 2017, it was sold to Prince Badr bin Abdullah of the United Arab Emirates for $400 million (plus $50.3 million in fees), the highest price ever paid for an artwork. In late 2017, it was reported that the painting would be put on display in the new Louvre Abu Dhabi,

but its scheduled September 2018 unveiling was cancelled without explanation, and there is much speculation that Prince Badr purchased the painting as a stand-in for his good friend the Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman.

In no small part, the extremely high price realized for Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi* can be attributed to the rarity of his work—fewer than 20 paintings are attributed to him worldwide, and none except *Salvator Mundi* are privately held. But it is worth noting that only one of Leonardo's paintings is in the United States, the National Gallery's portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci* (**Fig. 1-21**). The museum purchased it in a private sale in 1967 for $5 million—at the time, also the highest price ever paid for a painting. In the last fifty years, in other words, the art market, which depends on the participation of wealthy clients through their investment, ownership, and patronage, has exploded. It is no accident that the major financial centers of the world also support the most prestigious art galleries, auction houses, and museums of modern and contemporary art. Art galleries, in turn, bring artists and collectors together. They usually sign exclusive contracts with artists whose works they believe they can sell. Collectors may purchase work as an investment but, because the value of a given work depends largely upon the artist's reputation, and artists' reputations are finicky at best, the practice is very risky. As a result, what motivates most collectors is the pleasure of owning art and the prestige it confers upon them (the latter seems to have especially influenced the sale of *Salvator Mundi*).

1.3.1 Artistic Value and Public Opinion

It is at auction that the monetary value of works of art is most clearly established. But auction houses are, after all, publicly owned corporations legally obligated to maximize their profits, and prices at auction are often inflated. That said, the value of art is not all about money. Art has intrinsic value as well, and that value is often the subject of intense debate.

For one thing, the public tends to receive innovative artwork—work by the **avant-garde**, those who are working in advance of their time—with reservation because it usually has little context, historical or otherwise, in which to view it. It is not easy to appreciate, let alone value, what is not understood. When Marcel Duchamp exhibited his *Nude Descending a Staircase* (**Fig. 1-22**) at the Armory Show in New York City in 1913, it was a scandalous success, parodied and ridiculed in the newspapers. Former President Teddy Roosevelt told the papers, to their delight, that the painting reminded him of a

Fig. 1-21 Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci*, ca. 1474–78. 1519. Oil on panel, 15 × 14 9/16 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund.

Navajo blanket. Others called it "an explosion in a shingle factory," or "a staircase descending a nude." *American Art News* held a contest to find the "nude" in the painting. The winning entry declared, "It isn't a lady but only a man."

The Armory Show was most Americans' first exposure to modern art, and more than 70,000 people saw it during its New York run. By the time it closed, after also traveling to Boston and Chicago, nearly 300,000 people had seen it. If not many understood the *Nude* then, today it is easier for us to see what Duchamp was representing. He had read, we know, a book called *Movement*, published in Paris in 1894, a treatise on human and animal locomotion written by Étienne-Jules Marey, a French physiologist who had long been fascinated with the possibility of breaking down the flow of movement into isolated data that could be analyzed. He had also seen studies by the American photographer Eadweard Muybridge of animals and humans in motion (see Fig. 11-2).

Marey, Muybridge, and Duchamp had embarked, we can now see, on the same path, a path that paralleled the development of the motion picture. On December 28, 1895, at the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris, the Lumière brothers, who knew Marey and his work well, projected motion pictures of a baby being fed its dinner, a gardener being doused by a hose, and a train racing directly at the viewers, causing them to jump from their seats. Duchamp's vision had already

Fig. 1-22 Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 4 ft. 10 in. × 35 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

been confirmed, but the public had not yet learned to see it.

