ART RESOURCE GUIDE
Art during the Cold War
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Introduction

To consider the art of the Cold War means to grapple with the politicization of culture during a time of political realignment and polarization in the post-World War II world. The division of the globe into capitalist and communist cultural spheres meant that art produced on each side of the Cold War division came to be associated with each side’s respective ideology. Traveling exhibitions were one way that cultural politics were delivered to large numbers of viewers around the world. The development of different styles of painting that took on political meanings, like Abstract Expressionism and Socialist Realism, was another. In this way, the most deeply held cultural values of each side—freedom, individualism, and democracy in the West and the collective construction of a utopian socialist society in the East—came to be associated with the art produced on each side. These Cold War ways of seeing things distorted viewers’ and critics’ ability to properly recognize the other side’s perspective or to have truly international artistic dialogues.

Many artists rebelled against this polarization of the artistic sphere. Some artists grappled with nontraditional artistic materials or even destroyed works in order to register the trauma of wartime and the need to find new artistic paths in the postwar era. Pop artists, Sots artists, and Conceptual artists used different strategies to make visible the ideologies at the heart of the capitalist West and communist East. One of these strategies, technology, became a subject of art, whether to protest against nuclear war or to test the possibilities of transforming the world into a single, connected global community. During this era, art became more participatory, as artists invited viewers to interact with artworks, so that viewers could experience their own role in producing artistic meanings and possibly changing society. And finally, the human body became an artistic medium, demonstrating how, despite the global scale of Cold War politics, individual acts of memorialization, humor, and speech could still make an important statement.

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Throughout the resource guide you will notice that some important terms have been boldfaced. Terms that are underlined and boldfaced are included in the glossary of terms at the end of the resource guide. Also, students should be aware that dates in art history, especially early dates, frequently vary depending on the source and are often highly contested. The dates presented in this resource guide are not necessarily definitive, but are those dates provided by the museums that house the artworks or the sources consulted by the author in writing this guide.
INTRODUCTION TO ART HISTORY

Art history is an academic discipline dedicated to the reconstruction of the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which an artwork was created. The basic goal of this work is to arrive at an understanding of art and its meaning in its historical moment, taking into consideration the formal qualities of a work of art, the function of a work of art in its original context, the goals and intentions of the artist and the patron of the work of art, the social position and perspectives of the audience in the work’s original time and place, and many other related questions. Art history is closely related to other disciplines such as anthropology, history, and sociology. In addition, art history sometimes overlaps with the fields of aesthetics, or the philosophical inquiry into the nature and expression of beauty; and art criticism, or the explanation of current art events to the general public via the press.

This brief introduction to the discipline of art history will help you understand the kinds of questions that one may ask in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of a work of art. We will put these ideas into practice as we proceed through case studies related to the specific topic of the resource guide.

Methods and Inquiries of Art History

Art historians today generally define “art” very broadly and include in their inquiries almost any kind of visual material that is created by people and invested with special meaning and/or valued for its aesthetic appeal. In the past, art historians often limited their focus to what was called “fine art,” which generally included paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, and architecture, usually produced specifically for appreciation by an audience who also understood these objects as works of art. Today we define art much more broadly, also taking into consideration objects that in the past were dismissed as “craft”: textiles, pottery, and body art such as tattoos, for example. Art historians also consider objects that might not be considered art by their intended audience, including mass-produced posters and advertisements and even the design of ordinary household items like telephones, forks, and the living room sofa.

Art historians acknowledge that the meaning of a work of art can shift over time, and that an artwork may be perceived differently by viewers who approach it from different perspectives. To give one hypothetical example, Michelangelo’s paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel would have certainly been significant in different ways in the eyes of 1) the Pope, who commissioned the work and who had sophisticated theological knowledge and nearly exclusive access to this private space within the Vatican and 2) a worker who was charged with cleaning the floors of the chapel and whose level of literacy was probably quite low. Differences such as social status, education, physical access to a work of art, religious background, race, and gender have an impact on the construction of the meaning of a work of art. Similarly, the paintings’ meaning to a twenty-first-century Protestant, Muslim, or atheist is certainly different from the meaning they had for a practicing Catholic in the sixteenth century, even though the works may be equally admired for their aesthetic value by all of these viewers. In other words, the meaning of a work of art is not fixed; it is sometimes open to multiple interpretations taking into consideration factors such as historical context.
the artist makes decisions related to the visual aspects of the artwork that can reveal to us something about its meaning. From this point of view, aspects of meaning are intrinsic to the work of art. Terms associated with the formal qualities of works of art, or the “elements of art,” are discussed in detail a bit later in this section of the guide. Formal analysis requires excellent skills in observation and description. Beginning our study of an artwork with formal analysis keeps the focus on the object itself, which to the art historian is always primary.

Contextual analysis involves looking outside of the work of art in order to determine its meaning. This involves examining not only the context in which the work was created, but also later contexts in which the work was and continues to be consumed. Contextual analysis focuses on the cultural, social, religious, and economic context in which the work was produced. Art historians may examine issues of patronage, viewer access to the work, the physical location of the work in its original context, the cost of the work of art, the subject matter in relation to other artworks of the time period, and so on.

Art history often emphasizes a chronological development with the assumption that within one cultural setting the work of one generation of artists will have an impact on following generations. Art historians often use comparative study. For example, by contrasting a Gothic with a Renaissance artwork, we can understand more clearly the unique features of each and the series of stylistic changes that led from one to the other. Then, we can seek to relate these changes to historical context. Art history provides information and insights that add background to the meaning and significance of the works of art we study. As we place these works of art in their cultural and historical context, they are connected to the long history of events that has led up to our present culture.

Sources, Documents, and the Work of Art Historians

Art historians often begin their analysis with a close examination of a work of art. Direct examination of the work of art is ideal because much is lost when we look at a reproduction rather than an original object. In the case of sculpture, it is often difficult to get a proper sense of the scale and the three-dimensional qualities of a piece from a photograph. We lose the texture and some of the rich colors when we experience paintings in reproduction. Even photographs can appear flatter, lacking their subtle transitions from light to dark when seen reproduced in books. It is quite common, though, for art historians to settle for studying from reproductions due to practical constraints. In some cases, works of art might be damaged or even lost over time, and so art historians rely on earlier descriptions to aid in their formal and contextual analysis. In addition to examining the work of art in question, art historians will also seek to understand any associated studies (sketches, preparatory models, etc.) and other works by the artist and his or her contemporaries.

Art historians also use many written sources in the quest for contextual information about a work of art. Often these texts are stored in archives or libraries. Archival sources may include items such as letters between the artist and patron, or other documents pertaining to the commission, and art criticism produced at the time the work of art was made. An art historian might also search for written documentation about the materials used to produce the work of art, such as their cost and source, and about the function of the artwork—how a particular sculpture was used in ritual practice, for example. Art historians also seek to situate the work in the context of the literature, music, theater, and history of the time period.

Art historians may also rely on interviews with artists and consumers of works of art. This is especially the case in cultures that rely more on oral history than on written documents. Guided by the field of anthropology, some art historians also use methods such as participant observation to understand the context of a work of art. An art historian studying masquerade traditions in West Africa, for example, may participate in a performance while carefully documenting the event in order to better understand art traditions.

The Development of Art History

As an academic discipline, art history arose in the mid-eighteenth century. However, we can look at the work of much earlier writers to see how commentary on art has developed over time. The ancient Roman historian Pliny the Elder (23–79 ce) sought to analyze historical and contemporary art in his text Natural History. During the Renaissance, the author and artist Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) gathered the biographies of great Italian artists, past and present, in The Lives
of the Artists. Vasari’s text provides us with insights into the changing roles of artists in society during this period and the developing concept of artistic genius.

Modern art history was strongly influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–68) was a German scholar who shifted away from Vasari’s biographical emphasis to a rigorous study of stylistic development as related to historical context. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historians continued to develop approaches that placed increasing emphasis on an understanding of the interrelationship between the formal qualities of a work of art and its context.

When considering contemporary views of art history as well as perspectives on art history from the past, it is important to keep in mind that all histories are individual stories and thus will inevitably reflect certain biases. More recently, art history has been revised, particularly by feminist historians, who have noted that the traditional version of art history has largely focused on white men, whether as artists or as patrons. As a result of such revisions, art history has expanded its scope in recent years and has become a field that is broader, more international, more multicultural, and more inclusive than in the past, often involving Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic methods and viewpoints. Moreover, the concern with great artistic geniuses and masterpieces has lessened as the full range of “visual culture,” ranging from advertisement posters to film to photography and television imagery, has come to view.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ART OF THE WESTERN WORLD

This brief overview of Western art is intended to provide you with a basic understanding of important art historical periods as they developed chronologically. This abbreviated discussion also covers some key artistic innovations that occurred over time, providing you with examples of artists and works in their historical contexts. This basic information will set the stage for our more in-depth discussion of our case study focusing on an exploration of illness and wellness in art. Of course, a brief guide such as this only begins to touch upon the richness and power of the stories that comprise the history of art. You may also enjoy looking at other works from each of the periods discussed, beginning your own exploration of these works in their historical contexts.

Much of what we know of the earliest life on earth has been revealed through a study of the objects or artifacts that remain from early cultures. In many cases, the objects that remain are those made of enduring materials such as stone, metal, or fired clay, as opposed to those made of perishable materials like wood or fibers. Environmental conditions also have a major impact on preservation. The hot dry climate of the desert in Egypt, for example, enabled the preservation of even delicate materials like papyrus, and the sealed atmosphere of Egyptian caves and tombs likewise helped to preserve the objects contained within them for our wonder and enjoyment centuries later. In contrast, the humid climate of West Africa means that objects made of perishable materials have had little chance of survival over the course of decades, not to mention centuries.

This is one reason that the history of art as a discipline has placed greater emphasis on Western cultures, often neglecting to focus on developments in Nonwestern cultures. It is important to recognize that the
civilizations that are most often studied in art history courses are not necessarily those where the most or the best art was made. Rather, they are the civilizations whose art has been preserved and whose art has been discovered. There are, for example, many sites of important civilizations in Central and South America that though known, remain yet unexplored. Too often the story at these sites has been one of exploitation and destruction, as people carelessly take artifacts to sell them on the international market in antiquities.

**Ancient Civilizations**

**Art of the Old Stone Age**

The oldest works of art that we will consider are the cave paintings found in Chauvet Cave in southeastern France. These paintings, discovered in 1994, date from c. 30,000 BCE and thus are placed in the Old Stone Age (Upper Paleolithic Period). It should be noted that art historians use the best available information to date works of art from the distant past. Estimated dates are frequently contested and sometimes revised as new information becomes available. Except for a minimal use of yellow, the paintings and engravings in Chauvet Cave were created using red ochre and black charcoal and depict animals such as horses, rhinoceros, lions, buffalos, and mammoths. Additional cave paintings have been discovered in other parts of France and in Spain, with those in Lascaux and Altamira being the most famous. The art in these caves takes the form of large colored drawings of animals such as horses, bears, lions, bison, and mammoths, and the paintings include several outlines of human hands. The earliest scholarship on these drawings considered them to be the spontaneous scribbling of primitive cavemen. However, with further study, it became apparent that the various groups of drawings had been created by skilled artists working within an established tradition. The artists used pigments of red and yellow ochre to add color to the elegant black outlines they had created using charcoal. Though we cannot be sure of their original function, it is possible that these works were created as a part of hunting ceremonies or other ritual behaviors.

Another well-known group of artworks from the Old Stone Age are small stone female figures that have exaggerated bellies, breasts, and pubic areas. The best known of these figures is the *Venus (or Woman) of Willendorf* (c. 28,000–25,000 BCE), which is about four and one-eighth inches high. In contrast to the exaggerated female features of the body, the facial features of the statue are undefined, the arms are barely visible, and the feet are missing. Scholars contend that these statues were fertility figures although it is not known precisely how they were used.

**Art of the Middle Stone Age**

During the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic Period) the climate warmed, and a culture developed that produced art similar in some ways to the cave paintings of the Paleolithic Period. With the warming of temperatures during this era, cave dwellers moved out of their caves and began using rock shelters, as evidenced by the various paintings that have been discovered at such locations in eastern Spain. There has been much scholarly debate regarding the dating of these paintings, but it is generally estimated that they were created from around 7000 BCE until 4000 BCE. The rock shelter paintings, like the cave paintings that preceded them, demonstrate the skill of their creators in the depiction of animal figures. What sets the rock shelter paintings apart from the cave paintings is their depiction of the human figure. Except for one human figure found in the paintings at Lascaux, cave paintings did not include any human beings. The rock shelter paintings, however, portray human beings, both alone and in groups, and there seems to be an emphasis on scenes in which human beings dominate animals.
Art of the New Stone Age

The art forms most often linked with the New Stone Age (Neolithic Period) are rings or rows of rough-hewn stones located in Western Europe. These formations have been dated as early as 4000 BCE. The stones used were often exceedingly large—as much as seventeen feet in height and fifty tons in weight. Indeed, the sheer size of these works led historians to call the stones megaliths, meaning “great stones,” and the culture that created these works is often termed “megalithic.” The most well known of these rock arrangements is the one found at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England. Stonehenge is believed to have been built in many phases around 2100 BCE. Stonehenge features concentric rings made with sarsen (a form of sandstone) stones and smaller “bluestones”—rocks indigenous to the region. The outermost ring is comprised of huge sarsen stones in post and lintel construction—two upright pieces topped with a crosspiece, or lintel. The next ring is composed of bluestones, which encircle a horseshoe-shaped row of five lintel-topped sarsen stones—these are the largest ones used at Stonehenge, with some weighing as much as fifty tons. Outside the formation, to the northeast, is the vertically placed “heel-stone.” If one stands in the center of the rings and looks outward, this “heel-stone” marks the point at which the sun rises on the midsummer solstice.

The works of art and the ideas we have considered thus far have been isolated examples that have survived a very long time. The works and civilizations that we will consider next point to further conditions that allow for the creation of artworks and enable their survival. Usually, art thrives in highly organized cultures with stable population centers—usually great cities—that house ruling classes who in turn support the work of artists.

Also, if a civilization has a tradition of protecting its art in locations that are largely inaccessible, it is more likely that the works from that culture will survive to a point where they are included in a study of art history. Many extant artifacts have come from burial chambers, caves, and tombs, where they have been protected by being naturally concealed.

Ancient Mesopotamian Art

The civilizations that arose in Mesopotamia in the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers developed writing and arts in parallel with Egypt (discussed later). Unfortunately, the Mesopotamian civilizations formed in a valley that lacked the natural barriers of deserts and mountains that protected Egypt. This left them vulnerable to invasion, and hence, the history of this ancient region is one of successive conquest and destruction. Moreover, the use of more perishable materials by Mesopotamian civilizations has left us with fewer examples of their arts.
From around 4000 BCE, the Sumerians in Mesopotamia created impressive sculptures and buildings. Religion was a central aspect of Sumerian life, and the Sumerians built massive temples at the centers of their cities. Less complex platform structures evolved over time into the stepped pyramids called ziggurats. Around 2334 BCE, the cities of Sumer came under the rule of Sargon of Akkad. Although the Akkadians spoke a different language from the Sumerians, they assimilated Sumerian culture. With the Akkadian dynasty, loyalty to the city-state was supplanted by loyalty to the king, and consequently the art of this period tends to reflect an emphasis on the monarchy, with Akkadian rulers depicted in freestanding and relief sculptures. Around 2150 BCE, Akkadian rule came to an end as the Gutî, barbarous mountaineers, invaded and took control. About fifty years later, however, the cities of Sumer were able to reassert control, and a Neo-Sumerian ruler was established as the King of Ur. Perhaps the greatest known works of this era were the ziggurats that were built at the city centers. The ziggurats functioned primarily as temples but also served as administrative and economic centers.

The next important civilization in Mesopotamia was that of the Babylonians. For centuries Mesopotamia had witnessed the coexistence of several independent city-states, but around 1792 BCE, Hammurabi, king of the city-state of Babylonia, was able to centralize power. Hammurabi left an enduring legacy in that he codified Babylonian law—the Code of Hammurabi is the oldest legal code known in its entirety. The best-known artwork from this period, preserved in the Louvre Museum, is related to this code of law; it is a stone stele onto which Hammurabi’s code is carved with a sculpture in high relief at the top that depicts Hammurabi receiving inspiration for his code of law from the sun-god, Shamash.

While the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Babylonian cultures grew in southern Mesopotamia, the Assyrians dominated in the north. From about 900 BCE to around 600 BCE, the Assyrians were the most powerful civilization in the Near East. Among the most notable of Assyrian artworks are relief carvings, which often depict battles, sieges, hunts, and other important events. Throughout the seventh century BCE, the Assyrian hold on power weakened, and from c. 612–538 BCE, Babylonia once again became the dominant force in the region. It was during this Neo-Babylonian period that the famous hanging gardens of Babylon were constructed. Another important construction at this time was the gateway to the great ziggurat of the temple of Bel, called the Ishtar Gate, which is considered one of the greatest works of architecture in which figures—in this case animal figures—are superimposed on a walled surface.
Persian Art
The Persian Empire (c. 538 BCE–330 BCE) flourished in what is present-day Iran. The Persians were notable for their impressive architectural achievements, the most important of which was the palace at Persepolis, which was constructed of stone, brick, and wood and reflects the influence of Egyptian architecture.

Ancient Egyptian Art
Ancient Egyptian civilization is generally dated from c. 3000 BCE, following the predynastic period, through 332 BCE, when Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great. Recognizable works include the great monuments of ancient Egypt: the Sphinx, the great pyramids at Giza, the larger-than-life-sized statues of the pharaohs, and the portrait head of Queen Nefertiti.

Much Egyptian art emphasizes a style called hierarchical scale, which uses the status of figures or objects to determine their relative sizes within an artwork. Hierarchical scale is exemplified in the Palette of King Narmer, a relic from the Old Kingdom. This slab of stone, which may have been used as a ceremonial palette for mixing cosmetics, presents King Narmer centrally, and he is depicted as being considerably larger than the other figures. In the main image on the palette, Narmer is seen holding the hair of a fallen enemy, with his arm raised in preparation for delivering a deathblow. In the lowest section of the palette, below the king and his enemy, are two smaller figures of defeated enemies. The organization of the figures, their relative sizes, and their poses recurred in most of the ancient Egyptian art that followed. Figures are presented so that each part of the body is shown as clearly as possible, in a technique known as “fractional representation.” The head is in profile with the eye in frontal view, the torso is in full frontal view, and the lower body, legs, and feet are in profile. This formula became a standard style that endured for centuries as the typical way of representing people in Egyptian art.

We know a great deal about the art of Egypt because excellent conditions for preservation were present in much of Egypt. In addition, the burial customs of the Egyptians, which decreed mummification and entombment with lavish furnishings, symbolic servants, and jewelry, resulted in rich stores of objects and images. The most famous of the Egyptian tombs is that of the boy king, Tutankhamun. By the twentieth century, most of the ancient Egyptian tombs of the Pharaohs had been broken into and robbed of the materials inside. However, Tutankhamun’s tomb, because it was cleverly hidden, remained almost completely intact until 1922. When it was opened, the excavators found a treasure-trove of objects, all superbly made of rich materials. Among the most famous of the objects is Tutankhamun’s burial mask. This mask, found in the innermost layer of the king’s sarcophagus, rested on the mummy’s face and shoulders. It is made of gold and is decorated with blue glass and semiprecious stones. The mask presents an idealized portrait of the young king.

Nubian Art
The kingdom of Nubia lay to the south of Egypt and covered a large area of Africa. As contemporary historians become increasingly interested in revising and expanding art history, more knowledge about this great African civilization is being uncovered. Indeed, it is now known that there was a period in the history of Egypt when Nubia ruled the area, and the
Pharaohs of that era were Nubian. While there are few collections that feature Nubian works, this may well soon change as revisions to the story of art continue.

**Greek and Roman Art**

**Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean Art**

The Aegean island cultures were very important as precursors of the Greeks in terms of art production. Three major cultures flourished on the islands in the Aegean Sea, on Crete, and along the Aegean coast. The earliest of these cultures, the Cycladic culture, flourished from about 3200 to 2000 BCE in the Cyclades, a group of islands in the Aegean. Archaeologists still have many unanswered questions about Cycladic culture, but the simplified, geometric nude female figures from this area are highly appealing to modern sensibilities. In addition to these sculptures, the Cycladic culture produced decorated pieces of pottery as well as marble bowls and jars. Eventually, the Cycladic culture was supplanted by the Minoan culture, which developed on the island of Crete and reached its pinnacle in the second millennium BCE.

The Minoan culture centered around the city of Knossos on Crete, where the legend of the Minotaur—the creature believed to be half man and half bull who devoured those who entered his maze—is supposed to have taken place. The maze was actually the royal palace, a sprawling complex that has since been excavated. The art of these island people depicts sea life and includes statues of a female snake goddess. The Minoans created artworks that were characterized by a naturalistic pictorial style. Their paintings took two major forms: frescoes painted on palace walls and pottery designs. The architectural achievements of the Minoans were also impressive, as they built four major palaces, all completely unfortified and designed in a light, flexible, and organic style.

The collapse of the Minoan civilization coincided with the pinnacle of Mycenaean culture, and as a result, many historians believe the Minoans were destroyed by the Mycenaens. The Mycenaean culture was centered around the city of Mycenae on the Greek mainland. The Mycenaens built elaborate tombs, and their burial practices allowed for a large number of objects to be preserved. The objects that are best known are made of gold and show astonishing levels of mastery in goldsmithing. Additionally, the Mycenaens demonstrated much skill in their use of relief sculpture.

**Ancient Greek Art**

From around 660 to 475 BCE, during the Archaic Period, the Greeks, influenced by the stone sculptures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, created sculptures carved in marble and limestone. These freestanding figures borrowed the frontal pose used in Egyptian art, but were more dynamic and placed greater emphasis on depicting realistic human features. Temples were also built during this time period using columns in the early Doric and Ionic decorative styles. Vase painting was another notable art form and was done in many different styles. Some vases portrayed black silhouetted figures, while those in the Corinthian style set figures against a floral, ornamented background. Athenian-style vases used black figures, but were more linear and larger in scale. Red-figure vases, with red figures standing out against a black background, were also common.

The best-known ancient Greek art is that from the city-state of Athens from the Classical Period. During the Early Classical Period, temples were typically built with sturdy, Doric columns. Unfortunately, much of the sculpture from this period has not survived, but luckily Roman copies have provided us with a good deal of information on these ancient works. The sculpture of the Early Classical Period was characterized by its solemnity, strength, and simplicity of form and most often focused on a figure or scene either in the moment before or the moment after an important action. Significant advances were made in sculptural techniques, as the stiff frontal postures of the Archaic Period were largely abandoned in favor of more complex and life-like figures and positions.

Greek statuary evolved from a stiff, frontal presentation like that of the Egyptians to an increasingly natural-looking figure. A pose called “contrapposto,” or counter positioning, was invented to show the body to its best advantage. In contrapposto, the standing figure is posed with its weight shifted onto one leg, for a more relaxed, naturalistic appearance. Greek sculpture set the model for thousands of years in Western art, and the Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassical artists of the fifteenth through early nineteenth centuries aspired to equal the perfection displayed by the surviving Greek statues.

The Middle Classical Period witnessed important advances in architecture as is evident in the temples of this time period. The temple called the Parthenon.
restored in 447 BCE after being destroyed by the Persians in 480 BCE, is one of the most admired works of all ages, and the use of columns as exemplified in the Parthenon has been a principal feature of Western architecture for more than two thousand years.

Architecture declined during the Late Classical Period as Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War. Temples in this era were still built using simple Doric columns, but the use of highly decorative Corinthian columns became more and more popular. The Hellenistic Period saw an increasing influence from Eastern civilizations as Greek styles blended with those of Asia Minor. Notable works of this time period include freestanding sculptures such as the Venus de Milo and the Laocoön Group, which are masterworks designed to present ideals of beauty.

Etruscan Art

The art of the Etruscan civilization is seen as a transition from the ideals of Greece to the pragmatic concerns of the Romans. Etruscan civilization arose in what is now Italy in the first millennium BCE. Like other cultures we have examined, this one is known largely from the arts of tomb decoration. Nothing remains of Etruscan buildings as these were constructed of brick and wood. However, ceramic models depict temples with tiled, gabled roofs supported by columns in the fashion of the Greeks. Extant Etruscan artifacts also include sarcophagus lids and other art forms made of baked clay, as well as objects that display the Etruscans’ talent in bronze work. The only paintings that remain from the Etruscan culture are those found on the walls and ceilings of tombs. These were done in bright, flat colors, and they show figures playing music and dancing as part of funeral celebrations.

Roman Art

The story of Rome is one of conquest and empire building. Early Roman art reflected the influence of Etruscan art. However, by the second century BCE many Roman sculptures and other Roman artworks were variations of Greek works, and the standards for idealized presentations of Roman rulers were based on those of the Greeks. The Romans, however, made pioneering advancements in architecture and engineering. The Roman discovery of the equivalent of modern concrete was a major contribution to architecture, as it enabled Roman builders to fill the spaces between their stone walls with rocks and rubble bound together by the concrete mixture. With this
strong material, the Romans were able to construct huge domed buildings. They also pioneered the use of the curved arch, using this form to build bridges and aqueducts. These structures were part of a paved road system, making communication and control very effective in the Empire. Two buildings that can still be seen in Rome, the Colosseum (72–80 CE) and the Pantheon (c. 126 CE), remain as monuments to the engineering genius of the Romans.

The Romans created numerous sculptures. Often, colossal triumphal arches would be topped with relief sculptures portraying Roman emperors or Roman military victories. The Romans also created relief sculptures for funerary purposes. Tombs and sarcophagi were decorated with reliefs. Some of these reliefs were simply decorative, but many others had narrative subject matter. The Romans also sculpted portraits, which ranged in size from tiny busts to huge statues. During the Roman Republic it became common for members of a funeral procession to carry small carved images of the deceased family member. Later, statues in memory of great statesmen or other noble figures were erected in public areas. Both the funerary sculptures and the public statues did not present naturalistic depictions of their subjects. Rather, the Romans favored an idealistic style that highlighted Roman ideals. The art of the Romans not only had a tremendous influence on the art of the Middle Ages, but also had a notable impact on the art of the Renaissance and much of the art that followed.

**Byzantine and Medieval Art**

With the fall of the Roman Empire, the connections between its parts disintegrated, and what was once a vast empire evolved into separate and often warring kingdoms. But even as the Empire collapsed in Western Europe, it continued in Byzantium. The art that is best known from this Eastern culture is mosaic work in which small ceramic tiles, pieces of stone, or glass were set into a ground material to create large murals. It is an art that is largely Christian in content and can best be studied in the glimmering, shining mosaic walls of the great churches of Ravenna. Although Ravenna is in present-day Italy, it was then under Byzantine control. In terms of Byzantine architecture, the Hagia Sophia (532–537 CE), built in Constantinople, is still considered one of the greatest architectural achievements in history.
The medieval period witnessed a great deal of civil strife, and consequently the art of this era was preserved largely by the Church. During these times, the majority of the population was illiterate; formal education was largely limited to the noble class and the clergy. The international language was Latin, and books were hand copied on vellum or parchment. The preservation and production of books was largely confined to monasteries, where the monks spent time copying and illustrating the books in their collections, which were so valuable that they were chained to the tables where they were read. These illuminated manuscripts were remarkable works of art and helped facilitate the exchange of artistic ideas between northern and southern Europe. Among the many notable examples are the *Book of Kells* (late eighth or early ninth century) and the *Coronation Gospels* (c. 800–810).

Notable from the early medieval period (c. 375–1025) is the art of nomadic Germanic peoples, particularly their metalwork. The metal arts of this time period were abstract, decorative, and geometric and often took the form of small-scale, portable jewelry or ornaments made of bronze, silver, or gold and covered with patterns of jewels. Artifacts from this era also exist from the seafaring culture of the Vikings in Scandinavia. While metalwork was popular with the Germanic peoples, wood was the most important medium to the Vikings, who carved artistic designs and sculptures on their wooden ships. As a result of Viking invasions, the artistic styles of the Vikings eventually merged with those found in Anglo-Saxon England and Celtic Ireland. The resultant style is often termed Hiberno-Saxon.

In later medieval art, the architecture of churches became a dominant art form. Every city, town, and village had a church at its center, and the largest of these are masterpieces of art that often took more than a century to complete. The earliest churches of this period used a Roman arch as the basis of their design, and so the style used is called Romanesque. One famous example is *Saint-Sernin* in Toulouse, France (c. 1070–1120). Romanesque churches were stone vaulted buildings that often replaced earlier churches that had highly flammable wooden roofs. Romanesque churches are usually formed of a tunnel of arches called a **barrel vault**. A **vault** is an arch-shaped structure that is used as a ceiling or as a support to a roof. Massive walls had to be built to support the heavy stone arches of the Romanesque style. Consequently, window and door openings were usually kept quite small and were often decorated with carvings and relief sculpture.

The Gothic style developed in the first half of the twelfth century and remained popular into the sixteenth century. Though this style was used for some secular buildings, it was largely applied to the construction of churches. One characteristic of the Gothic style was the use of pointed arches, which gave an upward, soaring sense to Gothic interiors. Another important element of the Gothic style was the addition of **ribbed vaults**, a framework of thin stone ribs or arches built under the intersection of the
vaulted sections of the ceiling. A key innovation came in the early Gothic period when architects learned that the downward and outward pressure created by the arches of the barrel vault could be counteracted by the use of flying buttresses—additional bracing material and arches placed on the exterior of the building. This advance allowed for larger windows, many of which were filled with beautiful stained glass, and higher ceilings. A classic example of a Gothic cathedral is Chartres Cathedral in France (begun c. 1145; rebuilt after 1194). Here the effect of the tall arches and the brightly colored light from the stained-glass windows directs attention heavenward.

The Renaissance in Southern Europe

Although we often tend to divide historical periods into a series of discrete and separate styles and events, in actuality, history is much more complicated and subtle. The transition from the later medieval period to the Renaissance provides a good example of this, as the styles from this period cannot be neatly identified as either Gothic or Renaissance, but rather involve a mix of the two. The artist most often mentioned in connection with this transitional time period is a Florentine named Giotto di Bondone (1267–1336/37), who is best known for his frescoes. A key advance visible in Giotto’s works is his use of a simple perspective, achieved in large part by overlapping and modeling his figures in the round. This technique created the illusion of a stage for his figures, giving the viewer a sense of looking into the event. Giotto’s works were different from many Gothic works as he gave his figures powerful gestures and emotional expressions. To our eyes, his paintings may not look entirely naturalistic, but his artistic innovations must have had quite an impact on viewers at the time, who were accustomed to the flat, unexpressive, and stylized figures of the Gothic style.

Like the art of ancient Greece, the art of the Renaissance continues to have an impact on art today. It is interesting to note that a change in the economy played a key part in triggering the Renaissance. It was in this time period that paper money was first developed, and its use led, in part, to the vast fortunes accumulated by notables such as the Medici family. These wealthy families were the major patrons of the arts during the Renaissance era. Another important factor was the fact that examples of Greek and Roman art were readily available in Italy, and these classical works of art had a tremendous impact on the art of the Renaissance.

As we discuss the art of this period and later, you will observe that the lives and works of individual artists are often highlighted, while this has not been the case in our discussion of earlier periods. In part, this can be attributed to a new emphasis on the individual and the concept of individual genius that emerged during the Renaissance. Until the time of the Renaissance, painters and sculptors were, in accordance with Greek traditions of art, considered artisans. That is, they were people who were viewed as being of lesser status because they worked with their hands. During the Renaissance, the role of artists in society changed, as great artists came to be recognized as intellectual figures. Consequently, artists were accorded a special place in society.

An important event in the beginning of the Renaissance was a competition held in the city of Florence in 1401 for the design of the doors for the city’s new baptistery.
The winner of that competition was Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381?–1455), who designed a door panel that had figures harkening back to those of classical Greece. Ghiberti’s panel design depicts the sacrifice of Isaac, in which Isaac appears as a classical Greek figure. Soon after the doors were installed, Ghiberti was asked to make a second set for another entrance to the cathedral. This second set took more than twenty-five years to complete. The doors were so magnificent that Michelangelo called them the “Gates of Paradise,” and they have been referred to by that name ever since.

Among the most remarkable of Renaissance artists was Donatello (1389?–1466), who is widely considered the founder of modern sculpture. The influence of classical antiquity on his sculpture was strong, as evidenced by his best-known work, a bronze statue of David (c. 1420s–60s). This work was the first known freestanding nude statue to have been cast since antiquity. Toward the end of his life, Donatello’s sculptures reflected a greater emphasis on naturalism and the expression of character and dramatic action.

The generation of artists that followed are often referred to as High Renaissance artists. Two well-known artists of this time period, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo (1475–1564), are the models for the term “Renaissance Man.” Leonardo da Vinci is well known as an inventor, but also is recognized as an architect, engineer, painter, sculptor, scientist, and musician. His design for the locks that control movements along canals from one level to another is still used today, and his drawings of submarines and helicopters have been found to be viable models. Two of his paintings, The Last Supper (c. 1495–98) and the Mona Lisa (c.1503–05), have become so well known that they are now icons of popular culture. Leonardo’s key innovation in painting, which is readily apparent in the Mona Lisa, is the use of sfumato. Sfumato, from the Italian word fumo, meaning smoke, is the use of mellowed colors and a blurred outline. Sfumato allows forms to blend subtly into one another without perceptible transitions.

At the same time that Leonardo was working in
Florence, another artist, Michelangelo di Buonarroti, was at work on the piece that would establish his reputation as a sculptor. The city held a competition to have a statue created from a massive piece of marble that it had acquired, only to discover that the marble was flawed. Taking this difficult piece, which had a large crack in the middle, Michelangelo turned it into his vision of *David* (1504). The statue is larger than life-sized, as it was originally meant to be placed high on the façade of the cathedral in Florence and would have been viewed from far below. The beautiful carving, the smooth texture of the finished marble, and the striking pose were seen as the very embodiment of the spirit of Florence as a republic.

Throughout his stormy career, Michelangelo created a large number of other important sculptures, but it is a painting that often comes to mind when people hear his name. In 1505, Pope Julius II commissioned Michelangelo to design his tomb. Michelangelo began sculpting great statues such as *Moses* (c. 1513–15), *The Dying Slave* (1513–16), and *The Bound Slave* (1513–16) to be included in the Pope’s colossal tomb. However, in the midst of this commission, the Pope canceled the project for uncertain reasons. The cancellation of his work on the Pope’s tomb was one of the greatest disappointments of Michelangelo’s career, and he was bitter and hesitant when Pope Julius II gave him another commission. This time, the artist was asked to decorate the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It took Michelangelo four years, from 1508 to 1512, to cover the seven hundred square yards of the ceiling, but the result was an astonishing tour de force. The great masterpiece of the Sistine Ceiling has received renewed attention in recent decades, as restorers set about cleaning the great frescoes. The cleaning removed the collection of oil, wax, and grime that had accumulated over the centuries,
and the colors have returned to their original brightness. Not everyone was happy with the results of the cleaning, however, and a controversy about this restoration, as well as the restoration of artworks in general, continues within the art world.

One of the most influential painters of the High Renaissance was Raphael Sanzio (1483–1520). When he was a young painter, Raphael was brought to Rome, where Julius II gave him several commissions. During this period, Raphael learned much from Michelangelo, his older rival. Unlike Michelangelo, Raphael was not a loner, but employed numerous assistants to help him cover the Pope’s official chambers with large, sumptuous frescoes, notably the School of Athens (c. 1508–11), an homage to the great Greek philosophers and scientists. Raphael is considered the most influential painter of the Madonna. His masterworks, such as the Sistine Madonna (c. 1513–14), created an image of the Virgin Mary that has endured in religious paintings throughout the centuries.

Rome and Florence were not the only locations to witness an incredible flowering in the arts. Venice, too, became a center of artistic creativity. Giorgione (1477/78–1510) is credited with making innovations in the subject matter of landscapes, as he painted scenes not taken from the Bible or from classical or allegorical stories. Prior to Giorgione’s painting The Tempest (c. 1508), artists had generally begun with the figures that were to be the subject matter of the painting and then added the background. However, in The Tempest the landscape became the subject of the painting—the figures depicted are of lesser importance than the storm that threatens them.

Titian Vecelli (c. 1488–1576) was one of the most prolific of the Venetian painters. Titian is well known for his portraits of his patrons, and he is also recognized as having been the greatest colorist of the Renaissance artists. Titian was an innovative portraitist. He used various elements of setting, such as a column or a curtain, as the backdrop for his portraits instead of an atmospheric neutral background, as had been the custom. The influence of Titian’s use and arrangement of background elements can be seen in portraiture up through the twenty-first century.

Tintoretto (1518–94), another great Venetian painter, is often linked with an artistic style called Mannerism that grew in popularity in the late sixteenth century. Mannerist works are characterized by the distortion of certain elements such as perspective or scale and are also recognizable by their use of acidic colors and the twisted positioning of their subjects. Although Tintoretto used some Mannerist pictorial techniques, his color schemes differed from those of the Mannerists. Tintoretto presented his figures from dramatic angles—it is said that he used small figures as models and arranged them and rearranged them until he had the most dramatic effect. He also used dramatic contrasts of light and dark, called chiaroscuro, to heighten the emotional impact of his subjects. Tintoretto’s later works are marked by their spiritual subject matter, and his use of sharp perspectives and chiaroscuro anticipate the Baroque era.

One of the most important events impacting the history of sixteenth-century art was the Reformation. Protestants criticized the opulence and corruption of the Catholic Church and called for its purification. For art, this meant a move away from the richly decorated churches and religious imagery of the Renaissance. The Church reacted to the Protestant Reformation by launching a Counter-Reformation, which emphasized, even more than before, lavish church decoration and art of a highly dramatic and emotional nature. One of the artists most closely associated with the Counter-Reformation is Dominikos Theotokopoulos, known as El Greco. El Greco was strongly influenced by Tintoretto’s paintings, and he worked for a period of time in Titian’s workshop in Venice. In 1576, El Greco left Italy for Toledo, Spain. El Greco is one of the most well-known of the Mannerist painters, and his dramatic use of elongated figures captured the religious fervor of the Counter-Reformation. The works of both El Greco and Tintoretto can be seen as transitional works bridging the end of the Renaissance and the beginning of the Baroque period.

The Renaissance in Northern Europe

During the fifteenth century, the artworks being produced in northern Europe were smaller in scale than those of contemporaneous artists to the south. However, the work of northern artists displayed a degree of realistic detail beyond what can be seen in works of the south, primarily due to their use of new oil paints. While the Renaissance was occurring in Italy, much of European art north of the Alps was still Gothic in style. The influence of classical antiquity was also much less of a factor in the north, as the
northerners did not share Italy’s cultural connection with ancient Rome, nor did they have the advantage of being in close proximity to ancient Roman works as did their Italian counterparts.

The art of northern Europe in the sixteenth century demonstrates a far greater awareness of the Italian Renaissance than that of the fifteenth century. Many artists traveled to Italy to study the great works of the Renaissance, and some Italian artists brought these ideas with them when they traveled to the north. Engravers copied some of the more notable Italian works, and these engravings became available throughout Europe, thus spreading the ideas and styles of the Renaissance. Trade connections between upper-class German merchants and merchants in Venice, a center of trade and art, provided another avenue of influence.

Though the influence of the Italian masters was notable, not all northern artists embraced the ideals and innovative techniques of the Renaissance, as many maintained a more traditional approach. Moreover, though linear perspective and the colors used farther south did travel northward, the manner in which they were used in the northern countries was quite different.

During the fifteenth century and into the early decades of the sixteenth century, areas of southern Germany witnessed a flowering of artistic production. Matthias Grünewald (1475?–1528) and Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) are often considered the greatest artists of the Renaissance in northern Europe. Although only ten of Grünewald’s works have survived, his influence has nonetheless been notable. Grünewald is known for his religious scenes and his depiction of Christ’s crucifixion. The Isenheim Altarpiece (c. 1510–15), a work consisting of nine panels mounted on two sets of folding wings, is considered to be his greatest masterpiece.

Albrecht Dürer is perhaps the most famous artist of the Reformation Germany. Dürer’s early training was largely influenced by late Gothic works, but as the ideas of the Italian Renaissance spread northward in the sixteenth century, Dürer’s work began to reflect some of these new influences. Dürer aimed to achieve a style that combined the naturalistic detail favored by artists of the north with the theoretical ideas developed by Italian artists. He traveled to Italy, studied the work of his Italian contemporaries, and brought his new knowledge back to Germany. Dürer wrote about theories of art and published many series of woodcuts and copper engravings, such as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (c. 1498).

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543) is another important artist of this era, and he is considered one of the greatest Renaissance portraitists. Though born in Germany, Holbein is best known for his work in England. He became court painter to King Henry VIII of England, and his portrait of Henry VIII shows not only his talent for presenting details, but also his ability to capture the psychological character of his subjects. Holbein’s works became the model and standard for English painting up through the nineteenth century.

**Baroque Art**

The term “Baroque” is generally used to refer to artworks produced from the late sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. Baroque styles differed from those of the Renaissance in that Baroque artworks tended to be less static than Renaissance examples; the Baroque is characterized by a greater sense of movement and energy. The political structure of Europe during the Baroque era also differed from that of the Renaissance. Whereas the Renaissance witnessed wars between cities, the Baroque era saw conflicts between empires. During this time, the Church was determined to preserve its dominance in Spain and Italy, and orders like the Jesuits were founded to convert the peoples of other areas. Baroque art appealed largely to the emotions, and thus, these artists, influenced by the Counter-Reformation, aimed at dramatic and moving appeals to faith.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe were a time when society was governed by a ruling class that viewed its power as a divine right. Some of the most powerful sovereigns ever to rule are from this period. Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great of Russia, and King Louis XIV of France dominated the lives of the people of their countries. It was a time that saw the ongoing concentration of power and wealth into the hands of a few, until the results eventually became intolerable for the majority of the people. While a small minority of the population lived in great luxury, the lives of ordinary people were generally quite difficult, and eventually this disparity gave rise to protests like those found in the writings of Enlightenment authors, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in particular. Ironically, however, it was the patronage of the wealthy ruling class that gave
rise to the great works of art of the period.

As we might expect, the art of the Baroque period moved away from the classic simplicity and calm that was so characteristic of Renaissance works. The word “baroque” has come to represent the richness of color and ornamentation that heightened the energy and emotion that were characteristic of the great works of art of this period. The emphasis was on dynamic works that presented imagery in the most dramatic way possible.

Baroque painters made use of chiaroscuro, using exaggerated contrasts between light and dark to create a theatrical kind of lighting that made the subject appear to be in a spotlight. Caravaggio (1571–1610), an Italian Baroque painter, was renowned for his dramatic use of light and dark, and his technique influenced many artists who followed. Caravaggio’s work is so important that artworks using extremes of dark and light are often termed “caravaggesque.” Caravaggio’s work is also notable for its provocative degree of naturalism. For example, Caravaggio portrayed the Virgin Mary and the apostles not as noble figures in classical garb as they had traditionally been represented, but instead depicted them as poor and simple folks in threadbare garments. His use of actual lower-class individuals as models for his work helped him achieve this effect. It is no wonder that several patrons of Caravaggio’s canvases rejected them for this reason.

With recent revisions of art history, a woman named...
Artemisia Gentileschi (1593?–1652?) has also joined the ranks of important Baroque artists. Gentileschi, the daughter of a painter, had the unusual opportunity to study in her father’s studio. She is particularly known for her remarkable adaptation of Carravaggio’s techniques. Her works include self-portraits and paintings of Old Testament women.

The most important Baroque artist, Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the son of a sculptor, was a child prodigy who received recognition from the Pope at age seventeen. Bernini did his most significant work in sculpture, but he was also a talented architect, painter, and draftsman. He worked as a designer in the theater, and many of his works reflect the influence of his theatrical background. His most important masterpiece, the

\[ \text{Ecstasy of Saint Teresa} \ (1647–52) \]

is set into the altar of the Cornaro Chapel. The space includes a concealed stained-glass window that bathes the figure of the saint in dramatic gold lighting, as if she were on a stage. Bernini treated his medium in a new way as well. He did not adhere to the classical calm and natural flow of drapery around the figure that had been used in the past. Instead, Bernini pushed the use of marble to new limits and tried to make stone look like real fabric and even clouds.

The importance of the Baroque style extended beyond Italy. In Flanders, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) established a huge workshop and produced works of great energy and color that became models for many artists. In the mid-seventeenth century, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), a Dutch artist, created some of the best-known works from the Baroque period. Rembrandt is recognized not only as a painter and printmaker, but also as one of the greatest draftsmen ever. Perhaps his best-known work is

\[ \text{The Night Watch} \ (1642), \text{ more properly known as Sortie of Captain Banning Cocq’s Company of the Civic Guard.} \]

Like many other group portraits of the time, each member of the company depicted paid a certain sum to be included in the painting. Rembrandt chose to break with tradition and grouped the members of the company in a way that gave more attention to some members than to others. This break with tradition, as well as other problems in his life, ultimately caused the decline of his career. Though Rembrandt died in poverty, the self-portraits of his later years are considered to be some of the greatest studies of the inner life of the sitter ever to be painted.

It might be argued that the Baroque period reached its peak in France. There, Louis XIV had come to power, and his long reign was marked by a blossoming of French culture. Louis XIV united all of France and built a lavish palace at Versailles beginning in 1669. The palace and its grounds covered about two thousand acres and included various grand chateaux and gardens. There was a stable, capable of housing hundreds of horses, and a grand orangerie, or greenhouse, for the king’s orange trees. Eventually there was also a zoo and a system of fountains and waterfalls that included a grand canal large enough for the staging of mock sea battles. The opulence and power of this “sun king,” around whom the world of the court revolved, became a model that contemporaneous monarchs tried to emulate.

An important feature of Louis XIV’s court that was to influence art well into the nineteenth century was the system of choosing and supporting artists called the Salon. This annual exhibition established a set of rules for judging art that is still influential in the art world today. It was also under the rule of Louis XIV that the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, often referred to simply as the “Academy,” was established, and it soon came to be a means for imposing aesthetic standards and principles of taste.

To the south, the Spanish court of King Philip IV of Spain tried to emulate the court of France, and his court painter, Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), was a contemporary of Bernini. Velázquez’s method of building his figures from patches of color, rather than starting from a drawing, became a model for many later artists. In fact, Velázquez’s work had an influence on the movement we call Impressionism.

**Rococo, Neoclassicism, and Romanticism**

While the Rococo style might be seen as an extension of the Baroque period, it is quite different in form and content. Whereas the Baroque aimed to arouse grand emotions, Rococo works were celebrations of gaiety, romance, and the frivolity of the grand life at court, particularly the court at Versailles. The emphasis was on light-hearted decoration with the use of gold and pastel colors.

Three artists who excelled at capturing the elegance and wit so valued by their aristocratic patrons are...
considered the greatest masters of the Rococo style. Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) was the leader of a new generation and the innovator of a new genre of painting called the fête galante. Paintings of this genre generally depicted members of the nobility in elegant contemporary dress enjoying leisure time in the countryside. François Boucher (1703–70) was influenced by Watteau’s delicate style. He became the favorite painter of Madame Pompadour, mistress to Louis XV, and his works often transformed the characters of classical myth into scenes of courtly gallantry, with an emphasis on nubile nudes. Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) was also promoted by Madame Pompadour. Fragonard studied with Boucher, and his works strongly reflect Boucher’s influence.

The Revolution of 1789 in France ushered in an era of great change throughout Europe, and the idea of a democratic republic ruled by and for the people was reflected in the artwork of the time. In an attempt to hearken back to the democratic ideals of the ancient world, art of this period demonstrated a revival of interest in the art of classical Greece and Rome. This style, called Neoclassicism, emerged in the decades leading up to the Revolution and was also influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. The Neoclassical style, a direct challenge to the Rococo and its associations with the aristocracy, is epitomized in the work of Jacques Louis David (1748–1825), whose paintings, such as the Oath of the Horatii (1784), illustrated republican virtues. Following the Revolution, David joined members of the new government as the master of ceremonies for the grand revolutionary mass rallies. Later he became a dedicated painter to Napoleon Bonaparte, and in this capacity he painted large propagandistic canvases that would seem to undermine...
his earlier revolutionary ideals. A closer investigation of his work and his career reveals the complicated world of an artist and his patrons. The work of David’s pupil, Jean Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), shows the sharp outlines, unemotional figures, careful geometric composition, and rational order that are hallmarks of the Neoclassical style.

Ingres’s rival, Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), was a proponent of Romanticism. This style hearkened back to the emotional emphasis of the Baroque and had similar characteristics, though the subject matter was different. Whereas Neoclassical works emphasized line, order, and a cool detachment, Romantic painting tended to be highly imaginative and was characterized by an emotional and dreamlike quality—the Romantics favored feeling over reason. Romantic works are also characterized by their incorporation of exotic or melodramatic elements and often took awe-inspiring natural wonders as their subject matter. Delacroix’s works are characteristic of the Romantic movement in that they centered on exotic themes and included foreign settings, violence involving animals, and historical subject matter. Théodore Géricault (1791–1824) and William Blake (1757–1827) were also important Romantic artists.

**Realism and Impressionism**

In many ways, Realism was a reaction to Neoclassicism and Romanticism. The Realist style was inspired by the idea that painting must illustrate all the features of its subjects, including the negative ones. It was also obligated to show the lives of ordinary people as subjects that were as important as the historical and religious themes that dominated the art exhibitions of the day. The artist who represented this movement most forcefully was Gustave Courbet (1819–77), a flamboyant and outgoing personality who outraged conventional audiences by showing a painting of ordinary workmen repairing a road at the official government-sponsored Salon. This work, called *The Stonebreakers* (1849–50), also had political implications in the context of a wave of revolutions that spread across Europe beginning in 1848. Realism can also be seen in the works of Honoré Daumier (1808–79) and Jean François Millet (1814–75).

Impressionism largely grew out of dissatisfaction with the rigid rules that had come to dominate the Salons held to recognize selected artists each year.
Édouard Manet (1832–83) is sometimes referred to as the first Impressionist. Although he refused to consider himself as one of the Impressionists, Manet’s work, which showed light by juxtaposing bright, contrasting colors, nonetheless greatly inspired and influenced the generation of artists following him. Manet’s painting *Le Déjeuner sur L’herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass) (1863)—included in the Salon des Refusés in 1863, an exhibit of works rejected by the “official” Salon—was singled out for ridicule. The scandal surrounding this work resulted from its violation of the unwritten rule that the only appropriate nudes in contemporary art were classical figures or women in suitably exotic settings. In *Luncheon on the Grass*, Manet based his work on an engraving with a classical subject matter, but he showed contemporary clothed men with a nude woman as part of the group. This caused an uproar.

While Manet continued to submit his work to the Salon, other artists who disagreed with the rigid artistic standards espoused by the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and favored by the Salon set about establishing Impressionism as a new style. A work by Claude Monet (1840–1926) was the source of the movement’s name. Monet showed a work that he called *Impression, Sunrise* (1872), and the critics seized on this mere “impression” as a means by which to ridicule the movement. It was Monet who urged his fellow artists to work outdoors, and these endeavors were aided by technical advances in paint and brush production that made the medium more portable. Impressionist artists put their colors directly on the canvas with rapid strokes to capture the rapidly changing light. Scientific studies of vision and color led to the discovery that shadows were not merely gray but that they reflected the complementary color of the object casting them. Camille Pissarro (1830–1903) and Alfred Sisley (1839–99) were two other Impressionists of note.

**Post-Impressionism and Other Late Nineteenth-Century Developments**

The artists who followed Impressionism, though influenced by the earlier artists, took various features of Impressionism in quite different directions. The most influential of these artists was Paul Cézanne (1839–1906). Dissatisfied with the lack of solid form in Impressionist works, Cézanne set about redefining art in terms of form. He suggested that a painting could be structured as a series of planes with a clear foreground, middle ground, and background and argued that the objects in the painting could all be reduced to their simplest underlying forms—a cube, a sphere, or a cone. Here we should note the obvious influence that these ideas, presented first by Cézanne, later had on the development of Cubism in the early twentieth century.

The ongoing search for more and more brilliant color was a unifying feature for many of the Post-Impressionists. The work of Georges Seurat (1859–91) placed an emphasis on the scientific rules of color. Seurat applied his colors in small dots of complementary colors that blended in the eye of the viewer in what is called optical mixing. The results were vibrant, though the emphasis on technique also resulted in static compositions.

As Seurat was attracting attention and Cézanne was formulating his rules for painting, a young Dutch painter named Vincent van Gogh (1853–90) was studying art. Van Gogh, using theories of contrasting color and very direct application of paint, set about capturing the bright light of southern France. His vigorous brushwork and twisting forms were designed to capture an intense response, and though his career was short, many of his works have become very well known. Van Gogh developed the idea that the artist’s colors should not slavishly imitate the colors of the
natural world, but should be intensified to portray inner human emotions. The intense and jarring yellows, greens, and reds in the poolroom of Van Gogh’s *Night Café* (1888), which van Gogh considered a place of vice, illustrate this very influential idea.

The search for intense light and clear color also marks the work of Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), who is perhaps known as much for the story of his life as he is for his art. Though he was a successful stockbroker, Gauguin left his wife and family while in his forties to pursue his art career. He worked for a short time with van Gogh in southern France but was still dissatisfied with his art. Searching for more intense color and a more “unschooled” style, he went to Tahiti, where he painted works that depict the island’s lush, tropical setting and native people, as seen through the lens of colonialism.

At this juncture, it is important to note the outside influences that were affecting the changing art world. The invention of the camera called into question the very need to capture ordinary reality in art. Some of the most important inventions may seem quite mundane. The invention of chemically based paints and the paint tube allowed the Impressionists to paint outdoors easily for the first time. This was also a time of global exploration and colonialism, and the objects brought back from around the world had a profound effect on the Impressionists and the artists who followed. Artists were intrigued by masks from Africa, and many collected the Japanese prints that were used as packing for shipments of goods from Japan. Edgar Degas (1834–1917) was an Impressionist whose work exemplified these new influences. Degas often combined the snapshot style of photography with a Japanese-like perspective from slightly above his subject.

In England, a group of artists dissatisfied with the effects of the Industrial Revolution banded together and became known as the Pre-Raphaelites. These artists created a style that attempted to return to the simpler forms of pre-Renaissance art. The Pre-Raphaelites created many quasi-religious works that often blended Romantic, archaic, and moralistic elements. Their emphasis on nature and sweeping curves paved the way for Art Nouveau. Art Nouveau, which became popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a style of decoration, architecture, and design that was characterized by the depiction of leaves and flowers in flowing, sinuous lines.

### The Emergence of Modernism

As we move into the twentieth century, we see artists who were continually striving to discover new ways of presenting their ideas. Furthering the attempts the Post-Impressionists had made to extend the boundaries of color, a group of artists led by Henri Matisse (1869–1954) used colors so intense that they violated the sensibilities of critics and the public alike. Taking their cue from van Gogh, these artists no longer thought their use of color needed to replicate color as seen in the real world. Their wild use of **arbitrary color** earned them the name of **fauvists** or “wild beasts.”

Natural form was to be attacked with equal fervor, as can be seen in developments in Paris around 1908. Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), in close collaboration with Georges Braque (1882–1963), was at work developing a whole new system of art. Picasso and Braque broke down and analyzed form in new ways in the style that came to be known as **Cubism**. Psychologists had explained that human experience is much richer than can be gathered from a traditional painting that shows a single view from a fixed vantage point. When we look at any given scene, we remember the scene as an overlay of visual impressions seen from different angles and moments in time. Picasso and Braque were familiar with these theories, as indicated by their habit of breaking figures up into multiple overlapping perspectives. The Cubists were also influenced by African art, which they imagined to be more intuitive and closer to nature than intellectualized European art. Cubist works reacted against the naturalistic, often sentimental, artworks that were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Cubists favored abstract forms over lifelike figures.

In Germany, an art developed that emphasized emotional responses. A group of artists calling themselves **Die Brücke**, which included Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) and Emil Nolde (1867–1956), took the brilliant arbitrary colors of the Fauvists and combined them with the intense feelings found in the work of the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944). This highly charged attempt to make the inner workings of the mind visible in art is known as **Expressionism**. Another Expressionist group in Germany, **Der Blaue Reiter**, was led by the Russian artist Vasily Kandinsky (1866–1944), who around 1913 began to paint totally abstract pictures without any pictorial subject. Other pioneers of total **abstraction**
were the Russian painter Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) and the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), whose De Stijl canvases, consisting of flat fields of primary color, have become a hallmark of modern art.

The next events in our story of the history of art are important because they mark the beginnings of modern art in the United States. It was these beginnings, coupled with the effects of the First World War, that were partly responsible for the eventual shift of the center of the art world from Paris to New York. While the movements of modern art were sweeping Paris, the American scene remained largely unaffected until 1913. The Armory Show, arranged by the Barnes Foundation and held from February 17 through March 15, 1913, was the first major showing of modern art in the U.S., and it caused a sensation. Artworks that were to become landmarks of various European art movements were a part of the Armory Show, and they had a profound and lasting effect on American art. Marcel Duchamp’s (1887–1968) Nude Descending a Staircase (1912) and Picasso’s Les Demoiselles d’Avignon (1907) both shocked viewers with their challenging approaches to the figure and space. Brancusi’s (1876–1957) The Kiss, with its abstracted, block-like figures, and Kandinsky’s non-objective paintings added to the outrage.