Teaching the public how to see and appreciate what it called "advanced art" was, in fact, the self-defined mission of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) when it was first funded by Congress in 1967. The NEA assumed that teaching people to appreciate art—largely through its Art in Public Places Program, which dedicated a percent of the cost of new public buildings to purchasing art—would enhance the social life of the nation. Public art, the Endowment believed, would make everyone's lives better by making the places in which we live more beautiful, or at least more interesting.

Richard Serra's controversial *Tilted Arc* (**Fig. 1-23**) tested this hypothesis like none other. When it was originally installed in 1981 in Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan, there was only a minor flurry of negative reaction. However, beginning in March 1985, William Diamond, newly appointed Regional Administrator of the General Services Administration, which had originally commissioned the piece, began an active campaign to have it removed. At the time, nearly everyone believed that the vast majority of people working in the Federal Plaza complex despised the work. In fact, of the approximately 12,000 employees in the complex, only 3,791 signed the petition to have it removed, while nearly as many—3,763—signed a petition to save it. Yet the public perception was that the piece was "a scar on the plaza" and "an arrogant, nose-thumbing gesture," in the words of one observer. Finally, during the night of March 15, 1989, against the artist's vehement protests and after he had filed a lawsuit to block its removal, the sculpture was dismantled and its parts stored in a Brooklyn warehouse. It has subsequently been destroyed.

From Serra's point of view, *Tilted Arc* was destroyed when it was removed from Federal Plaza. He had created it specifically for the site and, once removed, it lost its reason for being. In Serra's words: "Site-specific works primarily engender a dialogue with their surroundings. . . . It is necessary to work in opposition to the

Fig. 1-23 Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981. Cor-Ten steel, 12 ft. × 120 ft. × 2½ in. Installed, Federal Plaza, New York City. Destroyed by the U.S. Government March 15, 1989.

constraints of the context, so that the work cannot be read as an affirmation of questionable ideologies and political power." Serra intended his work to be confrontational. It was political. That is, he felt that Americans were divided from their government, and the arc divided the plaza in the same way. Its tilt was ominous—it seemed ready to topple over at any instant. Serra succeeded in questioning political power probably more dramatically than he ever intended, but he lost the resulting battle. He made his intentions known and understood, and the work was judged as fulfilling those intentions. But those in power judged his intentions negatively, which is hardly surprising, considering that Serra was challenging their very position and authority.

1.3.2 Political Visions

One of the reasons that the public has had difficulty, at least initially, accepting so many of the public art projects that have been funded by both the NEA as well as local and state percent-for-art programs modeled after the Federal program is that in many instances people have not found them to be aesthetically pleasing. The negative reactions to Serra's arc are typical. If art must be "beautiful," then Serra's work was evidently not a work of art, at least not in the eyes of the likes of William Diamond. And yet, as the public learned what the piece meant, many came to value the work, not for its beauty but for its insight, for what it revealed about the place they were in. Serra's work teaches us a further lesson about the value of art. If art appears to be promoting a specific political or social agenda, there are bound to be segments of the public that disagree with its point of view.

A classic example is Michelangelo's *David* (**Fig. 1-24**). Today, it is one of the world's most famous sculptures, considered a masterpiece of Renaissance art. But it did not meet with universal approval when it was first displayed in Florence, Italy, in 1504. The sculpture was commissioned three years earlier, when Michelangelo was 26 years old, by the Opera del Duomo ("Works of the Cathedral"), a group founded in the thirteenth century to look after Florence Cathedral and to maintain its works of art. It was to be a public piece, designed for outdoor display in the Piazza della Signoria, the plaza where public political meetings took place on a raised platform called the *arringhiera* (from which the English word "harangue" derives). Its political context, in other words, was clear: It represented David's triumph over the tyrant Goliath and was meant to symbolize republican Florence—the city's freedom from foreign and papal domination, as well as from the rule of the Medici family, who had come to be seen as tyrannical.

Fig. 1-24 Michelangelo, *David*, 1501–04. Marble, height 13 ft. 5 in. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence.