While the effects of the European works in the Armory Show rippled through the American art world, there was also a quintessentially American movement underway. During the 1920s, Harlem became a center for African-American creativity. Fueled by the popularity of jazz, writers and artists joined musicians in a flowering of the arts that is called the Harlem Renaissance. Though the movement lasted only a decade, it was an inspiration to many artists, including Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, and other well-known artists of the next generation.

During World War I and its aftermath, another movement arose that challenged established ideas about art. This movement, called Dada, originated among a group of disaffected intellectuals living in Zurich and grew out of the angst of artists who were disillusioned with the war. Dada was an art that aimed to protest against everything in society and to lampoon and ridicule accepted values and norms. Marcel Duchamp created two works that have come to represent this amusing and irreverent view of the world. He added a mustache to a reproduction of the Mona Lisa and gave it an insulting title (LHOOQ, 1919), and he also exhibited a common porcelain urinal (Fountain, 1917).

Duchamp, in fact, invented a new category of artworks that he referred to as ready-mades. By taking an ordinary object and giving it a new context, Duchamp would create a work of art. In this way, Duchamp challenged traditional ideas about the way the artist functions—rather than physically making a work of art, an object became a work of art merely through the artist’s choice. Picasso created several works that may also be considered ready-mades. For example, in a famous work Picasso took an ordinary object—bicycle handlebars—and made them appear as bull horns when coupled with a bicycle seat (Bull’s Head, 1943).

Some artists, influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud, attempted to portray the inner workings of the mind in their artworks. This group of artists became known as the Surrealists and included artists such as Salvador Dalí (1904–89), René Magritte (1898–1967), and Joan Miró (1893–1983).

One of the most influential events in the history of art took place in Germany between the first and second world wars. A school of design called the Bauhaus—a name that would become a byword of modern design—established standards for architecture and design that would have a profound influence on the world of art.
The Bauhaus made a bold attempt to reconcile industrial mass-manufacture with aesthetic form. Taking the view that form should follow function and should be true to the materials used, the faculty at the Bauhaus designed a curriculum that continues to influence many contemporary schools of art. After the school was closed by the Nazis in 1933, many of the Bauhaus’ faculty, including Josef Albers (1888–1976), a well-known painter, graphic artist, and designer, came to the United States and continued to teach. We can still recognize the Bauhaus influence in our contemporary society with its streamlined furnishings and buildings.

**Abstraction**

During World War II, organized movements in art came to a virtual standstill. Art was produced, but attention was really on the war. Many artists did in fact serve in the military, and often art was designed to serve as propaganda in support of the war effort. When the war was over and Europe was recovering, a new center for the international art world emerged. The action had shifted to New York, and it would be decades before the artistic centers in England, France, Italy, and Germany would regain something that approximated the prominence of New York.

During the 1950s, the art scene in New York was dominated by the ideas and writings of critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. These critics had a tremendous influence on the development of art styles. Greenberg chose to promote a particular view of art and was an advocate for artists who were further developing abstraction. Beginning in the 1940s, Abstract Expressionist artists followed Kandinsky’s dictum that art, like music, could be free from the limitations of pictorial subject matter. These artists aimed at the direct presentation of feeling with an emphasis on dramatic colors and sweeping brushstrokes. The Abstract Expressionist movement, which included the artists Willem de Kooning (1904–97), Lee Krasner (1908–84), and Franz Kline (1910–62), reached its pinnacle with the work of Jackson Pollock (1912–56). Pollock eventually abandoned even the use of his paintbrush and instead dripped his paint directly onto the canvas.

Abstract Expressionist works tended to fall into two types: Action Painting, which employed dramatic brushstrokes or Pollock’s innovative dripping technique, or Color Field paintings, which featured broad areas of color and simple, often geometric forms. Mark Rothko and Josef Albers are two well-known color field artists.

In response to the non-objective style of Abstract Expressionism, other artists began to return to naturalism, producing works that, though they may appear in some ways similar to those of the abstractionists, focused on ordinary consumer objects. Jasper Johns (b. 1930) created a series of works that featured common things such as flags, numbers, maps, and letters. Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) created sculptures from the cast-off objects he found around him to create what he called “combines.” He hung his own bedclothes on the wall like a canvas and painted them *[Bed](55)*, and one of his most famous works, *Monogram* (1959), consists of numerous “found” items, including a stuffed goat, a tire, a police barrier, the heel of a shoe, a tennis ball, and paint. This use of everyday objects in artistic works had a decided influence on the next big movement in art—Pop Art.

**Pop Art, Minimalism, and Photorealism**

1960s Pop Art, with its incorporation of images of mass culture, violated the traditional unspoken rules regarding what was appropriate subject matter for art. Andy Warhol (1928–87), the icon of pop art, achieved the kind of popularity usually reserved for rock stars. His soup cans, Brillo boxes, and images of movie stars were created with a factory-like silkscreen approach that he used to mock the art world. Roy Lichtenstein (1923–97), another pop artist, adopted the imagery of comic books and recreated them on such a large scale that the pattern of dots used to print them was made...
massive. Robert Indiana (1928–2018) used stencils that had been originally used to produce commercial signs to create his own artistic messages.

**Minimalism** sought to reduce art to its barest essentials, emphasizing simplification of form and often featuring monochromatic palettes. The invention of acrylic paint and the airbrush enabled Minimalist painters to achieve very precise outlines, which resulted in the term “hard-edge painting.” The artist who is best known for these large, entirely non-objective paintings is Frank Stella (b. 1936). The sculptors David Smith (1906–65), who used stainless steel, and Dan Flavin (1933–96), who used neon tubing, also created large pieces that reflected this abstract minimalist sensibility.

A Pop-inspired group of artists began to produce works that aimed to create a kind of super-realism or what came to be called **Photorealism**. In these works, a hyper-real quality results from the depiction of the subject matter in sharp focus, as in a photograph. This technique offered a clear contrast to the use of sfumato, developed in the Renaissance, which had added a haziness to the contour of painted objects. Photorealism artists Chuck Close (b. 1940), with his portraits, and Duane Hanson (1925–1996), with his witty sculptures of ordinary people, hearkened back to the Realism promoted by Gustave Courbet.

**Earthworks, Installations, and Performance**

One intriguing development in the contemporary art world since the 1970s is that art is no longer limited to gallery or museum spaces, and many important works of art are departures from traditional formats. Some artists have taken their work to a new scale and have developed their artworks in new venues, often outdoors. In this way, artists also challenge conventional ideas about art and its function. An artist known by the single name Christo (b. 1935), working together with his partner Jeanne-Claude (1935–2009), is responsible for creating much interest in these kinds of **Earthworks** (also known as Land art or Environmental art). Beginning in Europe, Christo startled the world with the idea that landscape or architecture is something that can be packaged. He wrapped several well-known monuments in fabric, built a twenty-four-mile-long cloth fence in California, surrounded eleven Florida islands with pink plastic, and set up orange fabric gates on pathways throughout Central Park. These works, which require years and even decades of preparation, are as much about the process as they are about the finished product, and it is for this reason that Christo’s partner, Jeanne-Claude, played such an important role. While Christo designs the projects, Jeanne-Claude handled many of the logistical details that must be addressed to carry out the work. Their partnership raises important questions about the concept of the individual genius of the artist and how he or she works. Other artists associated with Earthworks are Michael Heizer (b. 1944) and Robert Smithson (1938–73).

The growth of **Performance Art** is another development that allows artistic expression to transcend traditional boundaries. Some artists work in conventional media such as photography and painting, as well as in performance art. Performance art is a combination of theater and art in which the artists themselves become the work. Such works exist in time, like music or theater, and are fleeting and transitory in nature. The point is to create a real event in which the audience can participate, but that does not result in a fixed, marketable artwork for a museum or living room wall. Sometimes performance art is socially conscious in its intent. An example is the Guerrilla Girls, a group of New York-based artists who began to work together in 1985. The individual identities of the artists in this all-female group are kept anonymous at all times. The artists even wear gorilla masks when they appear in public to conceal their identities. The artists use guerrilla-warfare tactics, such as pasting up posters and flyers, as well as giving public speeches, to challenge what they see as an art world dominated by white men.

**Postmodernist** art arose in reaction to the modernist styles, and not surprisingly, it takes many forms across a variety of media. Postmodern works tend to reintroduce traditional elements or to exaggerate modernist techniques by using them to the extreme. Postmodern works often return to earlier styles, periods, and references and often question the mores and beliefs of contemporary society. A leading proponent of Postmodernism in architecture is Philip Johnson (1906–2005), who at one time was known as one of the leading modern architects of the International Style. For decades, architecture had largely been dominated by the Bauhaus idea of form following function, and sleek towers of steel sheathed in glass were the standard for large buildings. But,
in 1970, Johnson suggested the radical idea that one of the functions of art was decoration, and with the AT&T Building (1984; now 550 Madison Avenue), he added a finial to the top of the standard office tower.

Today, artists around the world work in an endless variety of media and styles. One can no longer say that any particular city, country, or even continent is the “center” of the art world. The next section of this guide provides a brief overview of “nonwestern” art, but we should note that the categories of Western and nonwestern in the world of contemporary art are becoming obsolete with the emergence of transnational artists in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NONWESTERN ART

The story of art that we have been studying thus far has been a traditional one and has been told over and over again by countless writers since Giorgio Vasari's time. It chronicles a history of Western European ideas that grew out of the concepts put forth by early Greek philosophers. These ideas experienced a revival during the Renaissance and were further refined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Atomic power, the increasing pace of technological inventions, and the electronic age further expanded and changed the realm of art in the twentieth century.

We should keep in mind that the history we have chronicled thus far, though valuable, has clear limitations. In recent decades, art history, like many other academic disciplines, has been challenged to include artists and works that were previously marginalized. The influence of feminist critics in particular has led to major revisions, and there has also been an increasing inclusion of the histories of art of other cultures. At this point, we will look at the arts of Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and the art of Islam throughout the world. The art histories of these cultures are increasingly central to the development of the discipline of art history. Of course, this brief survey covers only a tiny fraction of the rich world of art beyond the boundaries of the Western world. The works considered here might be categorized as “traditional”; contemporary art from Asia and Africa, thoroughly immersed in the global art scene, is beyond the scope of this discussion, for example. Illustrations of the works of art discussed here can be found through basic Internet searches and in standard art historical textbooks.

Asian Art

Chinese Art

Civilization and art have been present in China for thousands of years, and some archaeological finds in China rival those in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Remains of painted wares have been found that date back to the fourth millennium BCE. Perhaps the most famous work of ancient Chinese art is the Great Wall, which was constructed over the course of centuries and covers thousands of miles. Of course this wall, now considered an enduring work of art and admired both for its engineering and aesthetic appeal, originally had a utilitarian function. This is an example of how meaning and function can change over time. In fact, many of the works we will examine here were created for a specific purpose but are now seen as works of art in a different context.

The dynasties or kingdoms that ruled for long periods of time had an impact on the history of art in China. In many cases, these rulers left elaborate tombs that contained many objects that have become great treasures of art. One of the most amazing works from the early period of Chinese art history is the monument to the first emperor to unite the kingdom—the Emperor of Qin (c.210 BCE). He had a full army of soldiers and their equipment, including their horses, created life-size in clay and buried as part of his tomb. The technical ability demonstrated in these sculptures and the life-like detail of the soldiers and their horses are quite astonishing. The dynasties succeeding Qin built grand walled cities with huge palaces and tombs. These dynasties are noted for bronze statues and ceremonial vessels. These vessels are covered with intricate designs, and the methods of casting are still not completely understood.

The introduction of Buddhism from India had a profound effect on Chinese arts and culture. During the reign of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), often referred to as China’s Golden Age, artists produced some of the greatest works of ceramic sculpture ever made. Traditional Chinese art also placed great value on ink drawings. Many scrolls are meant for contemplation, and the methods of casting are still not completely understood.

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the centuries. With the communist revolution that established the People’s Republic of China in 1949, art became suffused with political ideas and was often an instrument of propaganda. However, since the late 1970s, Chinese art has gradually become less political.

Indian Art

India is an extremely diverse nation in which more than 1,600 different languages and dialects are currently spoken, and India is home to a variety of religious and cultural traditions. India’s artistic traditions are among the oldest in the world, and here we will only be able to touch on one or two aspects of India’s rich artistic heritage. The influence of Buddhist traditions is strong, of course, but what often astonishes people unfamiliar with the art of India is the influence of Greek art on the classical images of Buddha. India has ruins of great early civilizations that rival those of Egypt and Mesoamerica, and the sensuous style of Indian sculptures has had an enduring impact on art over the centuries. Much Indian art reflects the tremendous influence of Hinduism. This religion, with its many gods and goddesses, gave rise to a lovely, lively, and sinuous style. Images of Shiva, who dances gracefully with his multiple arms, are particularly striking.

Japanese Art

The island kingdom of Japan, though tiny in size, has had a great influence on the international art world. Japan was closed to the West for the majority of its history, and this allowed Japanese art to remain relatively consistent and traditional. As with China, the history of Japan is one of succeeding dynasties, with each one leaving its mark in a series of succeeding styles. Also, as with China, Buddhism was imported to Japan and became an important focus in the traditional arts. The strength of Japan’s artistic traditions remained even when the country became more open to Western cultures. During the rise of the Impressionist movement in Europe, Japan sent a group of artists to study in France. These artists returned to Japan and introduced the ideas they had encountered in the West, and so, for a short time at the end of the nineteenth century, there was
a group of artists in Japan who used linear perspective and the colors and subjects of Impressionism. However, what is noteworthy is that the Japanese soon rejected these ideas and returned to the isometric perspective and flat areas of color favored by Japanese traditions. Although Japanese artists created excellent works in painting, architecture, crafts, and sculpture, it is for their printmaking that Japanese artists are best known in the Western world. Japanese prints had a profound influence on Western art, as French artists began to imitate the prints that they began to collect in the late nineteenth century. The flat colors and overhead viewpoint of these prints were adopted by many French artists during this period.

**African and Oceanic Art**

Some of the historic traditions of African art have already been discussed in our survey of Western art. As a result of the relationships between Egypt and the Mediterranean world, the ancient arts of northern Africa are often incorporated into the history of Western art. Usually the art of sub-Saharan Africa is treated separately from that of northern Africa because of the regions’ very different histories. A close look at all areas of the continent reveals that impressive art traditions emerged in west, central, east, and southern Africa quite early. Some of the oldest examples are cave paintings in what is now Namibia. In West Africa, the Nok civilization flourished from c. 900 BCE to 200 CE. Located in what is present-day Nigeria, this impressive civilization produced fantastically life-like terracotta sculptures, many of which were probably portraits of political and religious leaders. It is possible that the early Nok civilization had an influence on later cultural groups such as the Yoruba.

Another important historical tradition from Nigeria relates to the Benin Kingdom, which first emerged around 900 CE when the Edo people settled in the area. The kingdom became further consolidated with shifts in leadership in the eleventh century. Much of the remaining art from the Benin Kingdom was produced in association with a rich life at the royal court. Cast bronze portrait heads were intended for ancestral altars, and a variety of objects were made to reinforce the tremendous power of the oba, or Benin king. Countless treasures from the Benin Kingdom were destroyed or confiscated by the British in the 1897 raid on the royal palace. As a result, many more of these objects from historic Benin can be found in museums in Europe and the United States than in Nigeria.

While art objects in a variety of media have been created by many different African cultural groups, our study of them has been limited in many cases by the lack of necessary conditions for preservation. While there are some objects in metal and clay, the use of fiber and wood, which are quite perishable, has resulted in relatively few artifacts being preserved. Unfortunately, much African art was also destroyed by early European traders and colonial settlers on the
continent. Westerners often viewed much of what they found in Africa as dangerous and threatening to the colonial pursuit, perceiving artworks as pagan symbols that should be destroyed rather than preserved. Hence, a wealth of cultural artifacts has been lost. The objects that were preserved were often collected as archaeological artifacts and, in most cases, important contextual information was lost. It is only relatively recently that art historians have begun to explore the rich variety of artworks and aesthetic systems of African cultures. In many cases, traditional African arts challenge the Western concept of art for art’s sake—functional baskets, ceramics, and textiles, for example, are some of the most prized material objects for many African cultural groups.

When we look at African art in a museum, a great deal of contextual information that is crucial to our understanding of the object is lost. Many African cultural groups, such as the Dan and the Bwa, are well-known for their impressive masks. Masks, though, are not meant to be seen in isolation as they are typically displayed when in art museums. Instead, masks are usually integrated into performance, coupled with a full-body costume and accompanied by music, dance, jokes, festivities, and a great meal shared with friends and family. It is difficult, of course, to recreate all of this in a museum context!

Similar issues occur in relation to the arts of Oceania. Oceania is the collective name for the thousands of islands that constitute Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. As is the case with Africa, many perishable objects dating back for centuries have been lost to us due to the use of fragile materials in a sometimes hostile climate. In Polynesia, tattooing and other body arts were important ways of expressing social stature. Clearly these art forms are lost with the death of the tattooed person and were preserved only through engravings made by visitors to the islands prior to the invention of photography.

Some of the most important art traditions of the Asmat cultural group of Melanesia relate to warfare. Traditionally the Asmat engaged in head-hunting practices, but these traditions have died out. Enormous carved wooden shields decorated with beautiful black, red, and white abstract patterns were traditionally used for protection in raids among groups throughout the area; today these shields are seen as cultural symbols, but they no longer serve the same function in war.

Carved masks were a central part of Melanesian cultures. In many cases, these masks were used in ceremonies that involved summoning the spirits of ancestors to honor the dead. As is the case with African art traditions, much is lost when these objects are viewed in museum collections.

Rich traditions continue to develop throughout Oceania today, especially as groups such as the Maori of New Zealand seek cultural renewal by reviving old traditions in a new context. Many people from traditional cultural groups that have been threatened by colonization recognize that art offers vibrant possibilities for expressing and reinforcing cultural identity.

Islamic Art

Today, Islam is a major religion that is not limited to any one region of the world. However, historically Islam emerged in the Arabian Peninsula following the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (c. 570–632). The revelations of Muhammad are recorded in Islam’s holy book, the Koran. This text plays a central role in the practice of Islam, and some of the most valued art objects are beautifully produced copies of the Koran or containers that hold the sacred text. Following the Koran’s scriptures, Islamic art is largely non-figurative. Abstract or calligraphic decoration can be found on most Islamic art objects, including sacred architecture, which has a long history in the Islamic tradition. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (687–692) is one of the oldest examples of Islamic architecture. Its position in Jerusalem marks the presence of Islam in a city that is also sacred to Jews and Christians. The act of prayer is central to the practice of Islam, and the mosque, with its qibla wall facing toward Mecca, emerged as a site for communal prayer. Mosque architecture can be found in a variety of forms throughout the world today.

The Americas

For many years art historians classified much of the art of North and South America as products of simple craftsmanship. These artifacts were not truly considered works of art and therefore were kept solely in archeological and anthropological museums. However, renewed interest and new studies of these works have added considerably to our understanding and appreciation of the art of the first Americans, and objects from these cultures are becoming more and more common in the collections of art museums. Great civilizations grew and flourished in the Americas,
including the Olmec, Toltec, Maya, Inca, and Aztec. Great pyramids, rivaling those of Egypt, rose as the central features of large cities, of which the Pyramid of the Sun in Mexico is one of the best known. The decorative carvings on the Mayan ruins continue to amaze us, and in addition to architectural marvels, statues in clay and stone, as well as fine textiles and jewelry, remain as reminders of the glories of these civilizations.

While there is evidence of early people in many areas of present-day Canada and the United States dating back nearly 12,000 years, several of the conditions that we identified earlier as being necessary for preservation were not present. As a result, the majority of artifacts from these cultures are only from the last two thousand years. During the later centuries of the prehistoric period, the Native Americans of the Southwest demonstrated remarkable architectural skills in the building of pueblo complexes. These dwellings often consisted of well over a hundred rooms laid out in multiple stories.

**ELEMENTS OF ART**

*Formal Qualities of Art*

While it is crucial to examine any given work of art in its historical context in order to arrive at an understanding of its meaning, it is also important to focus intently on the formal qualities or the basic visual components of a work of art. These include line, shape, form, space, color, and texture, among other things. Formal analysis requires careful observation and description, often using the special vocabulary of art.

**Line**

Line is the most basic of art elements. Any kind of mark-making tool—a finger, pencil, paint, etc.—can be used to create a line on a surface. The strict definition of a line is the path of a point moving through space.
But beyond this technical definition, lines have a variety of characteristics such as length, width, and direction. Lines may appear hard or soft, bold or indistinct, uniform or varying in width. Sometimes lines are not solid but consist of a series of interrupted dots or lines that the eye connects to create an implied line. Think of prints in the sand or snow that imply the path of a person or animal. Sometimes we see the edges of objects as lines. The corners of rooms, the edges of doors, and the line where two colors meet all provide examples of how edges may be seen as lines.

Artists use lines to express ideas or feelings visually. Horizontal and vertical lines create a stable and static feeling. Vertical lines cause the eye to move upward. Medieval churches were created with very high arched ceilings, designed to raise the eyes of the people upward toward heaven to promote a feeling of spiritual awe. Horizontal lines, such as the line of the horizon, suggest a feeling of peace and tranquility while curving and jagged lines create a sense of activity. Though the use of lines is perhaps most essential and noticeable in drawing and some kinds of printmaking, all artists use line in their artwork in some way.

Shape and Form

Shape and form are two elements of art that are closely related to one another. Shape is what defines the two-dimensional area of an object, whereas forms are objects that are three-dimensional, having length, width, and depth. For example, a square is a shape, but a cube is a form. A triangle is a shape; a pyramid or a cone is a form. When one draws an apple that in nature is a form, one draws a shape that represents the apple. If one creates an apple out of clay, that clay apple is a form. In a two-dimensional artwork, an artist may try to create the illusion of form through the use of shading, foreshortening, perspective, and other techniques.

Shapes and forms may be geometric, such as circles/spheres and squares/cubes. These geometric shapes and forms can be defined mathematically and are precise and regular. Some shapes and forms are described as being “organic” since living things tend to be freeform and irregular in shape or form. A geometric shape or form can convey a sense of order and stability, while organic shapes and forms tend to express movement and rhythm.

Space is an element of art related to the organization of objects and the areas around them. The objects, shapes, or forms in an artwork occupy what is termed positive space. Sometimes these objects, shapes, or forms may be called the figure. The area around these objects, shapes, or forms represents negative space. In three-dimensional forms, negative space may surround the forms or may be created as a result of open spaces within the forms. Three-dimensional artworks include, among other forms, architecture, ceramic objects, and sculpture. The two primary types of sculpture are freestanding, or fully in the round, and relief, meaning that the sculpture projects from a surface or background of which it is a part. Such sculptures may be in high relief—projecting boldly from the surface—or bas (low) relief—projecting only slightly from the surface of the sculpture.

Perspective

The creation of perspective or the illusion of depth is another important use of space in two-dimensional artworks. There are many effective techniques that artists can use to create an illusion of three-dimensionality. They may use shading and highlighting on the contours—the visible borders—of objects to replicate the manner in which light shining on objects lends those objects a sense of volume and space. An artist can also create a sense of depth in an artwork by placing objects or figures lower on the picture plane to make them appear closer to the viewer. Or, one can do the reverse and place objects and figures higher on the plane to make them appear farther away from the viewer. Artists can also manipulate the size of objects to create a sense of perspective—larger objects will appear closer to the viewer than smaller objects. An artist can also have closer objects overlap objects that are farther away to indicate depth and distance. Moreover, the artist can make objects appear closer to the viewer by giving them greater detail than objects that are farther away—replicating the manner in which our eyes are able to perceive more detail in objects that are nearer to us.

Aerial perspective, also called atmospheric perspective, is a technique that takes into account the ways that fog, smoke, and airborne particles change the appearance of things when they are viewed from a distance. When an artist uses this technique, objects that are farther away will appear lighter and more neutral in color and will lack contrast of color or value.

Frequently, when we think of perspective, we think
of the mathematical techniques that were developed during the Renaissance which can be used to create the illusion of space. Such techniques create what is called linear perspective because this perspective is founded on the visual phenomenon that as lines recede into the distance, they appear to converge and eventually vanish at a point on the horizon. We may, for example, notice this effect when viewing highways, railroads, or fence posts as they stretch into the distance. In employing linear perspective, the artist establishes one or more vanishing points on the real or imagined horizon of the artwork. Then, lines are carefully drawn to ensure a precise and extremely realistic depiction of interior and exterior scenes. Thus, in drawing a black and white checkerboard floor (a frequent feature in Renaissance interior paintings), the horizontal lines of the tiles are drawn as parallel, but the vertical lines—which we know are also parallel in reality—appear to converge or come together in a systematic way as they recede toward the back wall of the interior.

Color

Color surrounds us wherever we go and is a compelling element in art. **Hue** is simply the name of the color. There are three primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—from which all other colors are produced. Secondary colors are formed from the mixture of two primary colors: red and yellow make orange; yellow and blue make green; blue and red make violet. There are six tertiary colors, made by combining a primary and an adjacent secondary color: red and violet make red-violet; violet and blue make violet-blue; blue and green make blue-green; green and yellow make yellow-green; yellow and orange make yellow-orange; orange and red make red-orange. The organization of these hues into a visual scheme, known as the **color wheel**, dates from the eighteenth century, though the underlying concepts were developed by Sir Isaac Newton in the seventeenth century. The color wheel is a useful tool for predicting the results of mixing hues.

Two important variables affecting color are the amount of light that is reflected and the purity of the color. The term "**value**" is often used when discussing the lightness or darkness of a color or of gray. Values in an artwork may be primarily dark or primarily light or may be contrasting from dark to light. The artist's use of value contributes to the expressive quality of the artwork. In mixing colors, artists create a lighter hue by adding white to the color. Adding white to red, for
example, makes a lighter red or pink. Artists create
darker hues by adding black to the color. Adding black
to red, for example, makes a dark red. A few words
about black and white are necessary at this point.
Black and white are not hues; they are called **neutrals**.
When mixing black and white, artists can create a
continuum of grays.

**Intensity** refers to the brightness or purity of a color.
The unmixed primary colors, being pure in color, are
generally considered to be the most intense colors.
If pure colors are mixed, they become less intense.
Adding black or gray to a color will reduce its
intensity. Adding a color to its complement lowers the
intensity of the color, making it more dull or neutral in
tone. Equal parts of two complements, such as red and
green, will produce a dull, muddy brown tone.

Artists often use specific color schemes to produce
particular visual or emotional effects. In the nineteenth
century, scientists discovered the relativity of color;
they determined that a given shade of red will look
brighter or darker, more or less intense, depending
on what other (similar or contrasting) colors are
placed next to it. Thus, colors do not have a fixed or
immutable character or value.

In discussing art and color, we often speak of warm
colors and cool colors. These color associations are
culturally constructed and are not absolute. In the
context of Western art, warm colors include red,
orange, and yellow and are referred to as such because
we associate them with the warmth of the sun, the heat
of a roaring fire, or the dry grass of a late summer day.
Cool colors—green, blue, and violet—remind us of
cool forests, mountain lakes, and snow. Artists often
use warm and cool colors to create space in artworks.
Warm colors seem to advance toward the viewer while
cool colors appear to recede. By employing contrasts
of warm and cool colors, artists can create a sense of
movement as the viewer’s eyes move over the surface
of the artwork.

Color may be local, arbitrary, or optical. **Local color**
refers to the “true” color of an object or area as seen in
normal daylight, irrespective of the effects of distance
or reflections from other objects. For instance, in a
work using local color, a grassy field would be green
despite the fact that it may, in reality, appear bluish
from a distance. **Optical color** refers to the effect that
special lighting has on the color of objects. Consider
how colors change in moonlight, at daybreak, in
candlelight, or in artificial lighting. Artists who use
**arbitrary color** choose colors for their emotional or
aesthetic impact. In the twentieth and twenty-first
centuries, artists have come to use arbitrary color
schemes more and more often.

**Texture**

Texture refers to how things feel or how we think they
would feel if touched. From a young age we explore
the surfaces of things and store away these tactile
experiences in our memory. When we see new objects
or artworks, we call upon our previous experiences
to determine the quality of the surface texture. In
the context of art, we make reference to two kinds
of texture: actual and visual. Some artists use actual
textures in their art. For example, a ceramic artist may
create an actual texture on the surface of a pot or plate.
In collages, assemblages, or masks, artists may use
yarn, rope, shiny paper, shells, and other natural or
manufactured materials to create actual textural effects.
Artists who work in three-dimensional media exploit the
textural qualities of their chosen material whether it is
stone, wood, metal, or some other substance.

Artists who work in two-dimensional media create
visual texture—an illusion of a textured surface—in
their artwork. For example, an artist may wish to
simulate the actual texture of a straw hat, a glass
vase, or an orange. Textures may be created by using
patterns of lines or shapes that suggest texture.
An artist can use the contrast of light and dark on
a surface to create a texture that appears rough.
Conversely, the absence of such a contrast will evoke
a smooth texture. Shiny surfaces appear to reflect light
while matte surfaces appear soft and dull. In addition
to using the aforementioned techniques to create visual
texture, painters can create actual texture with their
brushstrokes.

**Composition**

**Composition** refers to the artist’s organization of the
elements of art, whether in two- or three-dimensional
works. When speaking of a painting, the composition
refers to the arrangement of these elements on the
picture plane. In the case of architecture, composition
is a word used to describe the organization of these
elements in space.

**Rhythm** is the principle that we associate with
movement or pattern. Artists create a sense of movement or rhythm in their artwork through the repetition of elements such as line, shape, color, and texture. The rhythm of a composition can cause the viewer’s eye to move rhythmically across and around the composition. Some rhythms flow smoothly, while others are more jarring. The artist directs the movement of our eye through the use of repeated elements.

**Motif** and **pattern** are two aspects of repetition. A motif is a single element of a pattern. For example, in a quilt design, one or more motifs are repeated to create an overall pattern. A pattern involves the repetition of certain elements—color or line—or motifs within a work of art. Many patterns feature regular repetition. Shapes or motifs may be repeated in a number of ways to create regular patterns. Some kind of grid system will underlie a regular pattern. Checkerboards offer an example of a regular pattern.

**Balance** refers to the equal distribution of visual weight in a work of art. There are a number of techniques that artists use to create balance. The easiest to comprehend is symmetrical balance—a balance achieved when elements of the composition are repeated exactly on both sides of the central axis. If you fold a paper in half vertically and one side of the centerfold is a mirror image of the other side of the centerfold, then you have an example of symmetrical balance. Many formal styles of architecture make use of symmetry with columns, wings, and windows arrayed equally on either side of the central entrance. Artworks in which the central axis is horizontal and equal visual weight is placed above and below that axis also exhibit symmetrical balance. To avoid the rigidity and monotony that may accompany a symmetrical composition, many artists employ **approximate symmetry**. In this kind of balance, shapes or objects are slightly varied on either side of the central axis. The artist may also include variations in the color, detail, or position of the shapes to achieve this effect.

**Asymmetrical balance** is a visual balance that is achieved through the organization of unlike objects. Even though asymmetrical balance may appear to be more informal than symmetrical balance, it is actually a more complex compositional task. There are several ways that asymmetrical balance can be achieved. The first is by the position of objects. Think of two people of unequal weight on a seesaw. To maintain a balance, the lighter person must sit far out on the end of the seesaw while the heavier person must sit close to the fulcrum. Similarly, an artist may create balance by placing the heavier, more solid object close to the center of the artwork while placing smaller objects farther away from the center.

Contrast of color, value, shape, size, line, or texture creates interest to the eye. An element that contrasts with the rest of a composition will create a **focal point** where the eye tends to rest. This focal point appears more dominant, more important than other parts of the composition. In this way, the artist may guide the viewer to an understanding of meaning.

**Proportion** refers to the size relationships among the parts of a composition. Our sense of proportion is based upon our human scale. **Scale** refers to the dimensional relation of the parts of a work to the work in its entirety, and can refer to the overall size of an artwork. Size attracts our interest. The vast scale of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel creates a sense of awe. The detail of a tiny painting or of illuminations in medieval manuscripts intrigues us. Artists consider the purpose and place of their art when determining the appropriate scale for the work.

Scale also refers to the relative size of elements within the artwork. In a naturalistic work, we expect that the relative sizes of the objects depicted will appear as they actually are in life. In some cases, artists intentionally make one person or object in their composition larger to draw our attention to that person or object.

When representing the human face and figure realistically, artists strive to use accurate proportions. The standards for the relationship of the various parts of the human face and body were established nearly 2,500 years ago during the Classical Period of Greek sculpture. The Greeks believed that the human figure was the measure of all things. As a consequence, all structures were designed in proportions relative to human proportions, and specific rules were established. For example, the ideal human figure was determined to be seven and one-half heads high. The features of the human face could be correctly placed according to these rules: the corners of the eyes fall on a line halfway between the chin and the top of the head, the bottom of the nose falls halfway between the chin and the corners of the eyes, and the bottom of the lips falls halfway between the chin and the bottom of the nose. However, many artists at different times have
altered these proportions to reflect changing ideals of beauty. At other times, artists have exaggerated or distorted proportions for an expressive effect.

To truly understand how artists manipulate the elements of art and the principles of composition, it is necessary to examine a great many artworks and to analyze how artists create meaning in their artwork through skillful choices and the application of these artistic concepts. Students should keep in mind that many of the elements discussed in the principles of composition section of this guide are more often found in traditional works than in modern artworks. The rejection of notions such as unity and balance is often the very essence of much modern art.

**PROCESSES AND TECHNIQUES**

Two-dimensional art processes and techniques are those that are created on a flat plane. They have height and width, but not significant depth. These include drawing, printmaking, painting, photography, and some mixed media. Artworks that have depth as well as height and width that exist in space are three-dimensional. This category includes sculpture, other works in mixed media, and environmental art.

**Drawing**

Drawing is arguably the most basic of art processes. Most of us have been drawing since we could hold some tool and make marks on a surface. The most common drawing media are pencil, pen and ink, charcoal, crayon, and felt-tip pens. Artists can choose from a variety of surfaces upon which to draw. Early artists used walls of rock, and though some artists today continue to draw on walls, most use some kind of paper—from the white paper of common sketchbooks to a wide variety of manufactured and handmade papers. Papers may be smooth or rough, white or in a wide range of colors. Drawing tools may be black, colored, or white.

Drawing is primarily based on the use of line. Lines created by drawing media can vary dramatically in quality. Hard pencils will make thin, light lines while soft pencils will make thicker lines that may vary considerably in value from lighter to very dark. Charcoal is so soft that the color of the paper used will show through in places where the strokes are applied lightly. Each drawing tool or medium has its own unique qualities, and experimenting with a variety of drawing media is a good way to gain an understanding of their similarities and differences.

With drawing pencils or charcoals, a change in pressure will cause a change in value. More pressure creates darker values; lighter pressure creates lighter values. **Shading** can also be used to change values. Artists use the techniques of **hatching** and **crosshatching** to shade objects and create an illusion of three-dimensionality. Hatching consists of placing lines closely side by side. Crosshatching is a process in which lines are crisscrossed to create shading. Many drawing media can be blended to change their value and enhance shading. Another technique for shading is **stippling**. With this technique, the artist creates different values by making a pattern of dots. The distance between the dots determines how dark the shading will be—the more densely clustered the dots, the darker the shading.

When an artist uses ink as a drawing medium, the ink can be thinned to create a wash of lighter value in which the paper shows through to lighten the effect. Undiluted ink is opaque; it is not transparent, and it completely covers the underlying paper. But water can be added to make the ink translucent.

Color may be introduced into a drawing with the use of pastels or colored pencils. The same techniques used with black media are used with colored media. The artist using color must consider the effects of color and line in an artwork. Colored pastels became popular in the 1700s. These soft sticks of color can be readily blended to create delicate tints and shades, and they are particularly popular for portraiture. The major drawback of pastels is that they are very fragile, and pastel drawings must be cared for quite gently. Often, the surface of a pastel drawing is sprayed with a fixative to reduce the risk of smearing. Colored pencils are more durable than pastels, but like pastels, they may be layered to create blended colors.

**Printmaking**

Printmaking refers to a group of mechanically aided two-dimensional processes that permit the production of multiple original artworks. The principal printmaking processes include relief prints, intaglio prints, lithographs, and **screen prints**. All of these processes use some sort of printing plate (a “matrix”) on which an image is created. Ink is applied to the plate, and the image is transferred to paper or another material.
In **relief printmaking**, the artist cuts away parts from the surface of the plate. The matrix may be made of wood, linoleum, or a synthetic material, and a number of tools, including woodcarving or linoleum knives and gouges, can be used for cutting its surface. Once the plate has been cut, the remaining parts will stand out in relief. The relief sections may range from thin lines to broad fields, and it is these areas, when they are inked, that will produce the image. Wherever part of the plate is removed, the original color of the paper being printed upon remains. Ink is rolled over the surface of the plate with a brayer, and paper is placed over the inked plate. The plate and paper are then put into a press or rubbed with a burnisher to force the ink onto the paper.

**Intaglio printmaking** works in the opposite manner from relief printmaking. In the intaglio process, lines are incised on the wood or soft metal plate. Line is an essential element in the intaglio process. Carving tools are used to cut lines into the surface of the plate in a process called **engraving**. Another intaglio process is **etching**. In this process, the design is incised through a layer of wax or varnish applied to the surface of a metal plate. After the incising, the plate is immersed in acid, which etches, or eats away, the exposed metal. Leaving the plate in the acid for a shorter time will make faint lines in the plate, while leaving the plate in for a longer time will make deeper grooves. After the plate is etched, the remaining wax or varnish is removed, and ink is forced into the etched areas of the warmed plate. Then, the ink on the surface of the plate is wiped off, and finally, paper is placed on the plate, and it is passed through a heavy press. The paper is forced into the etched, inked areas, and the ink transfers to the paper. In an etching, the printing process causes the printed areas to actually rise above the surface of the paper, giving a degree of dimension to the print.

**Lithography** is a process in which the image is drawn with a waxy pencil or crayon directly on a plate, which
can be made of stone, zinc, or aluminum. The greasy image is hardened, and the plate is saturated with water. Then, ink is applied. The ink adheres only to the greasy image since oil resists water. The image is picked up on the paper when the plate is moved through a press. Lithography can be a complex and demanding process, but in contrast to woodcut and engraving, it does not require special professional training; anyone who can draw can make a lithograph.

Screen prints are familiar to most of us since this is the process used to print most T-shirts. In the silk-screening process, a photograph or other image is transferred or adhered to a silk or synthetic fabric that has been stretched onto a frame. The image serves as a sort of stencil, blocking out areas of the permeable fabric. When ink is forced through the fabric using a squeegee, at those areas not blocked by the stenciling, the image is transferred to the paper or fabric beneath.

Because multiple originals can be made through printmaking processes, the cost of an individual print is considerably less than that of a painting. Printmaking techniques have been used in the print industry for illustrating newspapers and books since the development of the printing press in the fifteenth century.

**Painting**

Painting encompasses a wide variety of media and techniques. Paint is usually composed of three different materials: pigments, binders, and solvents. Pigments are finely ground materials that may be natural or synthetic. Natural pigments include clays, gemstones, and minerals, as well as plant and insect materials that make color when powdered. These powdered pigments are mixed with a binder that holds the grains of pigment together and allows the paint to adhere to a surface. Egg yolks, linseed oil, and wax can all be used as binders.

A solvent such as water or oil can be added to change the consistency of the paint or alter its drying time. As with drawing, painters can apply the media to a variety of surfaces such as boards, paper, canvas, and plaster walls. Paint can be applied to a surface with many different tools. We usually think of paintbrushes as the tools used to apply paint, but fingers, sticks, palette knives, and anything else that an artist imagines will make the desired kind of applicator may be used.

One specialized technique of painting that has a long history is the **fresco**. The fresco technique is usually used to paint on walls or ceilings. In creating a fresco, the artist mixes pure powdered pigments with water and applies them to a wet plaster ground. The paint is permanently bound in the plaster, so the artist must plan carefully because he or she will not be able to make changes after the fact. This kind of fresco is termed **buon fresco** (“true” fresco). If an artist uses the technique called fresco secco, he or she will apply paints to dry rather than wet plaster. Frescoes have been found in the ruins of Pompeii and in many medieval and Renaissance churches. Diego Rivera, the famous Mexican muralist of the early twentieth century, used this technique for his murals in Mexico and the United States.

When we think of painting, oil painting usually comes to mind first. Oil paints were not widely used until the 1400s, and prior to that time, tempera was the most commonly used paint. Tempera is a water-based paint. Many of us remember using tempera paint in elementary school. Traditional tempera paint, which uses egg as a binder, has been used by fine artists throughout history. **Tempera** painting requires great skill, and there are limitations to this medium. Tempera colors dry quickly, and so they cannot be blended once they are applied to a surface. Tempera also has a narrow tonal range—colors are either light or dark—and it cannot achieve the close imitation of natural effects that oil paints can. Nonetheless, the positive qualities of tempera are evidenced by the many ancient tempera paintings that still retain their clear and brilliant colors.

Oil paints are much more versatile than tempera paints. Oil paints can be easily mixed, and they may be thinned to build up layers of delicate **glazes**—thin transparent or semi-transparent layers that are applied over another color to alter it slightly. The translucency of glazes permits, for instance, a crimson layer underneath to shine through a yellow layer on top and can thus create brilliant, luminous effects that are impossible to achieve with tempera. Oils can be applied thickly or in heavy lumps to make an **impasto** surface. Since oils dry slowly, it is possible for an artist to work on an oil painting over a long period of time—days or even weeks.

In ancient Egypt, grave markers were painted with wax-based paints called **encaustic**. With encaustic,
colored molten wax is fused with the surface via the application of hot irons. The fact that Egyptian markers have survived through the ages indicates the durability of the encaustic medium. Some painters today have returned to this ancient, traditional process.

**Gouache** is a water-based opaque paint that is similar to school-quality tempera, but of higher quality. Gouache has more body and dries more slowly than watercolor. It is a good medium for creating bright colors and meticulous details and is often used for design and fine artwork.

The most common water-based paint is **watercolor**. Watercolors are transparent, a quality that dictates the manner in which they are used. The white of the paper upon which the artist paints is a major factor in watercolor. White paint is rarely used in watercolors. Instead, to make tints, the artist adds more water to the paint. The lightest colors are applied first, and then the darker colors, working from background to foreground, from broad areas to areas of detail. Watercolor is not forgiving of mistakes, so watercolor artists must plan carefully and practice diligently.

A recent development in paint is **acrylic paint**. Made from synthetic materials, plastics, and polymers, acrylics were developed after World War II. Acrylics are very versatile. They do not require the slow, careful building up of successive layers with long drying periods in between as do oils. Acrylics are, however, unable to achieve some of the subtleties of which oil paints are capable. For artists who have developed allergies to oil paint and turpentine, acrylics offer a valuable alternative.

**Photography**
Photography was developed during the mid-nineteenth century, and it soon became a very popular way to document likenesses of people and scenes. The development of photography had a decided impact on other genres of art. As the use of photography grew, painters at first felt pressured to compete with the camera by achieving a higher degree of realism. Ultimately, however, artists felt less of a need to confine themselves to naturalistic styles of painting and were encouraged to explore various forms of art that were entirely beyond the reach of photography. Although not originally considered an art form, photography has gradually assumed a legitimacy within the art world that has only grown in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The medium of photography is in constant flux as new technology becomes available. In addition to still photography, film and video art are also used as art forms.

**Sculpture**
Sculpture is created in four basic ways: carving, modeling, casting, and construction. We usually think of sculpture as being **freestanding**, like the *Venus de Milo* or Michelangelo’s *Pieta*, but some sculptures are attached to surfaces such as doors, sarcophagi, altars, or church walls. Such **reliefs** may be carved into the stone or wood of the structure itself, or they may be cast of metal and fixed to the surface of the structure. High-relief sculpture projects significantly from the carrier surface, while low-relief sculpture projects only slightly. Reliefs can only be seen from a limited range, whereas a freestanding sculpture can be seen from every angle.

**Carving** is a subtractive process in which some of the original material is removed. For example, a stone or wood sculpture can be made by chiseling and gouging away with chisels, hammers, and files to bring the artist’s imagined form into physical existence. The scale of carved sculptures can range considerably, from miniature figures that rest on the tip of a finger to monumental forms carved of living rock.

**Modeling** is an additive process. A soft, workable material like clay, wax, plaster, or papier-mâché is formed by hand. Amounts of these materials can be added to the surface, and the surface can be shaped and decorated by hand or with simple tools. Sometimes an unfired clay or wax sculpture can become the basis for a **cast form**. In this process, the original form is encased in plaster. When the plaster hardens, it is removed from the original form and retained for use as a mold. The mold can then be filled and thus used to create one or more casts of the original object. Sculptures may be cast in plaster, metal, and more recently, synthetic materials like plastic or polyester resins.

Some sculpture is constructed using a variety of methods. Metal sculpture can be welded from sheet metal or bent from wire. Some artists use paper, board, or wood that is cut and glued, nailed, or joined together by some other means and then possibly painted. Sometimes found objects are combined to create a new sculpture.
Some sculptures can move or can have moving parts. For example, Alexander Calder (1898–1976) created mobiles with forms suspended by wire which can be moved by wind or air currents. Other artists have used a wide variety of motors, pulleys, ropes, pumps, or other mechanical means to introduce movement to their sculptures.

Environmental art, also called Earthworks or Land art, is a newer category of art form that first emerged in the 1960s, and many works that fit in this category could be classified as sculpture. Environmental art is usually large in scale, is constructed on-site, and is usually not permanent. Environmental art occupies space that may be outside in the natural world or inside a gallery or museum. In either case, the artwork redefines the space in which it is installed. Sometimes, performance may be coupled with the actual installation, and often the viewer is, to some degree, drawn into and involved with the artwork. Often, an essential part of the work of environmental artists is the process of collaborating with the community and governmental agencies to gain approval for their proposed works. Environmental art is often designed to be impermanent or to change over time. Photographs provide us with a more long-lasting documentation of these projects that are often designed to be fleeting in nature.

Mixed Media
Mixed media is the name given to a category of artworks in which the artist uses several art media, sometimes in conjunction with found materials such as fabric, rope, broken dishes, newspaper, or children’s toys. Mixed media works can be either two- or three-dimensional. Collage is a kind of mixed media in which artists combine various materials such as photographs, unusual papers, theater tickets, and virtually any other materials that can be adhered to a surface. Artists will select materials for their texture, color, or other aesthetic properties or for their symbolic meaning. Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque are credited with introducing this medium to the high-art sphere around 1912.

The artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) is well known for his mixed media pieces that combine silkscreen images with paint. Some artists create assemblages using all found objects, both two- and three-dimensional, in their compositions. Joseph Cornell (1903–72) was a twentieth-century artist who filled open boxes with a variety of objects that visually created symbolic and metaphoric statements.

Among traditional and nonwestern cultural groups, masks, ceremonial costumes, and other objects often employ mixed media. Masks may be carved of wood and embellished with grasses, beads, and paint.

Performance
Performance art is art in which the artist engages in some kind of performance, sometimes involving the viewers. Like environmental art, performance art lacks the permanence of more traditional genres of art. Videos or photographs of the performance may be the only remaining documentation of the event. In our world of canned, sterile, and constantly repeated media spectacles, performance art offers a means for recovering unique, unrepeatable human experiences. Since performances cannot be sold as objects, this art form has also been viewed by many as an escape from the increasing commercialization of art. True to the inventiveness of the artistic spirit, artists continue to explore new ideas, new materials, and new processes to express their unique perspectives and ideas. Such creative works continually challenge us to reconsider our own conceptions and definitions of the term “art.”

Craft and Folk Art
Craft, folk art, and popular art are all debated terms applied to a variety of art forms across cultures. In many cases, these terms are used to discuss art forms
that are largely utilitarian. Through time and across cultures, people have often sought to make the objects they use more distinctive or beautiful. Consequently, pottery, jewelry, fibers, and glass and wooden objects have come to be recognized as art forms even though they may have a utilitarian purpose. A discussion of craft or folk art raises many questions about the nature of art and the aesthetic pursuit.

Pottery is a medium based upon the use of natural materials. Clay, dug from the ground, is the essential material. Many types of pots can be built using hands and simple tools. A basic pot can be formed from a ball of clay by punching the thumb into the center of the ball and pinching the clay between the thumb and fingers. Clay can also be rolled out into coils with the palm of the hand, and these coils can then be stacked up to form a clay vessel. Depending on the diameter of the coils, pots built in this way can be of enormous size or made on a tiny, dainty scale. Slab-built pots are made by rolling out clay and cutting carefully measured pieces, which are then assembled by applying liquid clay, called slip, to the edges that are to be joined.

The potter's wheel was used in many ancient cultures and continues to be used by artists today. Using the potter's wheel, the potter forms the basic shapes of the pot by manipulating the ball of clay as it turns on the wheel. When a potter uses a potter’s wheel to create pots, these pots are described as being “thrown.” Throwing allows for particularly thin-walled pots in a wide variety of shapes. Many potters combine hand-built and thrown forms to create beautiful objects that may or may not be functional.

Once the clay form has air-dried, the kiln, a specialized oven, is loaded and fired. In the kiln, all remaining moisture is driven out of the clay, and a chemical change takes place. The pots harden permanently. Then, glazes made of clay and minerals that provide color may be applied to the surface of the pots, and the pots are fired once again. The glazes melt, forming a glassy, waterproof surface on the pots that is both decorative and useful. The surface of a ceramic piece can also be decorated with applied clay designs or with decorations incised or carved into the surface of the piece.

Fiber arts include both woven and nonwoven materials. Weaving has a long history in the production of materials for clothing and other household needs. Some weaving techniques use a loom while others rely on simple braiding, knitting, or crocheting. Quilting is another important craft form that is practiced by popular as well as fine artists.

Archaeological evidence indicates that glass was first made in the Middle East in the third millennium BCE. Glass is most often made of silica, which is derived from sand, flint, or quartz, combined with other raw materials. The introduction of additional minerals adds color. The development of glassblowing enabled the formation of glass vessels such as vases, drinking glasses, and perfume bottles. Stained glass became a dominant art form in the medieval period and was used to create the dramatic windows of cathedrals. By the end of the nineteenth century, stained glass had also become popular for lampshades and windows in residential homes.

Wood has been used to make functional objects such as furniture, boxes, boats, and homes. Northwest Coast Indians carve boxes and house boards with traditional designs. People all over the world have made wooden boats in varying practical and aesthetic forms. Today, artists make all kinds of objects from wood. Such objects may be functional, but first and foremost, they aim to be aesthetically pleasing. Functional objects like tables and chairs assume the status of art when the design is unique, the craftsmanship superb, and the visual effect beautiful. Sometimes these objects may no longer be functional, but become art for art’s sake.

**Architecture**

Architecture is the art and science of designing and constructing buildings. People in every culture and geographic area have designed shelters that meet their needs for protection. As people have imagined structures for a variety of communal and personal uses, they have developed various methods of construction to realize their ideas. Specialists in designing structures have become known as architects.

In early times, materials that could be found locally were used for building. Sticks, mud, grass, animal skins, ice, and wood were used in different climatic areas. Later, brick and stone were also used. An important architectural development was the use of the post-and-lintel construction technique in which a long stone or wooden beam is placed horizontally across upright posts. The famous Greek Parthenon is an example of post-and-lintel construction. This method is still commonly used today, with steel and
wood being the favored materials.

Other key developments in architecture include the arch, the vault, and the dome. Each of these is a variation of the same concept that allowed for greater height and more interior open space inside a building. The Romans were great engineers, and the Colosseum in Rome provides a fine example of vaulted construction. The Romans developed concrete as a building material, which they used in building aqueducts, great baths, and other public works projects.

In the medieval period, a skeletal building style developed that alternated between strong buttresses and thin walls with stained-glass windows, which admitted more light and color into the building. Many medieval cathedrals provide classic examples of this method. The addition of flying buttresses—external arches that counterbalanced the outward thrust of the high, vaulted ceilings—allowed for even more height and window openings.

During the Industrial Revolution, many new materials and processes for building were developed. In 1851 the Crystal Palace, so named because it consisted mainly of glass walls that were held in place by a framework of slim, iron rods, was built for the world’s fair in London. The Eiffel Tower in Paris, an amazing and beautiful monument, is primarily a framework of wrought iron.

Antonio Gaudi (1852–1926) created ingenious buildings of cut stone in Spain in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Without any flat surfaces or straight lines, Gaudi’s buildings are very organic in appearance. While we usually think of buildings as being more modular, having a regular and geometric shape, many architects have challenged this notion and have searched for aesthetically interesting designs and new materials to move beyond the idea of a building as merely being a box-shaped construction.

Steel and concrete have become the favored materials for large public, commercial, and multi-family housing.
while wood and brick continue to be commonly used for residential homes. While many buildings are designed by builders using more standardized plans, leading architects continue to explore new and exciting designs and materials.

SECTION I SUMMARY

- Art history is an academic discipline that seeks to reconstruct the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which an artwork was created. The basic goal of this work is to arrive at an understanding of art and its meaning in its original historical context. Art historians rely on a variety of documents and sources in order to conduct formal and contextual analyses.

- The history of Western art is often studied chronologically. This study begins with early cave paintings in southeastern France and takes us to contemporary art all over the world.

- Early civilizations arose in Mesopotamia. Other ancient Western cultures important for their art traditions include Egypt and Nubia, and the civilizations of the Aegean Islands, Greece, and Rome. The artworks that have survived from ancient civilizations are those made of durable materials. Often these artworks were preserved in places that were relatively inaccessible.

- Tremendous shifts occurred in the art of the medieval period with the emergence of Christianity as a major religion and the Church as a powerful patron of the arts.

- The Church remained an important patron of art during the Renaissance and Baroque periods; at the same time, there was also a rise in secular artworks during these periods, in light of the Protestant Reformation and general societal and economic shifts throughout Europe.

- Major innovations of the Renaissance include the use of linear perspective and a move toward greater naturalism. Baroque art is generally distinct from Renaissance art because of its greater sense of movement and drama.

- The Rococo style of art was closely tied to the power of the French aristocracy prior to the Revolution of 1789. The Neoclassical movement may in part be seen as a reaction to the Rococo and a response to the political and social revolution. Romanticism, in turn, was a reaction to the classicizing tendencies of Neoclassical art. Romanticism sought to appeal to the emotions and the senses.

- Realism and Impressionism both emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. Both movements were focused on everyday life as a subject matter, although Impressionism became increasingly concerned with ideas of visual perception.

- Other late nineteenth-century developments included Post-Impressionism and the Pre-Raphaelites.

- Modernism emerged in the early twentieth century. Important modernist movements include Cubism, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism.

- The Armory Show in New York (1913) marked a shift in the art world, as the United States became a new center of progressive artistic activity.

- Pop Art, Minimalism, and Photorealism responded to a post-WWII industrial culture. Installations, performance, and Environmental art (also known as Land art or Earthworks) all sought to challenge conventional ideas of art and its limitations.

- In the past, areas of nonwestern art were not incorporated in the chronological study of Western art; distinct regions of the world have often been studied separately. Today, though, many art historians are challenging this based on the realization that art throughout the world is interconnected, especially in terms of contemporary art. Art historians sometimes rely on different methods to understand nonwestern art.

- China, India, and Japan are among the major cultures of Asia. All three countries have ancient traditions and have produced art that relates to political power and religious practice.

- Ancient traditions can also be found in Africa. Often the arts of Africa and Oceania were created for very different functions from art in the Western traditions; consequently, there are tremendous formal differences as well.
- Islam is a major world religion that has produced much art. Most Islamic art is non-figurative.
- Ancient civilizations existed in the Americas as well. Archaeology is often used to learn about these civilizations and their art.
- In addition to understanding context, art historians seek to describe the formal qualities of artworks. Important terms used to discuss the formal qualities of an artwork include: line, shape and form, perspective, color, texture, and composition.
- Artists throughout time have worked in a variety of media, including drawing, printmaking, painting, photography, sculpture, mixed media, performance, craft and folk art, and architecture.
2020–2021 Art Resource Guide

Section II
An Introduction to Cold War Art and Culture

THE STATE OF THE WORLD AFTER WORLD WAR II

As the Second World War came to an end, with Germany, Italy, and Japan defeated and Europe in upheaval, the United States emerged as a dominant global power. American economic, military, and technological might had grown considerably in the previous half-century, and this sustained growth had created a domestic consumer society whose benefits had reached many ordinary citizens. By 1945, thanks to the productive power of its manufacturing sector, financial reserves, and the fact that the country had been physically untouched by the war (with the exception of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941), the U.S. economy was the strongest in the world. At the same time, Americans feared that an already weakened European economy would worsen and spread poverty worldwide, and that the response would be Communist revolution, as had happened in Russia, in part due to the impact of the First World War.