The *David* was, as everyone in the city knew, a sculptural triumph in its own right. It was carved from a giant 16-foot-high block of marble that had been quarried 40 years earlier. Not only was the block riddled with cracks, forcing Michelangelo to bring all his skills to bear, but earlier sculptors, including Leonardo da Vinci, had been offered the problem stone and refused to use it.

When the *David* was finished, in 1504, it was moved out of the Duomo at eight in the evening. It took 40 men four days to move it the 600 yards to the Piazza della Signoria. It required another 20 days to raise it onto the *arringhiera*. The entire time, its politics hounded it. Each night, supporters of the Medici hurled stones at it, and guards had to be hired to keep watch over it. Inevitably, a second group of citizens objected to its nudity, and before its installation a skirt of copper leaves was

prepared to spare the general public any possible offense. Today, the skirt is long gone. By the time the Medici returned to power in 1512, the *David* was a revered public shrine, and it remained in place until 1873, when it was replaced by a copy and moved for protection from a far greater enemy than the Medici—the natural elements themselves.

Perhaps the most contentious images—images that stir both widespread approbation and fervent disapproval—are those that revolve around the politics of racial prejudice. Shortly after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, people of Asian origin were subjected to sometimes violent attack by people who believed, because the virus had originated in Wuhan, China, that all Asians were somehow responsible for it. Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, whose graphic novel *Palimpsest* (2019) recounts her upbringing as a Korean adoptee in Sweden, and who now lives in New Zealand, realized that the Asian community suddenly went "from being invisible," to being, she said, "hyper-visible, but as a virus or as a carrier of a virus." She responded by creating a series of images on her Instagram page, among them *I am not a virus* and *Yellow Peril Kung Flu* (**Fig. 1-25**). The first stemmed from the hashtag #IAmNotAVirus created by French Asians in response to racist incidents on public transportation in Paris. Sjöblom lends the hashtag a visibility that insists on both her figure's humanity and her vulnerability. Language like that surrounding the young Asian woman in the second image likewise dehumanizes her. While thousands of followers have expressed their gratitude for Sjöblom's COVID-19 series, others have attacked her. When she first posted *I am not a virus*, it was widely shared, but it soon generated comments that were, she says, "absolutely horrific, and I have cleaned up the commentary because there was so much racism in it." Just as Trevor Paglen, with whose work we began this chapter, brings to light the secret structures of power that surveil us, Sjöblom's series exposes a xenophobia and racism that might otherwise remain hidden from view. Both, finally, teach us to see our world with more critical eyes.

Fig. 1-25 Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, *I am not a virus*, and *Yellow Peril, Kung Flu*, 2020. Instagram images.

THE CRITICAL PROCESS

Thinking about Making and Seeing Works of Art

In this chapter, we have discovered that the world of art is as vast and various as it is not only because different artists in different cultures see and respond to the world in different ways, but also because each of us sees and responds to a given work of art in a different way. Artists are engaged in a *creative process*. We respond to their work through a process of *critical thinking*. At the end of each chapter of *A World of Art* there is a section like this one, titled *The Critical Process*. In each case, additional insights are provided at the end of the text, in the section titled *The Critical Process*: *Thinking Some More about the Chapter Questions*. After you have thought about the questions raised, turn to the back and see if you are headed in the right direction.

Here, Andy Warhol's *Race Riot* (**Fig. 1-26**) depicts events of May 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, when police commissioner Bull Connor employed attack dogs and fire hoses to disperse civil rights demonstrators led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The traditional roles of the artist—to help us see the world in new or innovative ways; to make a visual record of the people, places, and events of their time and place; to make functional objects and structures more pleasurable and elevate them or imbue them with meaning; and to give form to immaterial, hidden, or universal truths, spiritual forces, or personal feelings—are all part of a more general creative impulse that leads, ultimately, to the work of art. Which of these is, in your opinion, the most important for Warhol in creating this work? Did any of the other traditional roles play a part in the process? What do you think Warhol feels about the events (note that the print followed soon after the events themselves)? How does his use of color contribute to his composition? Can you think why there are two red panels, and only one white and one blue? Emotionally, what is the impact of the red panels? In other words, what is the work's psychological impact? What reactions other than your own can you imagine the work generating? These are just a few of the questions raised by Warhol's work, questions to help you initiate the critical process for yourself.

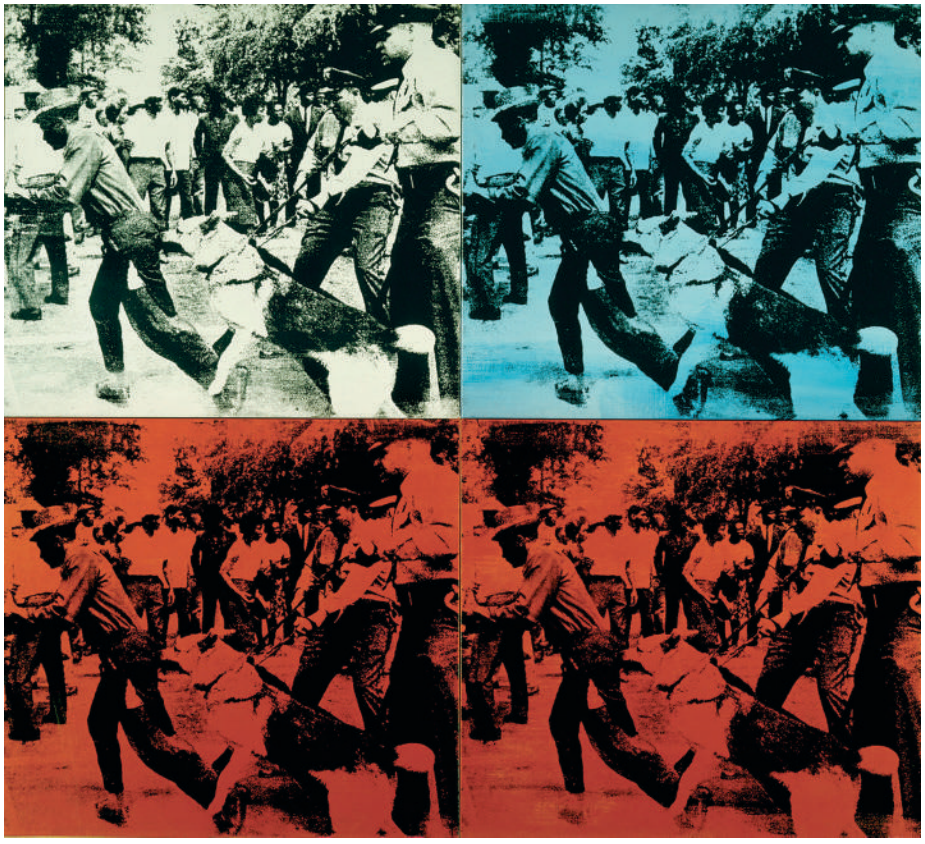


Fig. 1-26 Andy Warhol, *Race Riot*, 1963. Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, four panels, each 20 × 33 in.

Thinking Back

1.1 Differentiate between passive and active seeing.

The act of seeing is not a simple matter of making a direct recording of reality. Everything we see is filtered through a long history of fears, prejudices, emotions, customs, and beliefs. Through art, we can begin to understand those filters and learn to look more closely at the visual world. How does Trevor Paglen address this issue? How is the truth of our seeing challenged by trompe-l'oeil works of art? In his painting *Flag*, how does Jasper Johns present an opportunity to look closely at a familiar image? How might the historical context of Faith Ringgold's *God Bless America* influence how we see the work?

1.2 Define the creative process and describe the roles that artists most often assume when they engage in that process.

Artists all share the fundamental desire to create, but artists respond to their world in divergent terms. The artist must be something of an explorer or inventor. What distinguishes artists from other people? What must an artist be able to do to produce a work of art?