Such fears were not assuaged by the Soviet Union’s emergence as America’s main rival in the immediate postwar years. The Red Army had indisputably driven the Nazis back across Eastern Europe, sacrificing millions of soldiers and civilian lives in the process. The Communist message appealed to workers everywhere, calling for global solidarity and social justice. After all, Communists in Europe and elsewhere had fought Fascism in Spain in the 1930s and throughout Europe in the 1940s. By 1945, in many parts of Europe, the Red Army was seen as a liberating force after six long years of German aggression or occupation.

Europe was devastated, and both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. saw an opportunity for their own system to serve as a model for Europe’s postwar transformation. The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin wasted no time in imposing strict control over his immediate neighbors, creating an Eastern Bloc of satellite states that included Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and the Baltic states. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill described the situation as an “iron curtain ... drawn down upon [the Soviet] front” that threatened the very heart of Europe. From the perspective of the United States and Britain, the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe was a hostile imposition of a tyrannical Communist system beyond its borders and had to be contained. However, according to Stalin, this buffer zone was important for preventing a possible attack from the U.S. or Britain, which were no longer wartime allies of the U.S.S.R., but political adversaries hostile to the Soviet Union.

The United States addressed the postwar crisis in Europe by passing an unprecedented aid package for European reconstruction. The Marshall Plan provided approximately $13 billion (in today’s dollars, that amounts to at least $111 billion) in aid to European countries that agreed to receive it. Conditions for the receipt of this aid were practically unrestricted but
included accepting American envoys who would help decide how the aid was spent. The Marshall Plan helped alleviate wartime shortages, restart industries, rebuild cities that had been destroyed by prolonged bombing, and begin the construction of the social safety nets that would become the modern European welfare states. Stalin naturally saw this as a ploy to secure American hegemony in Europe and made it clear to the U.S.S.R.’s Eastern European satellites that accepting American assistance would be considered an anti-Soviet act. In part, Stalin was correct: the Marshall Plan was meant to slow the growth of local Communist parties in Western Europe and succeeded in doing so by providing the European working classes with social programs and salary increases, as well as through covert operations to break Communist influence.

A CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES
The Cold War was a confrontation between two opposing ideologies, capitalism and socialism, waged by the United States and the Soviet Union roughly between the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. From the beginning, Cold War culture was politicized, and cultural forces came to play an extremely important role in a world seen as sharply divided between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In the rhetoric of the time, American ideals of individual liberty, free markets, and the American way of life battled with Soviet values of social justice, state planning, and collectivism. Both sets of ideas were rooted in European Enlightenment notions of progress and were bolstered by each side’s sense of destiny with respect to its own inevitable expansion and the ultimate rightness of its social and economic systems. Both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. saw the rivalry as a battle between liberty and tyranny, although which side was which depended on one’s point of view. While the U.S. promoted American individualism over godless Soviet Communism, the U.S.S.R. claimed to protect a harmonious socialist society from unfeeling American imperialism.

In line with this intensification of ideological competition, cultural life and cultural institutions in both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. saw large increases in subsidies and attention, from orchestras and the
ballet to theater and the fine arts. In the realm of the visual arts, America’s standing had risen significantly. By the 1940s and 1950s, the art world’s center had gradually shifted from Paris to New York, as many artists and intellectuals left wartime Europe for the U.S. A new avant-garde movement called Abstract Expressionism arose and soon exerted a strong influence around the world. Abstract Expressionism’s distinctive style of abstract, energetic forms became associated with ideas like artistic freedom and masculine individualism. The association of style and ideology was bolstered by press coverage and traveling exhibitions that gave audiences abroad, including viewers behind the Iron Curtain, a taste of American consumer goods as well as avant-garde music and art.

In contrast, Soviet cultural policy was oriented toward articulating a clear vision for the future and had, since the 1930s, relied on an easily legible style to articulate that vision. Soviet critics denounced contemporary art movements like abstraction, Surrealism, and Expressionism as manifestations of corrupt bourgeois capitalism wallowing in decadent formalism. Form disconnected from clearly articulated political messages was, in these critics’ opinion, immoral. Socialist Realism, an artistic style that was made the official Soviet style in 1934, combined an academic realist style with politically correct subjects that would be accessible to the working classes and inspire them to build the new socialist society. The clash between Socialist Realism and Modernism would set the terms of both domestic and international debates over contemporary art for much of the Cold War.

FIRST WORLD, SECOND WORLD, THIRD WORLD

The dismantling of European colonial empires in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa in the 1950s and 1960s led to the emergence of dozens of new states, which the great powers sought to influence. In resistance to this bilateral division of the world, leaders in Yugoslavia, India, Egypt, and elsewhere sought to organize their own countries and these new nations into a “Non-Aligned” Movement, which could unify outside of the Cold War’s bipolar power structures. Nonetheless, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. tried to shape the Third World, as it came to be called (after the First World and Second World of the capitalist and communist spheres of influence, respectively), through assistance, intervention, and cultural influence, a form of “soft power” that each side hoped would sway these societies in their favor and transform them into willing proxies, markets for goods, and audiences for cultural products.

Artistic exhibitions were one widespread method by which this form of influence was exerted. In its attempt to convey a particular image of the world and export it, The Family of Man exhibition is a vivid example of this complicated relationship between the First and Third World during the Cold War.
SELECTED WORK: *THE FAMILY OF MAN EXHIBITION, CURATED BY EDWARD STEICHEN, 1955*

*The Family of Man* exhibition opened in the spring of 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. It was curated by Edward Steichen, a veteran photographer and director of the museum's photography department, and his assistant Wayne Miller. The exhibition featured 503 photographs chosen from the files of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), the National Archives, the Library of Congress, photo agencies like Black Star, Magnum, and the Soviet Union’s SovFoto, and popular magazines like *Life* and *Seventeen*. More than a quarter million people visited the show at MoMA, and versions of the exhibition subsequently traveled to thirty-seven foreign countries, supported by funding from the United States Information Agency (USIA). According to the USIA, more than 7.5 million visitors saw the show abroad between 1955 and 1965, making it the most popular show in MoMA’s history and possibly the most visited photography exhibit of all time.3

Steichen was a pioneering American photographer. Early in his career, he helped Alfred Stieglitz in the founding of the magazine *Camera Work* as well as 291, one of the first galleries in the U.S. to exhibit modern art in the first decades of the twentieth century. Steichen had experienced great success as a fashion photographer in the 1910s and 1920s and served in both World Wars—as commander of the photographic division of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I and as director of the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit in World War II. Prior to *The Family of Man*, Steichen had organized a number of large photography exhibitions at MoMA that aimed to boost American wartime morale, including *Road to Victory* in 1942, *Power in the Pacific* in 1945, and *Korea—the Impact of War in Photographs* in 1951. In his autobiography, *A Life in Photography*, Steichen recalls his hope that by helping viewers to see the real horrors of war, these popular shows would lead the public to take a stand against war on a large scale. His disappointment that the exhibitions did not actually result in such an outcome led Steichen to conclude that a different approach was necessary:

> Although I had presented war in all its grimness in three exhibitions, I had failed to accomplish my mission. I had not incited people into taking open and united action against war itself. ...What was wrong? I came to the conclusion that I had been working from a negative approach, that what was needed was a positive statement on what a wonderful thing life was, how marvelous people were, and, above all, how alike people were in all parts of the world.4

*Edward Steichen photographed above the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Lexington by Victor Jorgensen, November 1943.*
This positive attitude sums up Steichen’s approach in The Family of Man. Images of babies being born, children playing, men and women laboring, families gathering, people from around the world learning, worshiping, dancing, fighting, loving, struggling, thinking, and being together were hung from the ceiling with wires and on temporary walls set up throughout the gallery. The photographs—nearly all employing the realistic snapshot aesthetics of straight photojournalism rather than art photography—took advantage of every corner of the exhibition space. Clustered together thematically, they juxtaposed examples of life from multiple different cultural perspectives. In a recruiting letter to fellow photographers, Dorothea Lange wrote that Steichen’s exhibition promised to “show Man to Man across the world. Here we hope to reveal by visual images Man’s dreams and aspirations, his strength, his despair under evil. If photography can bring these things to life, this exhibition will be created in a spirit of passionate and devoted faith in Man. Nothing short of that will do.”

Despite the exhibition’s widespread popularity, already in the 1950s, some critics saw The Family of Man as a crude tool of Cold War propaganda that smoothed over real political conflicts and divisions shaping the post-World War II world. For example, the French critic Roland Barthes called the show “moralized and sentimentalized.” In his view, it conjured an “ambiguous myth of the human ‘community,’” one that relied on exoticism to promote a false sense of unity while turning a blind eye to real injustices at the heart of racial and class distinctions. Indeed, there was a subtle message that Lange had identified, which could be detected running throughout the display. In some cases, photographs that had been produced as part of larger projects with their own agendas were stripped of these original meanings. For example, by selecting single shots from August Sander’s 1920s photographic catalog of social classes in German society or the Farm Security Administration’s documentation of impoverished American farmers during the Depression, Steichen presented them as exemplars of the individual bootstrapping farmer or dignified family provider rather than representatives of a specific social class or casualties of poor government policies during the Great Depression.

Steichen and Miller’s selection of images for The Family of Man framed the exhibition’s stories about work, community, and the world in a way that suited America’s Cold War self-image as the bastion of freedom in an uncertain and divided world. The exhibition also aimed to demonstrate this point to visitors experientially through a dynamic and interactive placement of images and overall layout. The communications scholar Fred Turner has analyzed The Family of Man in the context of developments in American social science. Throughout the Cold War, American experts were set on discovering and cultivating something called “the democratic personality.” These social science experts—sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists—believed that totalitarian societies like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia were built around authoritarian individuals who captured the imaginations of their citizens. Authoritarian leaders could do so, the experts reasoned, because their societies’ citizens suffered from overly paternalistic family structures, an uninterrupted barrage of totalitarian propaganda, and an underdeveloped sense of individual emotion, reason, and will.

It was widely believed at this time that maintaining particular forms of government, required societies to promote particular states of mind among their citizens. In line with this idea, Steichen and his team devised a layout that would help inoculate visitors against the threat of authoritarianism. They built a series of temporary walls that allowed visitors to move through the exhibition along different trajectories and at their own pace, pausing or gathering at points of interest. Rather than locating pictures at the usual eye height, the designers arranged photographs in clusters, hung them from wires, attached them to poles, and even suspended them face-down from the ceiling. The photographs were reproduced in a range of sizes, with some filling entire walls, while others were so small that they required close inspection. Viewers were thus encouraged to position themselves in relation to the photographs of people engaged in activities they could recognize or relate to from their own lives.
In this way, Turner argues, the exhibition served as “a three-dimensional arena in which visitors could practice acts of mutual recognition, choice, and empathy—the core perceptual and affective skills on which democracy depended.” Instead of being led along a particular path or sequence of images, visitors to the exhibition were expected to wander freely and choose their own trajectories, looking, selecting, and arranging different images in their minds’ eyes to produce their own conclusions and sets of meanings in the process. Although this set of choices was itself limited in the ways that critics like Barthes articulated, Turner’s study reminds us of the earnest aspirations and real political stakes behind such Cold War-era projects as The Family of Man exhibition and the innovative solutions that Steichen and his team devised in pursuit of their goals.

THE COLD WAR AS A WAY OF SEEING

As mentioned already, the binary logic produced by the Cold War seemed to imbue every aspect of postwar life and shape the way many people, consciously or not, saw their lives and the world around them. This binary thinking tended to simplify complexity by pitting ideologies against each other in ways that erased specific situations and contingencies of individual lives and relationships. Art and culture became a frequent tool of political messaging, whether intended that way or not by artists and organizers. At the same time, politics became a cudgel to censure artists and cultural producers who did not conform to the political mainstream, whether American or Soviet. Some artists responded to these cultural imperatives by making them the explicit subjects or themes of their work, reminding viewers of the more complicated and ambiguous realities beneath blunt Cold War rhetoric. Gerald Laing’s Souvenir (of the Cuban Missile Crisis Oct 16–28 1962) is an example of an artwork that takes on such a critical function within the Cold War’s intensified political environment.


Gerald Laing (1936–2011) was a British Pop artist and sculptor whose paintings from the early and mid-1960s used a bold and accessible hyper-realist style to depict figures from popular culture, like astronauts, drag racers, and film starlets. Laing was part of a movement in Britain and the U.S. called Pop Art, whose use of popular imagery captured a sense of optimistic enthusiasm and mass appeal that seemed to pervade the U.S. in the postwar decades. Enchanted by America’s postwar prosperity and technological innovations, Pop artists often combined iconic images from mass culture with the printing processes of mass advertising, like screen printing, or applied painted references to mass reproductive technology, like the characteristically bold Ben-Day dots of comic books.

In contrast to his slick Pop paintings, Laing’s Souvenir (of the Cuban Missile Crisis Oct 16–28 1962) was unusual for its explicitly political subject and unmistakably angry tone. It was occasioned, as the title suggests, by the Cuban Missile Crisis, a harrowing thirteen-day standoff between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in the fall of 1962. Painted that same year,
while Laing was still a student at St Martin’s School of Art in London (Laing had served for five years as a soldier prior to entering art school), this work uses an unusual optical illusion to offer a critical stance toward its subject. Using an accordion-style series of wooden slats, Laing created an image that morphs and changes depending on the viewer’s position. Approached from the right, the painting appears to show President John F. Kennedy, Jr., his head tipped back, eyes closed, and mouth open mid-sentence against the red, white, and blue of the American flag. Viewed from the left, the painting presents a portrait of General Secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev, similarly open-mouthed as though speaking, against the red of the Soviet flag and the outlines of a black hammer and sickle. When seen straight on, the two figures merge into a cacophonously pulsating green head that Laing called “a two-mouthed monster.”

Laing did not paint many such jarring political images in the course of his career. In fact, Souvenir was conceived spontaneously in response to current events and exhibited only once, in 1963 at a gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne, Laing’s hometown. It is not known what response Souvenir elicited from visitors to that first exhibition in Laing’s native England. In the summer of 1963, Laing visited America, where he shared a studio with American Pop artist Robert Indiana. After his return to London, Laing painted another politically charged picture, Lincoln Convertible, depicting the moment of President Kennedy’s assassination, an event that had shocked the world in November of that year. According to Laing’s memoirs, his New York dealer and gallerist, Richard Feigen, refused to include Lincoln Convertible in Laing’s first solo show in the U.S., as he felt the subject matter was still too raw and traumatic for American audiences.9 It wouldn’t be until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 that a resurgence of interest in that turbulent period of politics would bring both paintings back to the public’s attention in the 1990s.

Souvenir is a quintessential Cold War image. In its flat, brightly colored style, it evokes both Soviet propaganda posters and American commercial images, both ubiquitous in their respective countries. However, by coloring the two world leaders green and merging them into a hard-to-read, hybrid head, Laing offers a commentary on the polarized politics of the era by avoiding the simple division of good versus evil that each side sought to project onto its enemy. In this depiction, both sides appear menacing and inhuman at a moment when the fate of the world is at stake. Neither the American president nor the Soviet premier offers words of solace or reassurance, and instead both seem to inflame tensions further. We should not, however, read this work as equating the two sides or as saying that one leader is just like the other. Rather, by refusing to resolve the two portraits into one harmonious image, Laing confronts the viewer with the ugly dissonance that the clash of Cold War ideologies produces, leaving it up to the viewer either to choose a side or perhaps to imagine another world altogether.

SECTION II SUMMARY

- The United States emerged as a leading global power after World War II and launched the Marshall Plan, an unprecedented investment in the reconstruction of Western Europe that led to the region’s integration into a U.S.-led capitalist economy.
- Though the Soviet Union had been a wartime ally of the U.S., it broke from the U.S. after the victory over Hitler, challenging American hegemony and creating an Eastern bloc of countries in Central and Eastern Europe as a buffer zone against invasion.
- The Cold War was a confrontation of ideologies—capitalism versus communism—that played out in every area of life, including in the fields of art, culture, and media representations.
- The competition between the Soviet Union and the United States was extensively played out in the symbolic sphere, of which art was a part.
- During the early years of the Cold War, Soviet Socialist Realism and American Abstract Expressionism were styles that became strongly associated with the corresponding political ideologies of both countries.
While the Cold War was a bipolar rivalry between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., it affected the entire world through foreign policy, proxy wars, and most of all, intelligence gathering and media representations that were meant to convince the rest of the world of the correctness of each side’s vision of the future.

Traveling exhibitions, like The Family of Man exhibition, originating at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955 and traveling to thirty-seven different countries, sought to export the American way of life and ideals to the rest of the world.

At the same time, The Family of Man was an attempt to produce a “democratic” viewing experience by offering the public an opportunity to practice individual choice in looking at and understanding the photographs displayed in the exhibition.

The Cold War was a “way of seeing”—it shaped the way people understood ideas and images, most often politicizing them, whether the artist intended to do so or not.

Gerald Laing’s Souvenir (of the Cuban Missile Crisis Oct 16–28 1962) demonstrated the relativity of Cold War vision by offering an image of American and Soviet leaders that changes depending on the viewer’s perspective. Laing’s work avoided portraying the clash between the Cold War rivals as one of good versus evil.

**Important Terms**
- binary logic
- ideology
- Marshall Plan
- Abstract Expressionism
- Socialist Realism
- First, Second, and Third Worlds
- democratic personality
The biggest question facing European artists in 1945 was how to continue to make art after the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust and the Second World War. As philosopher Theodor Adorno famously said in 1949, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”

For German and Italian artists, the atrocities carried out by their governments and fellow citizens in the name of racist and murderous ideologies threw their national cultures and traditions under suspicion. To be a German or Italian artist meant having to carry the burden of an unspeakable recent history. For other countries, like France, a history of collaboration with the Nazis put into question many people with official posts or those who somehow survived the years of occupation.

But even beyond the failures of specific national histories, for European and American artists more broadly, there was a sense that the larger cultural project of the modern era had become tragically and irreparably compromised. This project would broadly be called Modernism, and as we shall see, its cultural meanings would be hotly contested throughout the Cold War. Modernism arose in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century as the continent was undergoing the great societal processes of Enlightenment and Industrialization. As Europe entered the modern age, society directed its hopes and collective efforts toward building the institutions of knowledge, technology, and democracy and throwing off the stifling yokes of monarchy and religious superstition.

In the realm of the fine arts, Modernism reached its maturity in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as artists strove to break free from the traditions of the Academy and began to explore a succession of progressively more radical styles, like Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Cubism. These artistic movements turned away from the requirements of academic painting, which had called for artists to accurately represent the world using a visual language based on classical Greek and Roman art. Instead, Modernist artists employed visual forms and pictorial devices that accentuated representation itself, such as visible brushstrokes, unnatural or clashing colors, fragmented or shattered three-dimensional forms, and flattened pictorial depth. Artworks employing these increasingly abstract styles came to be understood as possessing a form of “autonomy,” as they no longer tried to represent the world around them and instead pointed only to themselves and their own formal qualities.

By the 1950s, Modernism had become the dominant art form in the West and was defined by Western critics in purely aesthetic, non-political terms. But as the Cold War divided the world into opposing sides, Modernist culture became increasingly politicized and contested. Artists in both the East and the West increasingly found it difficult to maintain a position of neutrality, as both abstract and figurative art came to be associated with Cold War ideologies.

**POSTWAR ABSTRACTION**

Prior to the crises of the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War, Modernism had been strongly associated with artistic and political progress. In its gradual purification of visual forms toward...
Alberto Burri’s Composition (1953) is a vivid example of one artist’s response to the dilemma facing European art in the postwar period. This highly evocative work made of burlap sacks, gold, and glue abandoned painting for the humble activity of stitching in order to both respond to the trauma of the previous decade and to reimagine certain Modernist processes and procedures—without simply continuing them—for its own historical moment.

Alberto Burri was born in 1915 in a small town in the Umbria region of Italy and received a degree in medicine from the university in Perugia. He served on the Axis side in the Ethiopian campaign during World War II, first on the frontlines and then as a physician treating wounded soldiers. In 1943, his unit was captured in Tunisia, and Burri was sent to a prisoner of war camp in Hereford, Texas. Disillusioned by the war and estranged by life in the camp, he took up painting, teaching himself to paint in a figurative style and abandoning medicine for the rest of his life. Burri was repatriated to Italy in 1946, quickly immersed himself in the recent history of European art, and began to exhibit his work. When he had been in the prisoner of war camp, Burri had lacked traditional canvas for painting and so had salvaged burlap flour and sugar sacks from the camp’s mess hall, which he stretched and covered with a ground layer for painting. Back in Italy, Burri continued to acquire discarded burlap sacks from the local flour mill, but instead of using them as a neutral ground for painting, he transformed his technique, tearing, collaging, and stitching the fragments together with great dexterity.

Upon seeing Burri’s Sacchi (or sacks, as this genre of Burri’s work is called), critics immediately
compared the tattered burlap, sometimes caked with a buildup of clear glue, to bloodstained bandages used to dress wounds during the war. Others saw in the rough sackcloth the ascetic robes of the Franciscan order founded in the countryside near Burri’s hometown, reading the occasional red underpainting of the holes in the burlap as references to stigmata. The most common association of the Sacchi, however, was with the trauma of the postwar moment. The destroyed and reconstructed surfaces of Burri’s burlap assemblages seemed to many critics to act as a surface that registered the traumatic memories of the war and perhaps portended new horrors associated with the atomic bomb. The fact that Burri had been a medic who would have literally sutured soldiers’ bodies made the connection between the violently disassembled and reassembled sacks and the war-torn body of European civilization even more visceral.

Throughout his life, Burri rejected such metaphorical readings of violence in his Sacchi and his other works, including those made out of torn household linens, torched wood veneer, and melted and charred plastics. He instead insisted on the autonomy of each artwork, locating its significance in the way it treated form, space, and materials. For Burri, it is the work itself that is important, rather than any social or psychological meanings that could be read into the artwork or its methods.

The art historian Jaimey Hamilton has interpreted Burri’s negation of symbolic meaning as more complicated than a simple rejection of over-inquisitive critics set on connecting the works to the artist’s biography. Quoting Burri’s 1955 statement “Words Are No Help,” Hamilton demonstrates the contradiction in the way Burri’s material processes act out the wounds of war as he simultaneously refuses to name them in language. In Burri’s words:

> Words are no help to me when I try to speak about my painting. It is an irreducible presence that refuses to be converted into any other form of expression. . . . My painting is a reality which is part of myself, a reality which I cannot reveal in words. . . . I can only say this: painting for me is a freedom attained, constantly consolidated, vigilantly guarded so as to draw from it the power to paint more.12

By framing his Sacchi as paintings that grapple with material form, Burri situated himself within a larger international movement called Art Informel. Put forward by the French critic Michel Tapié, Art Informel called for a renewal of the avant-garde through an active wrestling with the complicated, messy experiences of the modern world. Tapié and his contemporaries drew on the Existentialism of French philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who thought that the modern world produces situations that cause people to experience feelings of grief, anxiety, and trauma, and believed that artists should communicate their internal experience of these feelings in order to inspire people to take individual responsibility rather than remain passive bystanders.

Informel works like Burri’s Sacchi rejected the bold rhetoric of Modernist movements, like Italian Futurism.
and Russian Constructivism, whose declarations of inexorable progress in the construction of a new world now seemed to echo the forces that had helped drive the world to war. In opposition to the thrusting abstract forms of the pre-war avant-gardes, Burri embraced the formless, seemingly irrational style of expression where feeling and the body are reduced to pure matter. Between 1949 and 1960, Burri made hundreds of Sacchi, which excavated the open wounds of the recent past. Through the symbolic work of grappling with and ultimately suturing the material back into a finished work, however violent or ungainly the final product, Burri returned meaning to the artistic process and to Modernist painting. By offering painting as a site of struggle and ultimate triumph, Burri and his fellow Informel artists reasserted their moral authority and status as centered, modern subjects in the face of modernism’s failures.\(^{13}\)

In the context of the Cold War, Burri’s Sacchi can be read through one other important lens: economic and cultural influence over postwar Europe. Delicately brushed onto the surface of the rough burlap sacks is a small square of precious gold leaf. The contrast of values between burlap and gold signals a concern with the economic dimension of the postwar moment, echoing the contrast between a ruined Europe and the influx of American consumer goods and capital via the Marshall Plan.\(^ {14}\) However, Burri turns these values on their heads, asking the viewer to question what is poor and what is truly valuable. If the burlap sacks—former containers for American goods—stand in for American aid, then Burri’s application of gold alludes to the transfiguration of this base material, almost alchemically, into something loftier, like the golden altarpieces of the Italian Renaissance. Many Europeans feared that the Marshall Plan would enable an outsized American influence on their continent, promoting mindless consumerism among the population. Burri’s act of transfiguration with the gold leaf could be read as a principled, if sly stand against American cultural and economic hegemony, hinting at a deeper cultural wealth hidden or ready to be transformed among the rubble.

**SELECTED WORK: THE ARTIST IN 1950, HANS NAMUTH, 1950**

**Abstract Expressionism**

As European artists struggled to find a legitimate way forward in the postwar years, seeking to rescue Modernism from the morass of war and destruction, American artists, too, were looking for a new modern idiom. This idiom came in the form of Abstract Expressionism, a movement that developed in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s, though it was given the label of “Abstract Expressionism” only later and consisted of about a dozen artists whose work is hard to boil down to one particular style. What many of the Abstract Expressionist artists did have in common was a turning inward to explore the artist’s psychological states and to explore the process of artmaking itself.

Unlike European Art Informel, Abstract Expressionism frequently produced works that continued the formal experiments of prewar European avant-garde artists like Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse, but in highly individualistic and original ways, like Mark Rothko’s subtly floating fields of color or Jackson Pollock’s complex webs of dripped paint. It was this combination of abstract painterly language and
the mythology surrounding the Abstract Expressionists that came to be seen as quintessentially American and modern at the height of America’s postwar cultural power.

**Jackson Pollock and Action Painting**

The image of Jackson Pollock painting, taken by the photographer Hans Namuth during the summer of 1950, subtly demonstrates—and itself contributed to—the mythology surrounding the figure of Pollock, the archetypal American artist of the postwar era. Poised over the large unprimed canvas, Pollock is pictured in the act of painting. If the expected image of a painter is a man in a smock standing before an easel contemplating his composition, then Pollock’s painting process is pictured as much more direct, vigorous, and unfussy. In some of the more than five hundred photographs Namuth took of him that summer, Pollock is shown smoking a cigarette and holding a can of enamel paint. In others, he steps into the canvas, flinging the paint from his brush, his movements too swift for the film’s slow exposure. The popular image of Pollock—nicknamed “Jack the Dripper” by the press—as brooding, aggressive, and quiet, and the Abstract Expressionists as “The Wild Ones” or “The Irascibles” echoed ideas about virile masculinity as the source of artistic creativity. Pollock died tragically in 1956 as a result of a car accident while driving drunk, branding him as a tormented, self-destructive artistic genius. In Namuth’s photographs, however, Pollock is eternally frozen in the seemingly effortless dance of creation above the canvas.

**The Critical Reception of Abstract Expressionism**

In the critical reception of Abstract Expressionism, after an initial period of indifference and misunderstanding, Pollock and his contemporaries came to be hailed as the culmination of Modernist painting in America. The critic most responsible for this was Clement Greenberg, whose essay “‘American-Type’ Painting” (1955) attempted to place Abstract Expressionism in a longer history of Modernist art. According to Greenberg, the most advanced art is that which grapples with “society’s capacity for high art ... by testing the limits of the inherited forms and genres, and of the medium itself.” The Impressionists had done this in the late-nineteenth century when they flattened the picture plane in an attempt to capture the impression of living in the modern moment. The Cubists had done it in the first decades of the twentieth century by shattering...
the surface of their pictures. For Greenberg, the particular formal qualities of Abstract Expressionist painting—its shallow depth, all-over quality, and individualistic calligraphic marks—positioned Abstract Expressionism within the history of Modernism’s progressive purification of the medium of painting itself.

In his essay “Modernist Painting” (1961), Greenberg described Modernism as “the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” What he meant by this was that the real subject of painting in the modern era was painting itself, its properties and rules as a medium, and not any content or narrative conveyed by its illusionistic capacities. For painting, this meant color, the working of paint on a flat surface, and the delineation of flatness within the picture. This demonstrated a form of autonomy—painting attempting to be as “itself,” and no other medium, as possible.

“Modernist Painting” was first delivered as a lecture in 1960 on Voice of America, an American government-funded radio station that broadcast internationally during the Cold War, including into the Soviet Union in order to counter Soviet propaganda directed at Soviet citizens. While the broadcast is not likely to have had much effect on artists behind the Iron Curtain, it can be seen as part of the wider cultural politics of the era. From the Western European perspective, the “triumph” of American painting in the postwar era was part and parcel of an American ascendancy, in which the U.S. moved to the center of Western political and economic power, and Abstract Expressionist paintings alongside American products like Hollywood films, Coca Cola, and Ford automobiles came to stand as readymade symbols of modernity.