Most artists think of themselves as assuming one of four fundamental roles—or some combination of the four—as they approach their work. Artists may help us to see the world in new and innovative ways, create visual records of specific times and places, imbue objects with beauty and meaning, and give form to feelings and ideas. What roles do artists Mickalene Thomas and Édouard Manet assume in their work? What distinguishes the decorative coffins of Kane Kwei's workshop? How does Pablo Picasso give form to the immaterial in his painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*?

1.3 Discuss the different ways in which people value, or do not value, works of art.

The monetary value of a work of art is determined by the art market and is often established at auction houses. But the value of art is not all about money.

Art has intrinsic value as well, and that value is often the subject of intense debate. The public tends to receive innovative new artwork with reservation because it usually has little context by which to understand and appreciate it. As Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* demonstrates, it is difficult to value that which is not understood. If the National Endowment for the Arts' Art in Public Places Program was designed to teach the public how to appreciate "advanced art," how did Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* test the NEA's assumptions when it was installed in Federal Plaza in Manhattan? How did political and social issues affect both its reception and, nearly 500 years earlier, the reception of Michelangelo's *David*? What does the work of Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom teach us to see?

Chapter 2

Developing Visual Literacy

Learning Objectives

2.1 Describe the relationship between words and images.

2.2 Describe the varying degrees of realism from representation to abstraction.

2.3 Discuss how form, as opposed to content, might also help us to understand the meaning of a work of art.

2.4 Explain how cultural conventions can inform our interpretation of works of art.

Visual art can be powerfully persuasive, and one of the purposes of this book is to help you to recognize how this is so. Yet it is important for you to understand from the outset that you can neither recognize nor understand—let alone communicate—how visual art affects you without using language. In other words, one of the primary purposes of any art appreciation text is to provide you with a descriptive vocabulary, a set of terms, phrases, concepts, and approaches that will allow you to think critically about visual images. It is not sufficient to say, "I like this or that painting." You need to be able to recognize why you like it, how it communicates to you. This ability is given the name visual literacy.

The fact is, most of us take the visual world for granted. We assume that we understand what we see. Those of us born and raised in the television era are often accused of being nonverbal, passive receivers, like TV monitors themselves. If television, the Internet, movies, and magazines have made us virtually dependent upon visual information, we have not necessarily become visually literate in the process.

What, for instance, is required of us to arrive at some understanding of the painting on the right (**Fig. 2-1**)? In the first place, if we are to make sense of it at all, it is obvious that it requires more of us than just a casual glance. Visual literacy, like scientific inquiry, demands careful observation. Our eyes move over this image looking for clues about what it might mean. We might be tempted to think that there is nothing for us to grasp except for the evident energy of its brushwork, until, finally, the eye comes to rest on what appears to be a sailboat in the middle of the painting, its form reflected in the sea below. *North Atlantic Light*, we note, is the painting's title. Perhaps the yellow ball near the top of the painting is the sun, the painting's brushwork reflecting the turbulence of sky and sea.

As it turns out, in the mid-1960s, the artist responsible for it, Willem de Kooning, had moved to Springs, on the east end of Long Island, and this painting was executed in his studio there. He had moved there, he said in 1972, because "I wanted to get back to a feeling of light in painting. . . . I wanted to get in touch with nature. Not painting scenes from nature, but to get a feeling of that light that was very appealing to me, here particularly." If this piece of biographical information tends to confirm our understanding of the work, our reading still falls short of accounting adequately for much about it, especially the apparent randomness of de Kooning's

Fig. 2-1 Willem de Kooning, *North Atlantic Light*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 6 ft. 8 in. × 5 ft. 10 in.
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Acquired with the support of the Rembrandt Association.

brushwork. If visual literacy first and foremost requires close observation, it also requires the ability to describe and interpret what we see. It is, in other words, a process of critical thinking. To interpret what we observe we need, then, a descriptive vocabulary, and this chapter will introduce you to some of the essential concepts and terms that will help us—the relationships among words, images, and objects in the real world; the ideas of representation and abstraction; the distinctions among form, content, context, and conventions in art.

2.1 Words and Images

What is the relationship between words and images?

The Belgian artist René Magritte offered a lesson in visual literacy in his painting *The Treason of Images* (**Fig. 2-2**). Magritte reproduced an image of a pipe similar to that found in tobacco store signs and ads of his time. The caption under the pipe translates into English as "This is not a pipe," which at first seems contradictory. We tend to look at the image of a pipe as if it were really a pipe, but of course it isn't. It is the representation of a pipe. In a short excerpt from the 1960 film by Luc de Heusch, *Magritte, or The Object Lesson*, Magritte himself discussed the arbitrary relation between words and things. Both images and words can refer to things that we see or experience in the world, but they are not the things themselves. Nevertheless, we depend upon words to articulate our understanding of visual culture, and using words well is fundamental to visual literacy.

In a series of photographs focused on the role of women in her native Iran and entitled *Women of Allah*, Shirin Neshat combines words and images in startling ways. In *Rebellious Silence* (**Fig. 2-3**), Neshat portrays herself as a Muslim woman, dressed in a black chador, the traditional covering that extends from head to toe, revealing only hands and face. A rifle divides her face, upon which Neshat has inscribed in ink a Farsi poem by the devout Iranian woman poet Tahereh Saffarzadeh. Saffarzadeh's verses express the deep belief of many Iranian women in Islam. Only within the context of Islam, they believe, are women truly equal to men, and they claim that the chador, by concealing a woman's sexuality, prevents her from becoming a sexual object. The chador, in this sense, is liberating. It also expresses women's solidarity with men in the rejection of Western culture, symbolized by Western dress. But to a Western audience, unable to read Farsi, the values embodied in the poem are indecipherable, a fact that Neshat fully understands. Thus, because we cannot understand the image, it is open to stereotyping, misreading, misunderstanding—the very conditions of the division between Islam and the West, imaged in the division of Neshat's body and face by the gun. The **subject matter** of the work—what the image literally depicts—barely hints at the complexity of its **content**—what the image means. Indeed, the words that accompany a work of art—it title, for instance, as in de Kooning's *North Atlantic Light*—can go a long way toward helping us understand an image's meaning.

In Islamic culture, in fact, words take precedence over images, and **calligraphy**—that is, the fine art of handwriting—is the chief form of Islamic art. The Muslim calligrapher does not so much express himself as act as a

Fig. 2-2 René Magritte, *The Treason of Images*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 21½ × 28½ in. Los Angeles County