Views of Abstract Expressionism in the Soviet Bloc
On the other side of the Iron Curtain, in the Soviet Union and the Eastern satellite countries, Abstract Expressionism and abstract painting in general came to have even more politicized meanings as the Cold War progressed. Through traveling exhibitions put on by cultural institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and covertly funded by the CIA, Abstract Expressionism was used to promote a certain vision of freedom, bolstered by the kinds of mythologies about directness, virility, and rugged American individualism that we see in the Namuth photo. As art historian Serge Guilbaut explained it, to audiences abroad, Abstract Expressionism symbolized “the freedom to create controversial works of art, the freedom symbolized by action painting, by the unbridled expressionism of artists completely without fetters,” in
other words, the existential freedom of creation.22

Abstract Expressionism and American Politics and Culture
Reading Abstract Expressionism within a Cold War context is tricky because how the artists themselves felt about their political moment often did not align with how their art was put to use by cultural authorities. The period of Abstract Expressionism’s development and blossoming (1945 through around 1960) coincided with a vast move to the right in American politics and culture under Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. It was a period of heightened alarm over the perceived threat of Communism; McCarthyism and the Red Scare brought with them surveillance and deep conformity in many areas of life and culture. While Abstract Expressionism itself was not overtly partisan, many of the artists had come of age in the politically progressive 1930s and felt worn out by and at odds with the establishment. Some despised what they considered to be America’s “commercial philistinism” and instead identified with the “working man” and even spoke out against America’s use of atomic weapons.23

Thus, Abstract Expressionism occupied a paradoxical position in postwar American culture. On the one hand, it was held out as a beacon of liberal American culture and a bulwark against the threat of Communism abroad. At the same time, as an avant-garde movement, it came under attack from conservatives at home who distrusted a number of the artists’ earlier associations with the New Deal and 1930s leftism and famously proclaimed that “modern art equals communism.”24 In this light, the Abstract Expressionists’ retreat from the art of propaganda and illustration in which they were trained in the 1930s and immersion in the “autonomous” process of Modernist artmaking could be read as strategically apolitical, a way of sidestepping the explicitly politicized tenor of the times. Ironically, this rejection of their previous political commitments and their embrace of artistic autonomy were targeted by critics in the Soviet Union as a debased lack of social engagement that was politically suspect and an expression of a bourgeois-decadent society.25

SOCIALIST REALISM
While European and American artists strove to renew Modernism in the postwar period through new idioms and artistic identities, the Soviet Union pursued a different path, consistent with its political ideology of Marxism-Leninism. This had not always the case. Before the Revolution of 1917, Russia had contributed a great deal to Modernist art, both in delivering some of the earliest support for European Modernist art through its patrons and in producing some of the most striking examples of Modernist painting, including arguably the most radical painting of all time, Kazimir Malevich’s Black Square (1915).

After the Russian Revolution, Soviet art increasingly put itself in the service of the state. At first, artists continued to explore innovative and radical forms to imagine the new society of workers, drawing on the visual language of abstraction in order to do so. However, by 1934, such radical experimentation was no longer tolerated by the state. In a sweeping reorganization of Russia’s artistic life, all official art groups were dissolved, and one single Union of Soviet Artists was proposed. In the meantime, a special committee was organized to handle artistic affairs. This reorganization made the state the sole source
of commissions and the means necessary to fulfill them. Artists who did not join the union were unable to obtain artistic materials or studio space and were barred from exhibiting in state-sponsored exhibitions.

In 1934, the Union of Soviet Writers held its first congress in Moscow, bringing together nearly six hundred delegates from the Soviet Union and many other countries. In speeches by the Communist party leaders, Socialist Realism was pronounced the only acceptable artistic style for a socialist society, and a number of speeches called to abolish “formalism,” or art that was not based on realist principles and was not socially engaged.26

**SELECTED WORK: THE DAWN OF OUR FATHERLAND, FYODOR SHURPIN, 1949**

Fyodor Shurpin’s *The Dawn of our Fatherland* (1949) is a classic example of Soviet Socialist Realism in that it uses a figurative style to convey a clear and uplifting message about a real event: the rebirth of the Soviet Union after the Second World War. In his painting, Shurpin combines two genres, portrait and landscape. The portrait is of Joseph Stalin, who succeeded Lenin as the leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953. The landscape behind Stalin, however, is not a specific location, but rather the idea of the productive landscape that the Soviet Union sought to create during the period of Stalin’s rule and would continue to cultivate after the war. Together, the portrait and landscape look forward to a bright and productive future characterized by modernizing industrialization and the transformation of every aspect of Soviet society on a massive scale.

Firstly, this is indicated by the title that Shurpin has given his painting. A new morning is dawning on the land, as indicated by the rosy pink of the horizon and long shadows cast across Stalin’s figure and by the tractors in the field. Already, at this early hour, the farm and factory workers have started their day. No workers are actually present in the work; instead, they are metonymically referenced through the spaces and means of their labor: the field and the factory, the rural and the urban, which represented the two main sites of proletarian identity. The wide tractors that traverse the field with ease are modern equipment that, during the period of Stalinization, came to replace the beasts of burden, such as horses and cows, that had previously plowed the fields. Further, this broad agricultural plot that extends beyond the edges of the frame signifies the great expanse of the land that was combined under the collectivization that Stalin had
Collectivization was the process of seizing smaller plots of land that were the property of individual families and transferring the rights of the land to the state. These larger plots of land would then be worked collectively. Shurpin’s patriotic title refers to “our Fatherland,” suggesting that this land is not the property of any individual, but instead is collective property that belongs to all of the citizens of the Soviet Union. The factories in the distance at both the left and right edges of the canvas similarly demonstrate productivity on a mass scale. They are billowing smoke, a sign of both productivity and technological advancement.

In addition to producing material goods and equipment, factories symbolized the project of bringing electricity to the entire country. This message is made clear by the electrical towers that emerge from the vanishing point, which is behind Stalin at the center of the canvas, and extend beyond the right edge of the canvas, following Stalin’s gaze. Electricity was delivered not only to those who lived in cities, but also to former peasants who lived in remote areas and supposedly were to have been lifted out of poverty by the process of modernization.

Secondly, an idealized Stalin looks forward to a bright new day. This representation of Stalin is typical of heroic portraiture of ideological and revolutionary leaders like Karl Marx and Lenin that appeared in paintings, photographs, and statues across the Soviet Union. In Shurpin’s painting, Stalin appears monumental, as he rises well above the horizon line and occupies nearly a quarter of the painting’s surface area. Stalin had successfully led the Red Army in its victory over the Nazis, and here he returns to oversee the Soviet Union’s continued progress into the future. Painted for Stalin’s seventieth birthday, the painting was widely praised by critics and the public and was copied and reproduced extensively in books, postcards, and posters. It was one of the most recognizable images of the Soviet leader in the postwar period, and it earned Shurpin the prestigious Stalin Prize in the area of painting in 1949.

What is not visible in the picture are the casualties of Stalin’s collectivization: the millions of prosperous peasants executed under the dekulakization campaign and the five to seven million others who died as a result of famine. Although it was based on the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian Realism, which had set out to capture the realities of social life in Russia, critique injustices, and bring art to the people, Socialist Realism was more future-oriented, intended to picture the ideal socialist society that was in the process of being built.

Soviet Communist Party leader Andrei Zhdanov, speaking at the Union of Soviet Writers’ 1934 congress, described Socialist Realism as “reality in its revolutionary development” and a form of “revolutionary romanticism.” This is evident in the many pictorial strategies Shurpin marshaled to awaken in his viewer a sense of optimism about the future: from the balanced composition drawing the eye up and out of the canvas, to the romantic light and colors, to the subtle signs of industrial production seemingly sprouting from the very soil. After three decades of upheaval, including the Russian Revolution, Civil War, rapid
industrialization, and the Second World War, the sentiment of sacrifice finally bearing fruit, as made visible in Shurpin’s painting, was a rhetorically effective one. Soviet society was ready for stability and a bright future after all it had suffered.

As the Cold War intensified, the symbolic struggle between East and West, Socialist Realism and Modernism also intensified. While Abstract Expressionism was positioned as apolitical “pure” art, politics continued to permeate American society, and Communism was proclaimed to be a national threat in the U.S. Each side portrayed the other as politically dangerous and saw the other’s art as a form of propaganda calculated to delude its citizenry with false ideas. Soviet critics denounced Western Modernist art, like Pollock’s drip paintings, as “formalism,” lacking in humanity and uplifting purpose and certain to lead to its viewers’ debasement and dehumanization.

In the U.S., an equally vicious attack on Socialist Realism equated the realist style with political propaganda and its viewers with being either programmed automatons or tragic victims. While there was a grain of truth in both arguments, the blunt ways in which they were deployed left no room for an understanding of historical nuances or a consideration of the agency of individual artists working in each system. Paradoxically, these attacks had repercussions in their own countries. In the West, artists working in realist styles were seen as outmoded and were all but barred from the advanced art world, while Soviet artists who wanted to paint outside of Socialist Realist conventions had to go underground, creating art in secret and exhibiting their works to small groups of friends in their apartments. Artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain finally found a wider public in the 1980s, when petrified Cold War rhetoric began to be challenged, and the harsh political divisions between East and West finally began to break down.

INTERNATIONAL STYLES
The strict binary between Soviet Socialist Realism and Western Modernism was more complicated than the Cold War ideologues would have viewers believe. This binary starts to blur even further when we look to artists outside of the U.S. and the Soviet Union. As we shall see, artists beyond these two ideological poles adopted certain aspects from both sides, while eschewing others, and repurposed them for their own specific cultural needs.

SELECTED WORK: UNTITLED, KAZUO SHIRAGA, 1957

Abstract Expressionism in Japan
For Japan, which was recovering from the devastation of World War II and the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Abstract Expressionism served as a way for one group of artists to participate in a global avant-garde while engaging with native traditions to produce a new art for their own time. The Gutai Art Association (Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai) was founded in 1954 by seventeen artists living in Osaka. These artists looked to Paris and New York for the latest art and were particularly interested in Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel. Their reception of these Western movements was not straightforward; their understanding of the abstract paintings they encountered in magazines and later in traveling exhibitions was not always well informed, as the Gutai artists themselves noted in their manifesto of 1956. However, their ultimate goal was to enter into a conversation with the new art and to “advance into the unknown world.” Fittingly, their work often explored the themes of destruction, struggle, and rebirth.

Abstract Expressionist works first appeared in Japan in early 1951, when they were exhibited at the Third Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in Tokyo. This show introduced the Japanese public to recent works by Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Mark Rothko, and Theodoros Stamos, among others. While American critics like Clement Greenberg had emphasized the purely optical qualities of Pollock’s work,
the leading Gutai figure, Yoshihara Jirō, praised the exhibition for its deeply material qualities and kinesthetic effects on the viewer. In a review for the art magazine *Kansai Bijutsu*, he wrote of Pollock’s canvases:

*An undefined beauty, something attractive is expressed powerfully in them; this something has an impact not so much on the purely visual perception, but rather directly on ourselves. As Jackson Pollock proves, drops of paint are more beautiful than that which they present... You would say that painting has purified itself: the elements of painting, shapes, lines, colors, had come apart to reunite and undergo rebirth in abstract painting.*

Yoshihara and his contemporaries also saw the first publications of Hans Namuth’s iconic photographs of Pollock in *Art News* and in *Art d’Aujourd’hui*, as well as Namuth’s film of Pollock painting. In response, Yoshihara and his contemporaries’ work became more abstract, participating in what they considered to be a transnational, rather than a specifically American, avant-garde movement.

**Kazuo Shiraga**

Kazuo Shiraga was born in 1924 in Amagasaki City and studied traditional Japanese painting and later Western oil painting. He experimented with many forms of action painting using diverse implements but, starting in the mid-1950s, established his signature technique of painting with the soles of his feet, a gesture that builds on and extends the energetic painting technique pictured in Namuth’s photos of Jackson Pollock. In these physically demanding performances, of which *Untitled* (1957) is an example, Shiraga would lay paper or canvas on the floor of his studio and walk, slide, or spin his feet in mounds of oil paint or use a suspended rope to swing himself over the horizontal surface, dragging the paint around in broad gestures. The result was an explosion of red and yellow stains overlaid by black smudges radiating from the center of the composition in all directions and punctuated with an occasionally recognizable hand or footprint. Such works were as much performances as they were two-dimensional artworks, a way of both grappling with matter and also presenting a finished product. This
was even more evident in a slightly earlier work, *Challenging Mud* (October 1955), where Shiraga had a large pile of mud delivered to the courtyard of a Tokyo exhibition hall and threw himself into the mud, kneading and struggling with it, using his entire body, as photographers and a cameraman recorded the event.

Both Shiraga’s untitled foot paintings and his performance with mud participate in the discourse of Western avant-garde art, such as Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel. By breaching the edges of the canvas to embrace performance, Shiraga’s works made radical and original statements in their time and could be placed alongside international developments in *performance art* of the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as *Happenings* and *Fluxus*. At the same time, Shiraga’s *Untitled* clearly references traditional Japanese cultural forms, such as calligraphy, martial arts, and Sumo wrestling, thus complicating a singular reading of Shiraga’s work as derivative of Western developments. Gutai works attempted to participate in a dialogue with Modernism, building on the innovations of Western artists while at the same time contributing novel insights from Japanese traditions.

When Shiraga’s work was first introduced to the U.S. as part of an exhibition of Gutai art at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in September 1958, critics were unable to recognize this larger set of meanings and aspirations and dismissed it as merely derivative of American action painting. Whereas in Japan critics saw Abstract Expressionism as an international phenomenon, praising it for its “liberty” and “vivacity of spirit,” a kind of Cold War distortion of vision led American critics to misperceive the Gutai artists’ contributions and miss out on a truly international dialogue around abstraction, which was once again imbued with narrowly national characteristics.30

**SELECTED WORK: DER WURSTESSER (THE SAUSAGE EATER), SIGMAR POLKE, 1963**

As we have seen from numerous examples in this section, artists frequently found themselves unintentionally on one side or the other of the Cold War binary between Modernism and Socialist Realism and thus had to negotiate the stereotypes imposed on their art by these pervasive ideologies. When artists tried to bypass these categories, they either had to make and show their work in private, giving up the privilege of addressing a broader public audience (which was the case for underground Soviet artists), or
risk being grossly misunderstood by critics in the international art world (in the case of the works of the Gutai artists). One artist whose work challenged this calcified way of thinking through humor and irony, as well as an inventive play with ideas and themes, was the German painter Sigmar Polke. Polke’s *The Sausage Eater* (1963) blurs the boundary between abstraction and *figuration*, high art and commercial kitsch, as well as Modernist seriousness and the authorless anonymity of popular culture to propose a way to move beyond Cold War binaries.

**Postwar Germany**

Germany’s cultural situation after the war was a microcosm of the Cold War division between East and West. After the war, Berlin and Germany were divided into four zones: American, British, French, and Soviet. In 1949, the three Western zones were consolidated into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany), while the Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany). The art of West and East Germany largely followed the binary between Modernist abstraction and Socialist Realist figuration; art in the West was supported by Marshall Plan cultural programs, and art in the East was supported by new socialist state institutions funded by the U.S.S.R.

Sigmar Polke was born in 1941 in Oels, in the Silesian borderlands between Germany and Poland. His hometown had been significantly damaged by the Red Army in 1945. It was ceded to Poland in that same year, and Polke’s family fled to Thuringia, which became part of East Germany. Eight years later, the Polkes emigrated to West Berlin and eventually settled in Düsseldorf, in West Germany. Polke initially apprenticed as a glass painter and then between 1961 and 1967 studied at the prestigious Düsseldorf Art Academy.

**Polke and Capitalist Realism**

In 1963, fellow students Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg (who later changed his name and became the gallerist Konrad Fischer) founded a movement called *Capitalist Realism*, with which Polke would also come to be associated. In an iconic performance titled *Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, staged on October 11, 1963, at the Berges furniture store in Düsseldorf, Richter and Lueg invited audience members into an “average living room” in which the two artists lounged on furniture placed on pedestals. They then took the viewers on a tour of the store “on display without alterations,” except for a soundtrack of advertising slogans and four paintings by each of the artists installed amid the goods.31

*Living with Pop* was a provocation that at once critiqued East German Socialist Realism and art made under capitalism. Düsseldorf and its art scene were quickly becoming associated with the West German “economic miracle” of the 1950s and early 1960s, a period of rapid reconstruction and development. By absurdly inserting themselves into the furniture showroom as though it were their own living room, Richter and Lueg parodied the increasing consumerism of German and West European society. Moreover, this gesture challenged the values of artistic creativity, originality, and subjectivity by which Modernist art set itself apart from the worlds of commerce and popular culture.

Richter, like Polke, had moved to Düsseldorf from East Germany, where he had worked as a painter of state-sponsored murals, and so he was therefore well familiar with the codes of Socialist Realist...
representation. In giving their new movement the odd name “Capitalist Realism,” Polke, Richter, and their colleagues meant to draw an analogy between the socialist and capitalist representational systems: if Socialist Realist paintings conjured exaggerated dreamworlds of a bright socialist future, then Western advertising, too, appealed to people’s consumerist desires that rarely lined up with reality.

**Polke’s The Sausage Eater (1963)**

With his tongue-in-cheek *The Sausage Eater* (1963), Polke makes a similar critical move via what must have seemed to an ordinary German viewer at the time to be a bewilderingly strange painting. At first glance, *The Sausage Eater* is a banal picture of an absurdly long chain of sausage links coiling and twisting around the blank off-white space of the canvas and eventually finding its way into the grasping hand and open mouth of an anonymous smiling head in profile. In its direct representation of the sausage, the picture resembles a rather simple magazine advertisement, albeit lacking a brand name and laudatory ad copy.

In a January 1963 article in *Art International* with which Polke and his fellow artists were familiar, the critic Barbara Rose expounded on the return of everyday imagery to high art:

> *The result is what the detractors of abstract painting have clamored for: the image has returned to painting, but in a form they never imagined. It has come back via the TV, magazines, highway billboards, supermarkets and comic books, and not by way of salon painting or socialist realism.*

As though responding to the East German ideologues who railed against what they saw as the spiritually empty abstractions of Western modernism, Polke delivered a profane, scatological realism that parodied the official idea that art should address itself to the masses. As the Swiss artist Peter Fischli (who was much influenced by Polke) has noted, Polke’s art is “always about the world of the petit bourgeois—their aesthetic, their longings, and how they use these consumer items, which are always a little bit on the poor side.” The sausage eater in Polke’s picture is hardly a proletarian hero; he is rather a Homer Simpson-like buffoon.

If *The Sausage Eater* mercilessly mocks the realist aspirations of socialist art, neither does it spare the ideological underpinnings of Western Modernism’s drive toward purity. If advanced painting, according to Modernist critic Clement Greenberg, progressively shed narrative content and emphasized the specific properties...
of the painting itself, then the exaggerated way in which Polke has carefully painted the sausage links to trace the surface and edges of the canvas, but never overlap or intersect, can be read as mimicking Modernist purity. Yet to immerse oneself in the optical experience of this work would be absurd, given its subject; there is more than an element of “the emperor’s new clothes” to Polke’s strategy. Indeed, the very idea of authorship is destabilized. Already in Living with Pop, Richter and Lueg undermined the personality of the artist as the source of artistic inspiration and unique genius. Polke’s comic-like canvas likewise undermines the idea of the artist’s touch as the source of a unique individual style that ensures the work’s authenticity. If anything, The Sausage Eater could have been painted by an ordinary sign painter, and in fact Polke did occasionally task his friends with painting his works for him.

For Polke, as for his fellow Capitalist Realists seeking to find a valid artistic path in Cold War Germany, humor served as a form of understated rebellion, a way to sidestep the politics imposed on them from both East and West. In 1962, Gerhard Richter decided that he would “think and act without the aid of an ideology; I have nothing to help me, no idea I serve, . . . no belief that shows me the way, no image of the future, no construction that lends a higher meaning to things. I acknowledge only what is, and accordingly consider any description or portrayal of things we do not know to be pointless.”34 As the 1960s progressed, however, Richter’s perspective that it was possible to create art uninformed by ideology would come to be untenable, as art that examined the inescapable influence of the economy and social pressures came to the fore.

**SECTION III SUMMARY**

- European artists emerging from World War II faced the question of how to continue to make art after the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust and the Second World War. The project of Modernism—a belief in society’s gradual improvement through reason, technology, and democracy—had seemingly been discredited.

- Inspired by the philosophy of Existentialism, European artists associated with the Art Informel movement embraced nontraditional materials and techniques and an abstract style to convey the destruction and trauma of the world and inspire in the viewer a sense of individual responsibility.

- The Italian artist Alberto Burri made compositions of torn and sutured burlap sacks to try to reimagine painting that would feel meaningful in the postwar era. While Burri rejected critics’ attempts to read his works as metaphors for bandages or injured bodies, his insistence on grappling with the physical materials of burlap and glue and his refusal to reduce this activity to words could be seen as a renewal of painting’s motivation and the artist’s authority.

- In the context of the Cold War and America’s growing cultural and economic hegemony in Western Europe, Burri’s use of gold leaf could be read as an attempt to transfigure the base material of the sacks (which had carried American grain) into something more lofty, like
the golden altarpieces of the Italian Renaissance.

- Abstract Expressionism emerged in America in the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s as an abstract style that explored artists’ internal states and the process of artmaking itself. The critic Clement Greenberg argued that Abstract Expressionism was the heir of European Modernism since it continued Modernism’s drive toward greater purity.

- In the context of the increasing conservatism of America in the 1940s and 1950s, many Abstract Expressionist artists retreated from their more explicitly political social realist canvases of the 1930s, turning to a more ambiguous idiom of abstraction.

- Whether the artists themselves liked it or not, Abstract Expressionism became associated with an American ideology of freedom and individualism, as embodied in Hans Namuth’s photographs of Jackson Pollock dripping paint on a canvas placed on the floor of his studio.

- Soviet art, meanwhile, abandoned Modernist abstraction and pursued a new style of Socialist Realism, which was meant to help picture the bright future of socialist society.

- In *The Dawn of our Fatherland*, Soviet painter Fyodor Shurpin delivers an uplifting message about the rebirth of the Soviet Union under the leadership of Joseph Stalin. The easily legible painting was widely reproduced and meant to reach the greatest number of citizens, rather than a rarefied art public.

- As the Cold War progressed, Soviet Socialist Realism and Western Modernism came to be seen as rival tendencies and weapons of ideological warfare. American anticommunist ideologues denounced Socialist Realism as mindless propaganda and sent exhibits of Western abstract art behind the Iron Curtain to try to show Soviet citizens the freedom of life in the West. Conversely, Soviet critics railed against Western abstraction as the product of a soulless and corrupt bourgeois society that failed to consider the importance of collective struggle and instead only cared about the individual.

- Japanese Gutai artists created radical works, like Kazuo Shiraga’s painting performances with his feet, that attempted to engage in a dialogue with Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings while also referencing their own native traditions. A form of Cold War distortion of vision prevented a real cultural exchange when American critics were unable to see beyond their own national context and dismissed Shiraga’s highly original works as merely derivative.

- In Germany, a movement called Capitalist Realism similarly tried to transcend the Socialist Realism/Western Modernism binary by using humor and irony to undermine both approaches. A performance called *Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism* offered viewers a tour of a furniture store in which the artists and their works were situated as though on display, undermining the significance of artistic authorship and criticizing Germany’s increasingly commercialized culture.

- Sigmar Polke’s *Der Wurstesser (The Sausage Eater)* undercut the aspirations of Socialist Realism and the seriousness of Western Modernism by offering the viewer an absurd image that resembled a debased advertisement that mimicked Modernist abstraction’s fetishization of the painting surface.

**Important Terms**

- Modernism
- avant-garde
- autonomy
- trauma
- Art Informel
- Existentialism
- Marshall Plan (1948–51)
- Abstract Expressionism
- Socialist Realism
- formalism
- abstraction
- figuration
- Gutai
- Capitalist Realism
- ideology
As discussed in the previous sections, twentieth-century economic gains had turned America into a consumer society on a broad scale, and Europe in the postwar period was poised to receive an influx of American consumer goods and mass media with the help of Marshall Plan aid. Artists like Sigmar Polke recognized the flood of capitalist consumer goods and media into a weakened Europe as a form of cultural imperialism and employed an ironic approach, depicting consumer goods in a manner that made them seem ridiculous and undercut their magical status as the objects of consumer desire.

In this section of the resource guide, we will explore this idea further by looking at three art movements from around the world—Pop Art, Sots Art, and Conceptual Art—that turned their attention to the ways that consumerism and its underlying social and political ideologies shaped life in the modern world. While some artists were fascinated with this dynamic and wanted merely to examine it, other artists adopted more critical stances with regard to their local visual and media environments and political situations.

## POP ART

### SELECTED WORK: IT’S A PSYCHOLOGICAL FACT PLEASURE HELPS YOUR DISPOSITION, SIR EDUARDO PAOLOZZI, 1948

Eduardo Paolozzi was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, to Italian immigrant parents who ran an ice cream parlor. After Italy declared war on the United Kingdom in 1940, the Paolozzi family was interned as enemy aliens. In 1944, Paolozzi enrolled as a student at the Slade School of Fine Art, where he met Nigel Henderson and William Turnbull, future members—along with Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, and others—of the Independent Group. In 1947, Paolozzi went to Paris, where he became acquainted with modern European art, including Cubist and Surrealist collage, and acquired from American GIs illustrated magazines like Life, which had not been available in postwar Britain under rationing. These formative influences shaped Paolozzi’s conception of what kinds of images and ideas could be the proper subjects of art.

In 1952, Paolozzi and a loosely affiliated group of artists, critics, and architects formed what came to be
known as the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, as an alternative to the institute’s official lecture series, and they continued to hold informal meetings there until 1955. Members of the Independent Group came from a younger generation and rejected the sterile and unquestioning approach of established British critics like Herbert Read, whose aesthetic theories emphasized the timelessness and eternal qualities of beauty.35

Although they worked in different disciplines and media, from photography and photomontage to architecture and art criticism, the artists of the Independent Group all shared an interest in exploring the function of vernacular (ordinary, everyday) and popular culture within the contemporary urban environment. Their goal was to investigate “man’s changing state” in a society impacted by the advent of new technologies, like television and American mass media.36 Paolozzi and other group members believed that art should not be reserved for contemplating ideal forms or purely optical sensations (as was the position of Modernist critics like Clement Greenberg), but should instead reflect on the immediate environment.

Thus, at the first meeting of the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in April 1952, Paolozzi used a projector called an epidiascope to project a series of cut-out advertisements, magazine covers, car engine diagrams, medical photographs, and other everyday imagery without commentary in a gallery setting. This provocative gesture was shocking to many, especially the more conservative critics at the time, and it is sometimes credited as being the birth of Pop Art, which came to prominence in the 1960s.

Paolozzi had already been experimenting with popular imagery in his collage series Bunk, made between 1941 and 1952. The collage It’s a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps your Disposition (1948) from this series presents the viewer with two attractive housewives engaged in cleaning two gleaming, modern domestic interiors: a kitchen and a nursery. Both women smile eagerly, one pushing a brand-new Hoover vacuum cleaner and holding a caddy containing its many useful attachments, while the other seems to pause in thought while pushing a broom across the floor. Both environments are sparkling clean and overflow with the latest in consumer goods: home appliances, including a dishwasher, refrigerator, and stove, and an impressive array of spoons, ladles, cookware, and decorative dishes outfit the kitchen while an assortment of colorful toys are scattered around the nursery among a cheery children’s bedroom set.

However, not everything about these rooms is as abundant as it seems. Both rooms have windows overlooking leafy trees and grass. With no sense of a world beyond the bourgeois domestic interiors, the women seem to be isolated, as though in a well-appointed cage. The two rooms where they cook to nourish their families and raise their children are stacked one on top of the other, forming a whole that might represent a woman’s place in the postwar nuclear family as wife and mother. In this light, the absence of other figures seems peculiar. The women’s roles are defined not in relation to family members,
but to the world of inert objects. Paolozzi was particularly interested in the relationship between humans and machines, which were increasingly populating people’s everyday lives in the postwar period. The housewives’ isolation is underscored by the rough way that Paolozzi has collaged the two female figures in their interiors: a visible white edge reveals the cut-outs’ original source in another advertisement.

Paolozzi’s collage can therefore be seen as a kind of investigation of the condition of the modern housewife, or more precisely, the idea of the modern housewife as presented in popular culture. An analogous shift of attention to everyday life had also been taking place in social research. Starting in 1937, the Mass-Observation movement had begun sending an army of untrained volunteers to interview British people about their everyday lives and record people’s conversations and behaviors in different kinds of social spaces. By the 1950s, Mass-Observation had become a commercial market research organization, further cementing the connection between people’s everyday attitudes and experiences and marketing.

The title of Paolozzi’s collage, *It’s a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps Your Disposition*, hints at the idea that the social sciences had not quite managed to penetrate the potential contradictions at the heart of modern life, where more consumer goods and a higher standard of living were not necessarily providing for happier, more fulfilled individuals and family lives.

**UNOFFICIAL, UNDERGROUND, OR NONCONFORMIST ART IN THE U.S.S.R.**

Behind the Iron Curtain in the Soviet Union, art’s ability to evaluate and criticize society was both more natural and more precarious. The reason for this was that all art was effectively split into two camps: official Socialist Realism and underground or unofficial art, which existed in private spaces and behind closed doors. As discussed in the previous section, Soviet Socialist Realism was a didactic form of realist art that sought to depict the bright socialist utopia of the future. It followed a set of codified artistic rules and had common artistic conventions regarding subject matter. Thus, heroes of the communist revolution and socialist society—such as farm and factory workers, pilots, and geologists—were depicted as healthy, hardworking citizens fulfilling their duties to society. Images of masses of people celebrating socialist holidays, like the anniversary of the October Revolution, or listening to the Soviet leader appeared and reappeared in Socialist Realist paintings, posters, prints, school books, and on the packaging of socialist consumer goods. In fact, the entire visual field of Soviet life, from the capital of Moscow to the provinces of each of its fifteen republics and its satellites in Eastern Europe, was filled with Socialist Realist imagery, posters, and slogans encouraging and persuading viewers to fulfill their duties as proper socialist subjects.

It is in this context that artists who did not wish to create Socialist Realist art emerged as unofficial, underground, or nonconformist artists, working independently of the artists’ union and the state. Many of these artists did not set out to criticize the government; they simply wanted to make art that explored different themes and issues, such as religion and spirituality, existential themes, or different forms of abstraction, all of which were explicitly forbidden. Many of these artists were employed as artists, but in other, less politically charged areas of art, like book...
illustration or graphic design, and took advantage of the studio space, salary, and access to art materials to maintain separate, independent practices as painters, printmakers, photographers, or sculptors.

Rather than exhibiting in galleries or museums, to which they had no access, they showed their works to fellow unofficial artists in their studios or apartments, discussed and wrote about each other’s work for samizdat editions—self-published magazines or journals made using typewriters and carbon copy paper in small quantities. Forced out of the public space by repressive cultural policies, unofficial artists turned away from the Soviet public sphere and developed their own private spaces in which to create, contemplate, and discuss their art.

SELECTED WORK: OUR GOAL IS COMMUNISM!, VITALY KOMAR AND ALEXANDER MELAMID, 1972

Sots Art
Thanks to the highly effective Soviet propaganda program, all schools, workplaces, streets, hospitals, stores, and public spaces were filled with an over-abundance of clichéd ideological language and imagery contained in posters, slogans, songs, and phrases. In the early 1970s, a form of unofficial art emerged in the Soviet Union that more directly confronted the official style of Socialist Realism—not just in high art, but in all areas of Soviet life. Invented by the two-man artist collective Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, this artistic tendency was called Sots Art, combining the “sots” from Socialist Realism (sotsialistichesky realizm in Russian) and the “art” from Pop Art.

Though Komar and Melamid originally gave the name “Sots Art” to a specific series of works from 1972–73, it has come to refer to the work of a number of other artists, including Leonid Sokov, Alexander Kosolapov, and Boris Orlov, who all worked in a kind of socialist pop style. Rather than turning away from politics and disappearing into the rarefied sphere of art (in imitation of Western Modernism, which was banned in the U.S.S.R.), the Sots artists turned a critical eye to the subjects and modes of Socialist Realist visual culture, an approach that was just as, if not more, politically risky than avoiding politics altogether.

Komar and Melamid
Komar and Melamid were trained at the Stroganov Institute of Art and Design in Moscow, the oldest artistic educational institution in Russia, and graduated in 1967. This year happened to correspond with a very important date: the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The following decade saw a series of important landmark anniversaries, from the Red Army to the Komsomol youth organization. In 1972, Komar and Melamid were commissioned to create a program of visual décor for a young pioneer camp in the Moscow countryside to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the organization of young pioneers (the Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization). Komar and Melamid were charged with the task of decorating the camp with signs, slogans, images, and plaques. They were inspired by a story that they learned while being shown around the camp grounds that a bust of Stalin too large to destroy had been buried nearby; the pair concluded that Stalin and the ideology associated with him were already “buried” in their subconscious minds as Soviet citizens, and they decided to appropriate Soviet slogans as

Photo Courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
their own artistic gestures.

Two of the works in the resulting Sots-art series were typical red signs with white lettering, resembling the ubiquitous signs that one might see proclaiming Communist slogans on the wall of a meeting hall, on the side of a building, in a classroom, or carried during a public demonstration. However, Komar and Melamid altered the familiar Soviet sign in several crucial ways. In one work, *Quotation* (1972), they replaced the slogan’s letters with white rectangles, suggesting that the contents of the words were of no importance since Soviet citizens were already deeply conditioned to understand white letters on a red banner as being typical Communist propaganda. In *Our Goal Is Communism!* (1972), Komar and Melamid reproduced the famous slogan word for word, but instead of citing the author of the quote, Vladimir Lenin, below the text, they signed their own names, the way an artist might sign their name at the bottom of a finished canvas. Other works in the Sots-art series included *Double Self-Portrait* (1973), painted in the style of an official portrait of Lenin and Stalin, but instead of the two leaders of the Soviet State, the artists inserted their own profiles; and the two works *Portrait of Komar’s Wife and Child* and *Portrait of Melamid’s Wife* (both 1972), depicting a mother and child turned toward a bright sun and a sportswoman with a hula hoop painted in the colorful graphic style of 1960s Soviet propaganda posters promoting healthy socialist living and the bright socialist future to come.

Komar and Melamid’s strategy of inscribing themselves and their family members into Soviet visual culture or signing their names to a quote by the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin, may seem a strange choice. If they opposed the repressive conditions of artists in the Soviet Union, why use the official state style in their work? Why not paint, for example, in the forbidden mode of Abstract Expressionism or other styles associated with artistic freedom? In their “Sots-Art Manifesto” of 1972, Komar and Melamid insisted that “The sots-art artist is not a craftsman who services the aesthetic needs of the middle class. Sots-art artists are the midwives of new words.”37 In this statement renouncing bourgeois art, we can detect more clearly Komar and Melamid’s position within the Cold War dichotomies of abstraction/figuration and freedom/repression, which shaped cultural policies on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

To review, the West saw Socialist Realism as a form of coerced propaganda lacking in originality and inspiration and held up Modernist painting as an expression of the individual artist’s subjective search for truth and freedom. Western critics felt Modernist painting immersed the viewer in an aesthetically powerful experience that raised the viewer above the banal concerns of everyday life. Meanwhile, the Soviet line was precisely the opposite: only Socialist Realism was truly engaged with the problems of society and worked together with all of socialist society to construct a better world based on equality and brotherhood. Socialist critics saw Modernism as an escape into cold, abstract “formalism” and a clear symptom of the rot at the core of the capitalist system.

Therefore, when Komar and Melamid declared in their manifesto that they were not “craftsmen who
service the aesthetic needs of the middle class,” they were parroting the official Soviet line about an artist’s place in socialist society. However, when we look at their Sots Art works, we see how they go beyond the principles of Socialist Realism. They do so not by inventing new artistic forms or by trying to reach viewers in the depths of their souls, but by repeating the worn-out slogans and images of Soviet propaganda and pointing—through their absurd signature, for instance—to the way that these signs operate as signs of power and ideology within the all-pervasive ideological program of the Soviet state. Komar and Melamid’s red slogan Our Goal Is Communism! would naturally have triggered an automatic reaction in the Soviet viewer, but the absurd artists’ signature interrupts this automatic reading and suggests the viewer take a second look.

As art historian Valerie L. Hillings has written, Komar and Melamid “examine the central role images play in bolstering and validating systems of belief and power.”38 By signing their name to Lenin’s slogan, Komar and Melamid negate the total power of the slogan and make visible the possibility that it is not the only possible text or ideology, but just one among many. In a Cold War context, this strategy of revealing the nature of ideology from the inside was quite powerful, as a number of artists besides Komar and Melamid adopted it, even practicing it after emigrating to the United States. One such example of this is Alexander Kosolapov’s painting Lenin and Coca-Cola (1982). In this work, Kosolapov combines the soft drink brand’s red logo with a picture of Lenin and the slogan “It’s the Real Thing,” as though signed by Lenin himself.

CONCEPTUAL ART
In our previous two examples, we saw how Pop and Sots artists appropriated signs and symbols from popular and political culture in order to comment on the prevalence of ideological messages inherent in them. The Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles went a step further to try to get his commentary to ordinary people and to highlight in the process the ways that political and cultural messages travel throughout society.

SELECTED WORK: INSERTIONS INTO IDEOLOGICAL CIRCUITS: COCA-COLA PROJECT, CILDO MEIRELES, 1970

Cildo Meireles’s Insertions into Ideological Circuits was a series of actions and provocations carried out between 1970 and 1975 in Brazil. Instead of utilizing the white cube of the gallery to reach an audience, the project relied on existing circuits of circulation and exchange, like bank notes or glass bottle returns. In the Coca-Cola Project, Meireles affixed clear labels with political messages like “Yankee go home” or instructions for building a Molotov cocktail on the sides of Coca-Cola bottles. The messages were practically invisible when the bottles were empty, but once the bottles were refilled with the dark liquid soda pop, the messages would appear, traveling widely throughout Brazilian society.

The year when Meireles devised his project, 1970, coincided with the most violent phase
of the military dictatorship in Brazil that had been aligned with and supported by the United States and in 1964 had ousted the democratically elected Labor Party government. During this period, Brazilians experienced political violence and strict censorship, and Meireles’s *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* project was a form of guerrilla tactics to cleverly oppose this oppressive regime without being detected. His related *Banknote Project*, for example, consisted of messages—such as a reference to a journalist who had died in police custody under suspicious circumstances and calls for fair and free elections—anonymously stamped onto banknotes.

Meireles came of age in the late 1960s among a group of artists from Rio de Janeiro who were no longer interested in seeing artworks passively displayed in museums. They instead wanted to involve the viewer, making viewers confront the ways that they have been socially, culturally, historically, and politically conditioned. As a member of the Experimental Unit of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), Meireles helped to publish *Malasartes*, a short-lived magazine that declared its subject to be “the politics of art.” In an editorial in the first issue, the authors asserted that their interest was not “art objects,” but rather “the significations of art” and its “insertion…into society.” They called on artists and critics “to study the processes and production of art, its distribution, and the mechanisms by which it provides feedback.”

The *Malasartes* group did not consider art to be outside of the boundaries of everyday life, but instead recognized their own implication in systems of power. In the wake of the Brazilian “economic miracle,” which had helped to concentrate wealth within increasingly elite upper and middle classes, a period of currency instability led cynical patrons to treat art as a target for investment. Artists recognized that their work was not just a reliable place to park money, but a form of social capital that reflected positively on the patrons who were seen to support “high culture.” In response to this set of circumstances, Meireles’s *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* rejected and commented on the art market “boom” by directly addressing the themes of value, circulation, and the economic and symbolic functions of art in a capitalist society. Another work from this time, *Árvore do dinheiro* (*Money Tree*), 1969, for example, demonstrated how art’s symbolic value translated directly into monetary value by placing one thousand folded and stacked one-cruzeiro bank notes on a pedestal and then giving them a price of two thousand cruzeiros.
The Independent Group was a group of British artists, architects, and critics interested in investigating vernacular and popular culture in order to better understand “man’s changing state” in an increasingly technological society affected by American mass media.

The Scottish artist Eduardo Paolozzi’s collage *It’s a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps Your Disposition* (1948) uses advertising imagery to investigate the social condition of the modern housewife, or more precisely, the idea of the modern housewife as presented by popular culture.

Paolozzi’s projection of magazine covers, advertising, and other non-art imagery from medicine, technology, and other fields to a group of viewers in a gallery setting injected popular imagery into the field of art and can be considered one of the foundational moments of Pop Art.

The Soviet artist duo Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid invented a new form of socialist Pop Art called Sots Art, which used the conventions of traditional Socialist Realism to analyze the structures of power inherent in the Soviet system.

Komar and Melamid’s Sots Art series from 1972–73 included the work *Our Goal Is Communism!* which appropriated the clichéd form of the Soviet slogan banner with the additional element of the artists’ signatures below it. By adding the signatures, Komar and Melamid undercut Soviet ideology’s claim to total truth, suggesting alternative options.

The Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles was part of a larger group of artists in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1960s and 1970s who wanted to make art that responded to the viewer and to the political situation in Brazil at that time.

Meireles’s project *Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project* (1970) attached clear labels with political messages like “Yankee go home,” or instructions for making Molotov cocktails, on Coca-Cola bottles. These messages were invisible on an empty bottle but became visible when the bottles were refilled with Coca-Cola. The messages thus traveled through the system of people purchasing, consuming, and returning the bottles to reach a wide Brazilian audience. In a time of censorship and political violence, Meireles’s project of inserting art into wider circuits of circulation constituted a guerilla tactic in response to the oppressive political situation.

**Important Terms**

- consumerism
- ideology
- the Independent Group
- Pop Art
- samizdat
- Sots Art
- Conceptual Art
- circulation
Art and Technology

One of the factors of the Cold War that set it apart from all previous wars was the unprecedented power and ubiquity of modern technology, particularly nuclear weapons, which threatened every aspect of people’s lives in every corner of the world. As the Cold War progressed, both sides—the socialist East and the capitalist West—harnessed new technologies in the service of the arms race, the space race, and efforts to gather classified information for strategic gains. Technology became closely associated with war, the military, and mass communication, and thus technology came to be perceived by some artists as an instrument of oppression in capitalist society. At the same time, new modes of technology like video and satellites were perceived to hold the potential for social liberation through global connectivity. Some artists even attempted to engage viewers in interactive, technology-based art as a tool for restructuring social relations at a time of growing conformity and centralization.

THE HORRORS OF WAR
The use of nuclear weapons in the bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945, stunned the world and killed or wounded approximately 200,000 people, most of them Japanese civilians. As the Cold War progressed, the battle between capitalism and communism, America’s policy of containment, and various decolonization processes played out in a series of conflicts, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and sundry coups d’etat, civil wars, and wars of independence across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Some artists who had firsthand experiences of war and displacement, or who saw the graphic effects of these conflicts on television, responded with forceful statements condemning war.

SELECTED WORK: AUTO-DESTRUCTIVE ART, GUSTAV METZGER, 1961

Gustav Metzger was born to Polish Jewish parents in Nuremberg, Germany, and was evacuated along with his brother from Nazi Germany to Britain in 1939. The rest of Metzger’s family had stayed behind and perished in the Holocaust. Metzger drew on these traumatic experiences to produce a new genre of performance art called “Auto-Destructive Art” that both condemned wartime violence and attempted to understand it in the present.

Metzger’s first presentations of Auto-Destructive Art took place in November 1959 at a London coffeehouse run by a fellow artist. There, Metzger showed three paintings on steel sheets to which color had been applied.
and scraped off, and later, a found cardboard TV box that Metzger had disassembled and hung on the wall. A text accompanying the presentation defined “Auto-Destructive Art” as a “public art for industrial societies” that is “unadulterated by commercial considerations or the demands of the contemporary drawing room.” By presenting temporary works of art that eschewed the rich clientele of the luxury art market, Metzger’s Auto-Destructive Art was meant to antagonize the viewer who may have come expecting more aesthetically appealing works.

Metzger’s Auto-Destructive Art was both anti-capitalist and anti-war. Metzger made this clear in one of his best-known performances, Acid Action Painting, which was part of an Auto-Destructive Art demonstration that took place on July 3, 1961, on London’s South Bank. Donning a gas mask and goggles, Metzger employed a paintbrush and spray pump to apply acid to a series of large nylon canvases painted white, black, and red and stretched over a series of seven-foot-tall, 12 ½-foot-wide metal frames. As the acid came into contact with the painting, the nylon fibers shriveled away, causing a series of slits and gashes to form across the billboard-sized sheet. As an artistic gesture, Metzger’s performance and its title clearly referenced the Abstract Expressionist action painting of Jackson Pollock, which Metzger would have seen in Hans Namuth’s photographs in Life magazine. But whereas Pollock’s pours and drips of paint resulted in rich webs of color that invited the viewer’s absorbed attention and visual pleasure, Metzger’s performance was not aimed at the creation of a visually engaging object, but instead centered on the production of an event that was a subversive political weapon.

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For Metzger, Auto-Destructive Art was a way of symbolically reenacting the very real violence done to individuals and groups by destructive forces like the Nazis. Donning the gasmask and goggles, Metzger assumed the role of the soldier exacting violence, while the torn nylon canvas came to stand (like Alberto Burri’s burlap Sacchi) for the violated bodies of wartime victims. However, unlike Burri’s sutured canvas wounds, Metzger’s nylon wounds did not heal, but instead expanded over time, as the nylon was consumed by the acid. In this way, rather than offering a gesture of healing, Metzger hoped that the performance would trigger viewers to connect the work to a wider range of issues related to technology and violence in the present, including nuclear weapons and nuclear power, pollution, and the dehumanizing aspects of the capitalist system as a whole. 43  (Metzger himself was involved with a number of political campaigns, including committees on nuclear disarmament and against nuclear war.) Expressive and powerful, Auto-Destructive Art was a form of anti-war art that sought to shock the viewer into recognizing the violence caused by destructive forces like the Nazis.

At the same time that Metzger’s art employed the shock tactics of destruction to shake the viewer awake, Metzger also wanted his art to gesture toward the possibility of new creation. As the nylon gradually disappeared, the tears in the canvas offered the viewer a new and different view of St. Paul’s Cathedral on the other side of the river. Thus, even within the darkness of destruction, Metzger managed to find a kernel of transcendence, a way for humanity to continue—but this new creation depended not on the artist, but on the viewer to actively see through the destruction to the world beyond.
SELECTED WORK: BALLOONS FROM THE SERIES HOUSE BEAUTIFUL: BRINGING THE WAR HOME, MARTHA ROSLER, c. 1967–72

The responsibility of the artist to society is a central question in the work of American Conceptual artist Martha Rosler. This question became particularly pressing for Rosler in the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement began to reveal the deep inequalities that structured American life at home, and the Vietnam War increasingly cast U.S. foreign policy as aggressively violent and ineffective. Rosler had begun her career as a painter, but quickly shifted her practice to what she called “agitational works”—print works like posters or ads in underground magazines that aimed to deliver a clear political message rather than hang in a gallery seemingly outside of political reality.

In the late 1960s, Rosler began to make photomontages using a technique of cutting and pasting sections of photographs, magazines, or newspaper illustrations to create a composite image that reveals more about the subject than any one individual shot. Historically, photomontage has been associated with mass media and political propaganda, as in the works of the Dada artist Hannah Höch or the anti-Nazi propagandist John Heartfield. More than paintings or sculptures, which still carried the aura of the artist’s touch and the physical presence of the artwork, the medium of photomontage was perceived to be less precious and allowed Rosler to focus on creating, as she put it, “a space in which different tales collided.”

The early shift away from Modernist painting in Rosler’s work came about as a result of her growing awareness of the effects of patriarchy. In one of her first photomontage series from 1965–72, Body Beautiful: Beauty Knows No Pain, Rosler combined advertising images of home appliances from women’s journals with women’s body parts cut out of mass-market and even pornographic magazines to reveal the ways that contemporary culture reduces women to the dual roles of docile keepers of the home and sexualized objects of the male gaze. As art historian Christine Filippone has argued, Rosler chose images from magazines marketed to women and those marketed to men in order to draw an analogy between the objects that women were expected to purchase and use in the home and the ways in which women were themselves “consumed” within capitalist society. In this way, Rosler’s earliest works critiqued the way that both the latest home appliances and women’s bodies were understood and consumed as forms of technology within a Cold War-era consumer culture.
Rosler was also greatly affected by the Cold War and her gradual realization of its false dichotomies (e.g., America as a beacon of freedom versus the U.S.S.R. as a repressive carrier of Communism). Rosler acknowledged the role of the Cold War in her artistic development in a 1994 essay:

> When I began working, the two-worlds model of culture was dying along with Abstract Expressionism and high modernism ... My politicized practice began when I saw that things were left out of explanations of the world that were crucial to its understanding, that there are always things to be told that are obscured by the prevailing stories.46

Already beginning to fall apart, the contradictions of the Cold War order (“the two-worlds model”) that Rosler perceived around her catalyzed her belief that the artist’s primary role should be to see through the prevailing narratives and ideologies propping up the status quo and to help the viewer to better understand and challenge them.

In the late 1960s, Rosler joined the Women’s Liberation Front, a radical feminist and antiwar group based in and around the University of California, San Diego at La Jolla. Her series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, from about 1967–72, brought together previous concerns about women’s position in society with America’s increasing militarization. In *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*, Rosler employed the same photomontage technique as before, but this time she juxtaposed cutouts of lavish interiors from *House Beautiful* and similar magazines with battlefield scenes of the war in Vietnam published in mass-market *Life* magazine.

While some works in the series depicted oblivious American housewives and families enjoying the middle-class comforts of their homes as the war raged beyond the window, others, like *Balloons*, inserted the civilian casualties of the military conflict directly into the American interiors. The woman depicted in *Balloons* is wedged into a staircase overlooking a bright, sunny living room, complete with patterned, stuffed armchairs...
arranged around a clear Lucite coffee table on a white shag carpet, with a pile of multicolored balloons in the corner. Within this idealized white living room, the woman looks frantically off to the right and carries an injured baby splattered with blood. Instead of providing the healthful air, light, and sun promised by proponents of modern architecture, the sharp angles of this open-plan home appear to pin the mother down in the bottom center of the picture as though in the crosshairs of a weapon.

This juxtaposition of the aspirational modern interior with the gory evidence of an interminable overseas war seems to erase the distinction between private and public spheres, connect consumption at home to the war abroad, and implicate the viewer in a larger system of domination. Images like those of the woman and child were regularly broadcast on dinnertime television and published in magazines like *Life*. By literally “bringing the war home,” Rosler challenged her viewers to reject seeing these images as distant and separate from their everyday lives in the United States (or worse, as entertainment) and instead to actively imagine the realities of life during wartime.

Rather than exhibit these works in a gallery setting, Rosler made copies of her photomontages and passed them out during antiwar demonstrations, later publishing some in underground newspapers and showing them as slides during lectures about her work. In so doing, she undermined their status as artworks and instead asserted their role as political messages. Whether or not the photomontages were meant to be seen as art objects, they were undoubtedly made to provoke the viewer to think and to act. Rosler stated that one of the reasons she chose photomontage as a medium was that it looked handmade, and that others who might be provoked into making similar connections about the culture around them might begin to make their own photomontages of political messages.

**TECHNO-UTOPIAS**

As much as the growth of Cold War technologies posed a threat to people around the world—the fear of nuclear war was as common then as the fear of school shootings is now—new information and communication technologies, like computers and satellites, also sparked utopian aspirations for transforming the world for the better.

**SELECTED WORK: A DAY IN THE STREET, JULIO LE PARC (GROUPE DE RECHERCHE D’ART VISUEL), 1966**

For the France-based Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (Visual Art Research Group, or GRAV), modern technologies such as cybernetics, optics, and information science offered models for work that rejected the psychological expressionism of American and European Modernist art. Instead, the GRAV developed a technological aesthetic in paintings, sculptures, and especially interactive objects that encouraged viewer engagement, allowing viewers to become aware of their own status as participants in the perceptual process.

The GRAV was a group of artists from Europe and Latin America—Horacio García-Rossi and Julio Le Parc from Argentina, Francisco Sobrino from Spain, and François Morellet, Joëll Stein, and Yvaral (Jean-Pierre Vasarely) from France—who met in the late 1950s and exhibited together in international exhibitions of kinetic and *Op Art* throughout the 1960s. Their works often used modern industrial materials, like reflective metals and plastics, to create *kinetic sculptures* that rotated, pulsed, and subtly shifted using electricity or air currents, and abstract geometric paintings (called *Op Art*) that used optical effects to shift and flicker with the viewer’s changing position.

Rather than pursuing their own individual artistic styles, the GRAV artists sought to eliminate the touch of the individual artist from the work and instead functioned as a kind of research center, developing group
projects through “a new method of approximation, combinatory potential, probability, statistics, etc.” This unusual artistic rhetoric, which could be described as “technocratic,” echoed the language of think tanks and the modern French state, as these entities sought to put rationalized information systems to use in France’s postwar reconstruction and development. The term “technocracy” refers to a government run by technical experts who rely on scientific research to more efficiently organize society—a form of management that was increasingly popular in meeting the immediate challenges of postwar Europe, but one which had both positive and negative consequences that were hotly debated in postwar French society.

For the GRAV, the goal was not to create mechanistic art for the sake of maximum efficiency, but on the contrary, to make the viewer pause in order to critique the drive toward efficiency in postwar government and society. Early on, the GRAV artists rejected both figurative painting and Abstract Expressionism as forms of art that transported the viewer away from the concrete situation of encountering the work. Abstract Expressionism also represented for the GRAV a kind of recognizable brand name that could be marketed as the “inspired” product of individual authors. Instead, the group turned to kinetic and Op Art to try to destabilize the viewer and force viewers to negotiate their own experience of the work—to recognize that the viewer’s own movement is part and parcel of the way the work is perceived. In other words, the meaning of the work was located in the viewer’s own active encounter with it, not drawn out from the subjectivity of the artist to be expressed in form.

By the mid-1960s, the GRAV expanded its critique from the individual’s encounter with the artwork to a larger critique of rationalized postwar society. It was in these first postwar decades that the French government attempted to use technocratic means to solve an acute housing crisis caused by wartime damage and exacerbated by population shifts from rural to urban areas and a rising postwar birth rate. One such solution was the cheaply built, rent-controlled housing blocks that were quickly erected on the urban peripheries and consisted of cramped, noisy units in neighborhoods lacking basic services like schools, shopping centers, parks, and public transportation. The GRAV saw a way to improve life for residents by installing
Plexiglas and metal structures in public spaces that, like the GRAV’s kinetic and Op Art works in galleries, used a modern, mechanical aesthetic to encourage inhabitants to perceptually engage with them in order to (the GRAV hoped) recognize their own agency as viewers, and not just subjects of government planning.

The GRAV’s technocratic approach to activating audiences culminated in *A Day in the Street*, a series of public events that took place around Paris on Tuesday, April 19, 1966. From 8 am to midnight, passersby in the streets and metro stations were invited to wear, play, and interact with various kinetic and manipulable objects, such as boxes, springs, blocks, or balloons. Pedestrians were invited to build Plexiglas towers that fragmented the viewers’ reflections, or to try to walk on booby-trapped street furniture that would throw them off balance. As with the GRAV’s previous works, *A Day in the Street* attempted to activate viewer perception, but this time to inject this more active perception into people’s everyday experiences of the city as they ran errands, traveled to and from work, and went about their habitual activities. In this way, the GRAV hoped to equip viewers with new perceptual tools for a more enlivened mode of social interaction and a more engaged experience of public space.

**SELECTED WORK: GLOBAL GROOVE, NAM JUNE PAIK AND JOHN GODFREY, 1973**

Just as the GRAV used an anonymous, technocratic aesthetic to try to activate audiences in their own local communities, Korean-American artist Nam June Paik tried to do something similar using video art and broadcast television, but on a global scale.

Paik was born in Seoul, Korea, into a wealthy family that fled the country at the outset of the Korean War. Paik studied first in Tokyo, then in Munich, and soon met a number of avant-garde artists and composers, like John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, and George Maciunas, becoming a member of Maciunas’s neo-dada Fluxus movement. Fluxus was a radical art network that included artists from the U.S., West Germany, and Japan who were interested
in liberating art from the artificial distinction between art, music, theater, poetry, and life itself. Paik immigrated to New York in 1964, where he was one of the first artists to use a portable video camcorder for artistic production. Together with Japanese engineer Shuya Abe, Paik created an early video-synthesizer that allowed him to combine and manipulate images from various sources, colorizing or distorting them in real time.

Like Rosner and the GRAV artists, Paik hoped that his art would inspire and activate viewers. In the interactive work *Magnet TV* of 1965, Paik invited viewers to use a magnet to modify the output on their television sets into a medley of swerving abstract lines. In a world increasingly saturated by television imagery (the first televised presidential debates had taken place just five years earlier in 1960 and arguably had a major impact on the outcome of the election), Paik’s suggestion that viewers should take control of their TV sets was a radically democratizing gesture.