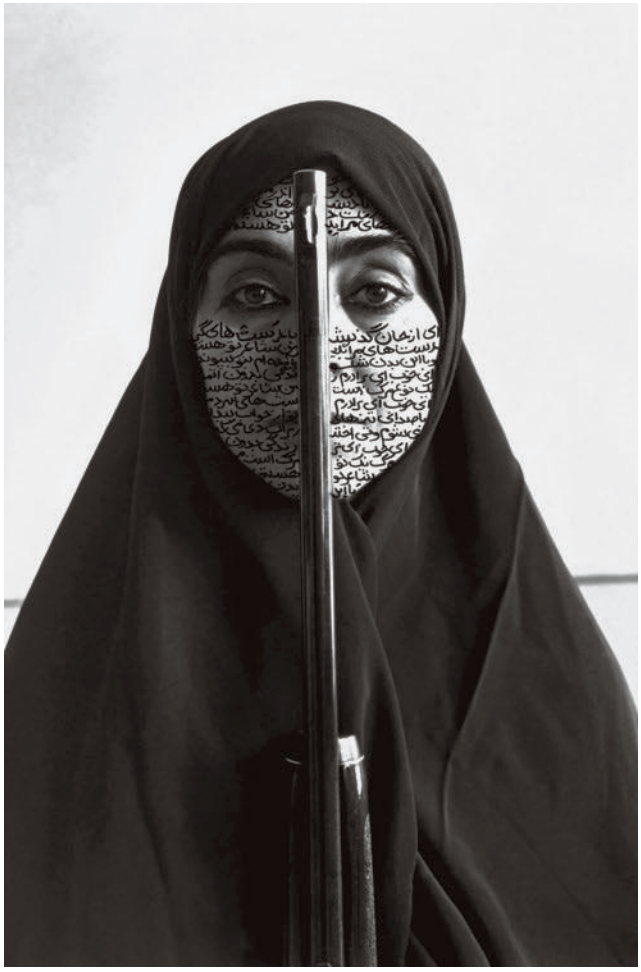


Fig. 2-3 Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, from the series *Women of Allah*, 1994. Gelatin silver print and ink, 11 × 14 in.

Fig. 2-4 Folio from the *Blue Qur'an*, made in Tunisia, possibly Qairawan, second half 9th–mid-10th century. Gold and silver on indigo-dyed parchment, 11 15/16 × 15 13/16 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2004.

medium through which Allah (God) can express himself in the most beautiful manner possible. Thus, all properly pious writing, especially poetry, is sacred. The sumptuous design of the famous *Blue Qur'an* (**Fig. 2-4**) is the very manifestation of its sacred status. It was written in ink made of gold dust and silver mixed with emulsion (glair or gum) applied to animal-skin vellum dyed indigo. The dye was itself harvested from tiny seashells. The letters in each line have been manipulated to make each line the same length, forming perfect rectangles of text.

The Islamic emphasis on calligraphic art derives, to a large degree, from the fact that at the heart of Islamic culture lies the word, in the form of the recitations that make up the Qur'an, the messages the faithful believe that God delivered to the Prophet Muhammad through the agency of the Angel Gabriel. The word could be trusted in a way that images could not. In the *hadith*, the collections of sayings and anecdotes about Muhammad's life, Muhammad is quoted as having warned, "An angel will not enter a house where there is a dog or a painting." Thus, images are notably absent in almost all Islamic religious architecture. And because Muhammad also claimed that "those who make pictures will be punished on the Day of Judgment by being told: Make alive what you have created," the representation of "living things," human beings especially, is frowned upon. Such thinking would lead the Muslim owner of a Persian miniature representing a prince feasting in the countryside to erase the heads of all those depicted (**Fig. 2-5**). No one could mistake these headless figures for "living things."

Fig. 2-5 Page from a copy of Nizami's *Khamseh* (*Quintet*) illustrating a princely country feast, Persian, Safavid culture, 1574–75. Illuminated manuscript, 9¾ × 6 in. India Office, London.
British Library/GRANGER.

The distrust of images is not unique to Islam; at various periods in history Christians have also debated whether it was sinful to depict God and his creatures in paintings and sculpture. In the summer of 1566, for instance, Protestant **iconoclasts** (literally "image breakers," those who wished to destroy images in religious settings) threatened to destroy Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece* (see Fig. 1-18), but just three days before all Ghent's churches were sacked, the altarpiece was dismantled and hidden in the tower by local authorities. In Nuremberg, Germany, a large sculpture of Mary and Gabriel hanging over the high altar of the Church of San Lorenz was spared destruction, but only after the town council voted to cover it with a cloth that was not permanently removed until the nineteenth century. The rationale for this wave of destruction, which swept across northern Europe, was a strict reading of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not make any graven image, or any likeness

of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:4–5). But whatever the religious justification, it should be equally clear that the distrust of visual imagery is, at least in part, a result of the visual's power. If the worship of "graven images"—that is, idols—is forbidden in the Bible, the assumption is that such images are powerfully attractive, even dangerously seductive.

2.2 From Representation to Abstraction

What are the varying degrees of realism from representation to abstraction?

In the last section, we began to explore the topic of visual literacy by considering the relationship between words and images. Words and images are two different systems of describing the world. Words refer to the world in the abstract. Images represent the world, or reproduce its appearance. Traditionally, one of the primary goals of the visual arts has been to capture and portray the way the natural world looks. But, as we all know, some works of art look more like the natural world than others, and some artists are less interested than others in representing the world as it actually appears. As a result, a vocabulary has developed that describes how closely, or not, the image resembles visual reality itself. This basic set of terms is where we need to begin in order to talk or write intelligently about works of art.

Generally, we refer to works of art as either representational or abstract. A **representational** work of art portrays natural objects in recognizable form. The more the representation resembles what the eye sees, the more it is said to be an example of **realism**. When a painting is so realistic that it appears to be a photograph, it is said to be **photorealistic** (see *The Creative Process*, pp. 34–35). The less a work resembles real things in the real world, the more it is said to be an example of **abstract** art. When a work does not refer to the natural or objective world at all, it is said to be completely abstract or **nonobjective**.

Albert Bierstadt's painting *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak* (**Fig. 2-6**) is representational and, from all appearances, highly realistic. First exhibited in New York in April 1864 at a public fair, the painting's display was accompanied by performances by Native Americans, who danced and demonstrated their sporting activities in front of it. However, the scenes depicted by

Fig. 2-6 Albert Bierstadt, *The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 73½ × 120¾ in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Rogers Fund, 1907.

Fig. 2-7 Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge*, c. 1920–22. Oil on canvas, 35¼ × 45⅞ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

the painting were almost entirely fictional. Although commonly believed at the time to be a representation of Lander's Peak in the Wind River Range, the mountain rising in the center of the painting does not bear even a vague resemblance to any Rocky Mountain, let alone Lander's Peak. It is instead an illustration of a mountain from the Alps, a none-too-disguised version of the Matterhorn. Bierstadt presents the American West through a European lens, perhaps because he understood that view was what his audience expected and also because he saw the world through that lens himself. As Bierstadt wrote in 1859, describing a journey to the American Rockies:

> The mountains are very fine; as seen from the plains, they resemble very much the Bernese Alps, one of the finest ranges of mountains in Europe, if not in the world. . . . The color of the mountains and of the plains, and, indeed of the entire country, reminds one of the color of Italy; in fact, we have here the Italy of America in primitive condition.

By "primitive," Bierstadt means pure, untainted, and unfallen, as if it were another biblical Garden of Eden before Eve ate of the apple of knowledge. The Native Americans in the foreground are similarly "primitive," the so-called "noble savages" at peace in a place as yet untouched by white settlement. But in the pamphlet accompanying the painting's exhibition as it toured the country, Bierstadt wrote that he hoped that, one day, in the area occupied by the Native American encampment, "a city, populated by our descendants, may rise, and in its art-galleries this picture may eventually find a resting-place."

Bierstadt's painting is naturalistic rather than realistic. A brand of representation, **naturalism** retains apparently realistic elements—in Bierstadt's case, accurate representations of Western flora and fauna, as well as Native American dress—but the scene itself is imaginary. Often naturalistic images present the visual world from a distinctly personal or subjective point of view, in this case, a formula that he used in painting after painting of the American West—a bucolic lake in the foreground inhabited by peaceful natives behind which a waterfall tumbles down a precipitous mountain into a quiet lake.

While still a recognizable image of the bridge over his waterlily pond at his home at Giverny, north of Paris, Claude Monet's *The Japanese Footbridge* (**Fig. 2-7**) is far more abstract than Bierstadt's *The Rocky Mountains*. So dense are the swirls of the painting's color and so loose are its gestures, the bridge is almost obscured as it arches over the pond. Furthermore, the palette, with its maroons, oranges, and rust-reds, seems almost alien to the subject matter—the bucolic garden in which he had been painting for years, in much more naturalistic terms, and in the cool blues and greens that one might expect. In fact, in its intensity the painting seems not so much a depiction of his garden as an abstract expression of Monet's temperament.