In 1973, Paik produced the video *Global Groove* in collaboration with technician John J. Godfrey for the public television station WNET/Thirteen. The station had received grant funds to create an experimental TV division, the Artists’ Television Laboratory, and Paik was one of the artists invited to take part in the experiments. As art historian John G. Hanhardt describes it:

*Global Groove* integrates and unites diverse elements—films and videotapes by other artists, interviews and voiceovers (including appearances by [poet] Allen Ginsberg and [composer] John Cage), pop music (such as “Devil with a Blue Dress On” by Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels), appropriated commercials and broadcast fragments—in a series of short segments driven by a rapid, energetic pace and comprehensive image processing. The effect can be likened to postmodern vaudeville where artists and moving-image selections take turns on a constantly shifting stage.\(^5\)

Turning the TV studio into a real experimental space, Paik invited dancers, musicians, and performance artists to perform for the camera, and encouraged Godfrey to cut in and out of the footage intuitively as the music played. At one point, Paik’s image appears on the screen, inviting the viewers to close and then open their eyes. If the viewer’s eyes remain open, an image of a nude dancer appears through a veil of saturated color. The trick on the viewer who does not follow the instruction acknowledges television’s inherently voyeuristic nature, just as it encourages a more active viewership of the broadcast by seeming to respond to the viewer’s real-time choices.\(^5\)
Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” in the 1960s to suggest how the mass circulation and consumption of images, media, and content by global audiences brings people together into one connected global community.55 Paik’s *Global Groove* opened with a voiceover describing how video might bring about such an interconnected global village: “This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the earth and TV Guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.” Through works like *Global Groove*, Paik articulated a utopian vision of a future in which television technology could provide unrestricted access to art and culture from anywhere to anybody in the world who wished to participate, activating viewers and crossing Cold War boundaries still strongly reinforced by borders and walls in the physical world.

**SECTION V SUMMARY**

- Modern technology, particularly nuclear weapons, set the Cold War apart from all previous wars due to the potential for total destruction.
- A number of artists used their work to reflect on technology as an instrument of oppression in capitalist society.
- Other artists held out hope for technology as a tool for social liberation.
- German-Jewish artist Gustav Metzger invented a new genre of performance art called “Auto-Destructive Art” that condemned wartime violence and sought to imagine a creative potential within destruction.
- In his performance of *Acid Action Painting*, part of an Auto-Destructive Art demonstration on London’s South Bank on July 3, 1961, Metzger used acid to “paint” a series of large nylon canvases, causing a series of slits and gashes in the nylon, resembling the wounds of the victims of nuclear war.
- With his Auto-Destructive Art, Metzger turned action painting on its head, creating not the lush visual experience of a Jackson Pollock canvas, but an event that demanded that the viewer confront the horrors of wartime violence and actively seek a new perspective on the world through the canvas’s destruction.
- American Conceptual artist Martha Rosler used photomontage to convey political messages that would activate viewers to consider the connections between the systems of capitalist oppression at home and those of military oppression abroad.
- In her 1965–72 series *Body Beautiful: Beauty Knows No Pain*, Rosler pasted women’s nude body parts cut from pornographic magazines onto images of domestic appliances to underscore the way that women had come to be seen under capitalist culture as another form of domestic appliance for the pleasure of the male gaze.
- In her 1967–72 series *Bringing the War Home*, Rosler inserted images of Vietnamese civilian casualties into the upscale homes from *House Beautiful* magazine, prompting her viewers to see their plight in the context of their own lives, not as distant, unreachable victims on the other side of the world.
- Rosler’s use of the photomontage medium, which has historically been used as a popular form of political messaging, was meant to encourage viewers to take up the scissors and create their own photomontages in response to their own political realities.
- The France-based Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (Visual Art Research Group, or GRAV) developed a technocratic aesthetic in paintings, sculptures, and interactive objects that encouraged viewer engagement and hoped to make those viewers conscious of their own status as participants in the perceptual process.
- In a series of kinetic sculptures and Op Art paintings, the GRAV rejected the aura of expressionist paintings in favor of a more modern, mechanical aesthetic. These physically and optically dynamic works attempted to make viewers aware of their integral role in perceiving the artwork.
- The group repeated this principle on a more
public scale by installing Plexiglas and metal structures in the new public housing neighborhoods outside Paris that, like the GRAV’s kinetic and Op Art works, used a modern, mechanical aesthetic to encourage inhabitants to perceptually engage with them and recognize their own agency as viewers, and not just subjects of government planning.

- For *A Day in the Street*, which took place around Paris on Tuesday, April 19, 1966, the GRAV invited passersby to engage with different interactive objects in an effort to shift their experience of everyday life in the city and enliven their social interactions with fellow citizens.

- Nam June Paik was a Korean-born American artist who used video and television technology to try to activate viewers through participatory video art.

- In *Magnet TV* of 1965, Paik invited viewers to use a magnet to modify the output on their television sets, a radical gesture in a world increasingly saturated by television imagery.

- In his best-known video work, *Global Groove* of 1973, Paik invited musicians, dancers, poets, and performance artists to perform in the studio and then used a video synthesizer to layer the footage with other video, voiceover, and distortion into a cacophonous video experience.

- Paik was influenced by Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who coined the term “global village” to suggest how the mass circulation and consumption of images, media, and content by global audiences brings people together into one connected global community.

- In his videos, Paik developed a utopian vision in which television technology could provide unrestricted, participatory access to art and culture to anybody in the world across Cold War boundaries.

**Important Terms**

- Auto-Destructive Art
- photomontage
- kinetic sculpture
- Op Art
- participation
- technocracy
- Fluxus
- video art
- Marshall McLuhan
- global village
Section VI
The Body in Action

In the 1950s and increasingly in the 1960s, the body became a medium for artistic expression on both sides of the Iron Curtain. As we have previously seen, paintings had served as stand-ins for the body for artists dealing with wartime trauma, like Alberto Burri with his sutured Sacchi or Gustav Metzger with his Auto-Destructive Art. Those artists re-enacted the violence of war in order to make it visible and conceivable and ultimately to try to come to terms with their own and their countries' traumatic pasts. Extending this tactic beyond the canvas, performance artists began to use the body itself to stage visceral experiences for audiences. While sometimes shocking or even violent, these performances affirmed the importance of life over death. As the art historian Kristine Stiles explains it, “the body as material in art after 1950 was deeply tied to the need to assert the primacy of human subjects over inanimate objects, and was a response to the threatened ontological condition of life itself in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the advent of the atomic age.”

Besides its fundamental association with life and humanism, the body of the performing artist also became a site for artists to grapple with global politics. As artists’ bodies are frequently visibly marked by gender and race and often identified by nationality, performance art that engaged the artist’s body in various public activities could also become a site for thinking about politics in the Cold War. In countries where political speech was censored and explicit political action repressed, performance artists used the body to speak poignantly, if at times quietly or obliquely, about repressive political conditions or to protest continuing injustices. Most of all, performance art extended the boundaries of what art could be—in Western Europe and North America, as well as the Eastern Bloc, Asia, and Latin America.

ACTIVATING THE BODY

SELECTED WORK: CUT PIECE, YOKO ONO, 1964

One of the most iconic pieces of performance art that came out of the 1960s is Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece. Ono performed Cut Piece four times between 1964 and 1966: in Kyoto and Tokyo, Japan; in New York; and at the Destruction in Art Symposium in London, organized by Gustav Metzger. Each time, Ono invited members of the audience to come up and cut off pieces of her clothing with a pair of scissors as she knelt silently on the stage in the polite Japanese sitting position. No additional instructions were given, so audience members were at first timid and hesitated considerably between cuts. Some tentatively took small clutches of her dress, while others were more daring; one viewer snapped the strap of her bra, causing Ono to lift her arms in order to cover her bared chest. Other than the occasional nervous laughter from the audience, no sounds could be heard in the concert hall.

Cut Piece has commonly been understood as a foundational work of feminist art whose central themes range from voyeurism, to women’s subjugation under patriarchy, to violence against women from a violent society. In this reading, Ono performs the role of a passive subject to the audience members’ aggressive acts of cutting, her silence and nudity symbolizing this violence. However, reading the work in its specific historical and international contexts, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson has argued persuasively that Ono’s
performance makes explicit reference to the visual aspects of atomic war in a way that allows her to deliberatively address the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Bryan-Wilson explains, Ono does not simply enact a violation of the artist by the audience, but rather, she creates a ritual of “destruction and memorialization.” In the profoundly ceremonial work, viewers are invited to participate by cutting and then taking away the pieces of cut clothing as mementos or souvenirs. Ono’s stripped body and torn clothing resembles censored U.S. Army photographs and survivors’ own drawings of Japanese bombing victims whose clothing was blown off in the blasts. In Bryan-Wilson’s reading, Ono’s silent performance was a form of giving testimony about the experience of atrocity, one which had been suppressed by censors in U.S.-occupied Japan until 1952.

Ono was born in 1933 into a prosperous Tokyo banking family that lost its fortune at the start of the Second World War. As a child, Ono witnessed the fire-bombing of Tokyo and was twelve years old when the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Her family experienced hunger after fleeing the city for the countryside, so Ono was intimately familiar with wartime deprivation and its effects on the body. In 1953, Ono moved to the U.S., where she studied music composition at Sarah Lawrence College and soon got involved in the avant-garde music and art scene in New York. She met artists and composers like John Cage, Nam June Paik, and artists associated with Fluxus and used her downtown loft as a performance and exhibition space for experimental art.

Ono’s earliest works, produced in the mid-1950s, took the form of “event-scores,” or brief, poetic instructions that were meant to be imagined or performed by viewers as though they were musical compositions. Enigmatic and often impossible to carry out, Ono’s event-scores resembled Zen kōans, or short, often illogical stories or sayings meant to aid in meditation. Some examples are Earth Piece (spring 1963): “Listen to the sound of the earth turning”; Laugh Piece (winter 1961): “Keep laughing a week”; Body Piece (summer 1961): “Stand in the evening light until you become transparent or until you fall asleep.”

A number of Ono’s event-scores touched on the themes of trauma and memory. Conversation Piece from 1962, for example, consisted of the following typed instructions: “Bandage any part of your body. If people ask about it, make a story and tell. If people do not ask about it, draw their attention to it and tell. If people forget about it, remind them of it and keep telling. Do not talk about anything else.” While seemingly abstract or even whimsical in its invitation to the viewer to feign an injury, it nevertheless insists on the act of remembering above all else.

In another work, Shadow Piece (performed along with Cut Piece at the Destruction in Art Symposium in 1961), a transparent piece of cloth is wrapped around the body and exposed to the light. This work explores the idea of visibility and invisibility in art, and how it relates to the artist’s identity and legacy. The artist Yoko Ono, photographed in 2007 at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Photograph by Marcela Cataldi Cipolla.
1966), Ono tried to trace the audience’s shadows on long pieces of cloth. In the postwar context, these captured shadows may have reminded viewers of photographs taken after the atomic blasts, which sometimes showed the imprints of victims’ bodies on flat surfaces, like building walls or steps. Here again, a minimal action of trying to capture the ephemerality of shadows performed the important and deep work of remembering a traumatic event. Bryan-Wilson interprets this performance in relation to the physical traces of the bomb’s destruction as a “desire to store them up or hoard them in one place [that] reflects the fear of forgetting.” She emphasizes the incredible impact of the Second World War and the atomic bomb on Ono’s generation of artists who lived through it, and the importance of the postwar period as a time of living after war, a time of historical accounting and remembering, which Ono’s Cut Piece and related works perform.

The first two performances of Cut Piece took place in Japan, first in Kyoto as part of a concert called The Insound/Instructure: Contemporary American Music and then in Tokyo at the Yoko Ono Sayonara Concert to mixed reviews. Most reviewers ridiculed the concert and questioned whether Ono’s work was even art. Reproducing familiar Cold War divisions, some in Japan viewed Ono with suspicion, associating her with American art in a political climate that was increasingly turning against the American occupation, and particularly America’s continued nuclear experiments and militarization of their country.

For Ono, who had traveled between Japan and the United States as a child and had recently returned to Japan after years spent in New York, her hybrid outlook—both Japanese and American—made her a stranger in her own country. While Cut Piece subtly performed an act of memorialization of the atomic blasts in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, most of her Japanese audience failed to recognize these deeper meanings. Nevertheless, Ono continued to pursue avant-garde experiments and affirm the vital importance of art in the face of the numbing or even maddening effects of everyday life. As she wrote later, “I realized then, that it was not enough in life to just wake up in the morning, eat, talk, walk, and go to sleep. Art and music were necessities. But they were not enough, either. We needed new rituals, in order to keep our sanity.”


Ana Mendieta was another artist who traveled between her country of origin and the United States and staged performances that drew on ritual practices—in her case indigenous, Afro-Cuban, and Roman Catholic—as well as contemporary avant-garde movements. Like Yoko Ono with Cut Piece, the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta used her body in visceral performances to explore issues of gender and identity, including her Cuban heritage, which was in turn deeply shaped by the history of the Cold War.
Mendieta was born in 1948 in Havana, Cuba, and sent off the island in 1961 following the Cuban Revolution through Operation Pedro Pan, an American government program run by Catholic Charities, which managed to transport 14,000 unaccompanied children out of Fidel Castro’s Cuba to the United States. Mendieta and her sister Raquelín spent five years in a series of foster homes in Iowa before being reunited with their mother and brother, and it would be another thirteen years before they would see their father again. In her haunting multimedia performances, Mendieta draws on both North American and Cuban aesthetic sources in an attempt to bridge the painful chasm created by her exile.65

Mendieta completed a Master of Arts degree in painting at the University of Iowa in 1972 and then entered the university’s pioneering multimedia and video art program, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1977. The Iowa program encouraged students and faculty to move beyond traditional fine arts categories like painting and sculpture to pursue work that was interdisciplinary, exploring the ways in which dance, theater, writing, music, and other creative forms could merge with the visual arts. During her time as a student in the multimedia program, Mendieta shifted her focus from painting to a more conceptually based, ephemeral form of performance art that incorporated elements of sculpture, land art, and photography.66 Responding to the work of artists like Marcel Duchamp, Bruce Nauman, and Vito Acconci, and exploring ways to use the body as a sculptural material, Mendieta began to make works that documented her body’s transformations through actions like pressing her face against a piece of Plexiglas or changing her appearance through the addition of facial hair, makeup, or a nylon stocking pulled over her head. In one early piece, Grass on Woman (1972), Mendieta lay her body face-down in the grass and partially covered herself with more cut grass, foreshadowing her later Siluetas series of body earth works.67

With the encouragement of the experimental approaches in her courses, Mendieta explored the uses of the body in increasingly unusual ways. In works like Feathers on Woman of 1972, she covered her naked body with chicken feathers to transform herself into the Mesoamerican feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl. In Chicken Piece of the same year, she carried out a ritualistic performance with the blood of a decapitated chicken, rendering her body an extreme expressionistic action painting and evoking both Cuban Santería rituals and the radical performances of the Viennese Actionists—artists who used slain animals, blood, and theatricalized ritual in the 1960s to break taboos on speaking against Nazi atrocities and criticizing the Catholic church in conservative postwar Austria.

In 1973, Mendieta traveled with her multimedia class to Oaxaca, Mexico, which seemed to her to exude a special religious aura that reminded her of her native Cuba. There she began to develop a series of “site-
specific body works [that] integrated sacred and secular forms.” In works made on this and subsequent trips to Mexico, Mendieta seemed to reconnect with a Latin American culture that to her felt close to the Cuban one from which she had been abruptly severed at the age of eleven. As a Spanish speaker, Mendieta acted as an interpreter and cultural mediator for her classmates, none of whom had previously been to Mexico. While Mendieta was not herself Mexican, her study of the Roman Catholic and Pre-Columbian sources, which she incorporated into her works, suggests her interest in the hybridity of different Latin American cultures. At the same time, because Mendieta could not explore Pre-Columbian sources in her native Cuba, her works could sometimes seem essentializing, treating cultural symbols fairly loosely and without concern for their specific historic and cultural meanings.

In one Oaxacan piece, called *Flowers on Body*, for example, Mendieta lay down nude in a shallow empty grave at an archaeological site and had a collaborator place white flowers over her head, neck, chest, torso, and legs. The collaborator then quickly photographed the performance from different angles before the authorities had time to object. In this work, Mendieta blended symbols of life and death in an attempt to reestablish a symbolic connection to Pre-Columbian culture, a connection she prioritized over the methods of archaeological science.

In another series of five untitled works, Mendieta used the space of a sixteenth-century Dominican church complex in the Oaxacan village of Cuilapan to create veiled body sculptures—her own body wrapped in a sheet—and sculptural works made of a calf heart and branches in different ritual places in the church, including a niche, a baptismal font (a kind of sacred dunking pool), and a holy water font. These site-specific works engaged with the religious and cultural history of the site and connected with Mendieta’s own Roman Catholic background, which she had left behind when forced to leave Cuba as a child and which she likely would not have been able to explore in this way in Communist Cuba. As art historian Julia P. Herzberg explains, in using her memories of Cuba, Mendieta “discovered new ways to explore sacred imagery … and bridge the gap between sacred and secular art forms without being pedantic or overly self-righteous.”

Over the next twelve years—Mendieta would suffer an untimely death in 1985—she continued to use the primal materials of blood, earth, fire, and water to develop the themes of magic and ritual, the sacred and the secular in ephemeral, site-specific sculptures and outlines using her body in natural environments. The *Siluetas* series consisted of traced or sculpted outlines of Mendieta’s body on the ground using ignited gunpowder, leaves, grass, mud, stones, other natural elements, and cloth. The red *Silueta* in Mexico (1973–77) consists of the dug-out shape of Mendieta’s body in the sand right at the point where the ocean waves roll over the beach. The shock of bright red pigment sprinkled into the cavity recalls Mendieta’s earlier works with blood, like *Chicken Piece* or *Blood Sign #1* and *Blood Sign #2*, in which she used animal blood to trace her body’s outline and dragged her bloodied forearms in a downward tracking motion along a white wall. However, rather than the bloody violence evoked by those works, the symbolism of the pigmented Silueta is more subtle, invoking ideas of impermanence, liminality, and transition.

Mendieta traveled back to Mexico several times in the 1970s and to Cuba in the 1980s as a member of the Circulo de Cultura Cubana (Cuban Cultural Circle). In Cuba, she served as a tour guide, created and exhibited her own work, and met and made connections with other Latin American artists, always interested in the connection between art and ideology. When traveling to Cuba, Mendieta carried ideas about recent art movements, like land art, body art, multimedia art, and feminism, conveyed information through art magazines, and herself translated magazines and books for her interlocutors. In return, the young Cuban artists in whose circle she found herself shared their knowledge of the Afro-Cuban religious cult of Santería and the Taíno, an indigenous tribe of the Caribbean in which Mendieta was interested. Although herself raised Catholic, Mendieta remembered the cultural significance of the Afro-Caribbean...
practice of Santería from when she was a child on the island and freely borrowed its use of elemental natural materials as “a means of infusing spiritual power or, as she would put it, ‘magic,’ into her art.” In this way, Mendieta’s life and work literally and metaphorically crossed the boundaries between the First World and the Third World, which marked the Cold War world in the 1970s and 1980s, as she struggled to close the gap that had been opened up by her early displacement to the United States.

THE BODY UNDER REPRESSION REGIMES

SELECTED WORK: I AM GLAD IF I CAN LOOK AT THE WALL AND I WOULD BE GLAD IF I COULD WRITE SOMETHING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL, ENDRE TÓT, 1979

Another artist who crossed Cold War borders and, like Mendieta and Ono, made the experience of living in displacement a theme in his art is the Hungarian Endre Tót. Tót was born in 1937 in Sümeg, Hungary. Hungary had aligned itself with Nazi Germany and soon joined the war alongside the Axis powers. Hungary was liberated by the Red Army at the conclusion of World War II, and the Hungarian Communist Party eventually assumed power and, as in the other Soviet satellite countries, imposed Socialist Realism as the official artistic style.

Tót began his artistic training in Budapest’s Academy of Fine Art but was expelled in 1958 for refusing to follow the Socialist Realist party line. He then transferred to the less prestigious School of Applied Arts, from which he graduated in 1965. Like many artists living behind the Iron Curtain, Tót experimented with Western art styles, like Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel. He even exhibited in the important Iparterv exhibitions in 1968 and 1969, which had managed to avoid the Communist censors. For Tót, however, debates between Western Modernism and Socialist Realism seemed beside the point; both sides seemed equally ideological and duplicitous.

It was at this time in 1970 that Tót declared that his work had reached a “ZERO (0)” point, signaling his turn away from painting and expression and toward a Conceptual Art that used such methods as typed and printed texts, cut-up newspapers, the carrying of posters in public, telegrams, postcards, rubber stamps, t-shirts, artist books, telegrams, and mail art, sending postcards and other printed materials to fellow artists and gallerists around the world. Playing with the idea of what an artwork is, Tót produced his first self-published book, entitled My Unpainted Canvases (Budapest, 1971). It consisted of twelve pages of blank rectangles labeled with dimensions, but no titles. In a companion work, his self-published Night Visit to the National Gallery (1974), Tót altered a booklet for London’s National Gallery by blacking out all of the pictures, humorously implying a connection or even an equivalence between the impossibility of painting in Hungary (due to censorship) and the impossibility of seeing art in the West.
(due to a lack of freedom to travel). In these two related works, Tót points to the distance between himself and Western art institutions, suggesting that no communication between the two art worlds is possible.

Meanwhile, Tót dedicated himself to overcoming this marginal position in the international art world by distributing his work to as many viewers as possible around the world. He compiled an impressive mailing list of international artists by hunting down addresses in foreign art magazines and expanding his network of connections. He began to take part in numerous international exhibitions and actions and used the less restrictive postal system in nearby Belgrade (Yugoslavia) to send works of mail art and letters, often containing texts overtyped with rows of zeros or pages of typed zeros, to his growing international network.

In addition to his Zero works, Tót developed the somewhat absurd motif of “gladnesses,” which he could apply to myriad different projects. These conceptual works combined photographs of Tót smiling and doing everyday things with proclamations of joy or gladness, such as, I Am Glad If I Can Lift One Leg or I Am Glad If I Can Take One Step (both 1973–75). As art historian Klara Kemp-Welch has observed, “many of Tót’s actions verged on hyperbole,” overstating the amount of gladness engendered by the action pictured. Speaking with Kemp-Welch in 2006, Tót himself recalled that “My ‘Joys’ were reflections of the totalitarian state of the seventies. I responded with the absurd euphoria of Gladness to censorship, isolation, suppression sensed in every field of life, though this suppression worked with the subtlest means, hardly visible.” Tót’s Gladnesses series played with the everpresent—though frequently invisible—demand that all citizens should be cheerful and optimistic at all times. At the same time, by overidentifying with Communism’s demand for conformity (like the Sots artists Komar and Melamid), Tót underscored and highlighted the restrictive environment in which such a demand might be imposed on the entire population.

In 1976, Tót was invited to a six-month residency at the Ecart Gallery in Geneva, during which he developed a series of street performances, which he called TÓTalJOYs. In these actions, Tót walked with banners and posters that proclaimed, “I’m glad if I can advertise on posters” and other exaggerated phrases of gladness. In these actions, Tót extended his Conceptual Gladnesses project into the space of the street, expanding his audience from specialized art viewers to the everyday public. The next year, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) awarded Tót a fellowship to study in West Berlin. For over a year, the Hungarian government refused to grant Tót permission to exit the country, but it was eventually forced to do so as a result of enormous pressure from the international press. Tót was finally allowed to travel to Germany in 1978.

The two works I Am Glad If I Can Look at the Wall and I Would Be Glad If I Could Write Something on the Other Side of the Wall (1979), both produced in Berlin, speak to the Cold War condition of division and also extend Tót’s Gladnesses series beyond the borders of Socialist Hungary. The actions took place in front of the Berlin Wall, a barrier erected in 1961 to separate the socialist East from the capitalist West. In the first action, Tót stands facing east: away from the viewer and toward the wall in the direction of his country of origin. The text proclaims his gladness that he can look at the wall. In the second action, he imagines himself on the other side, wishing he could write something on the wall.

Having finally crossed over to the West, Tót should be happy to find himself in the space of freedom. Instead, his proclaimed gladness at being able to look at the wall is tinged with irony; the wall itself is blank and uninteresting, and the camera captures Tót standing against it as though before a firing squad. At the same time, he may have in mind an image of his homeland, now blocked by the wall. Similarly, Tót’s wish to write something on the other side of the wall (that is, to return to the East in order to carry out the same activity) suggests more than it says: to write something on the other side of the wall would mean the freedom to approach the wall from the East, where armed guards kept watch and regularly shot at defectors. It is not hard to read these actions as a melancholic yearning for a state in which the wall did not create a barrier between people, causing conditions of inequality between East and West.
SELECTED WORK: **NO+, ART ACTIONS COLLECTIVE (CADA), 1983–THE PRESENT**

As the examples of Endre Tót’s Zero art and Gladnesses series demonstrate, making art under conditions of repression often meant playing games with language in order to convey a message and stay under the censor’s radar. For Tót, it was safer to imagine himself writing a message on the socialist side of the Berlin Wall than to try to storm it and put his body in the line of the guards’ fire. The art actions of the Chilean group Colectivos Acciones de Arte or Art Actions Collective (abbreviated as CADA) similarly masked their explicitly political content in poetry. However, they also insisted that art and poetry have a greater role to play in politics, conceiving of “the entire city as a museum, society as a collaborating group of artists, and life as a work of art in need of correction.”

CADA was an interdisciplinary collective founded in 1979 in Santiago, Chile, by the visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, the sociologist Fernando Balcells, the writer Diamela Eltit, and the poet Raúl Zurita. CADA was founded in the wake of Chile’s violent military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, and installed an authoritarian government that used state terror, including censorship, torture, mass killings, kidnapping, and disappearances, to silence all opposition. CADA responded to the silencing of Chilean society by staging actions that involved ordinary people and invited them to actively question the conditions of life in Chile under dictatorship.

In CADA’s first action, *To Not Starve in Art (Para no morir de hambre en el arte)*, on October 3, 1979, members of the group distributed one hundred half-liter bags of milk to residents of La Granja, a low-income neighborhood in Santiago. This simple action responded to the specific need of hunger and malnutrition due to food shortages. At the same time, it was deeply symbolic in a number of important ways. First, each bag had the label “½ liter of milk” stamped on it, echoing the ousted socialist government’s guarantee of providing a half liter of milk per child per day. The phrase would have summoned memories of a different life before the military dictatorship. Secondly, the group asked that the empty bags be returned so that they could be used to make artworks, which they would later exhibit in the gallery. Finally, the milk itself became a kind of symbolic substance.

On the day of the action, the group published a page in the popular magazine *Hoy*. They had originally wanted the page to be completely blank, except for the name CADA printed at the bottom, but the publisher would only allow them to buy the page if it included content. The text the group eventually printed was the following:

- imagine this page completely blank
- imagine this page white as the daily milk to be consumed
- imagine every corner of Chile deprived of the daily consumption of milk like blank pages to be filled

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The Presidential Palace is bombed during the 1973 military coup in Chile. CADA was founded in the wake of Chile’s violent military coup, which overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende and installed an authoritarian government.
This text conjures the poetic resonances between milk, the blank magazine page, and the wider social and political contexts of Pinochet’s Chile with its deprivations and silencing. White could be blank like the page or full and nourishing like milk. And likewise, society could be deprived of nutritious milk or—if the reader imagines it and then acts to make it so—sustaining of its population.

Many of CADA’s actions used performance and direct action in public spaces to try to transform the way Chilean citizens saw their cities and allow them to become active participants in the creative (and by extension political) process. No+ was perhaps CADA’s best known and most significant action. Like the milk action, No+ had a fairly simple premise: between the end of 1983 and 1984, members of CADA along with many collaborators would go out at night to write No+ (which reads as “no más” or “no more” in Spanish) on the walls of Santiago. The phrase seemed to invite completion, and soon people began to complete it with images, words, or phrases, like “No + dictatorship,” “No + torture,” “No + weapons,” “No + disappeared,” or “No + death.” Leaving the phrase open rather than calling for the end of something specific, as one might do with a traditional political slogan or propaganda poster, had the effect of mobilizing people in their everyday lives to start to imagine what they would like to see put an end to. As art historian Robert Neustadt explains, “the notion of the authorial subject disappeared and the work came to belong to the community, the anti-dictatorship movement.”

While the action itself is purely language-based, the way that it mobilized viewers is truly impressive. Milan Ivelic, the former director of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Santiago, even connects CADA’s No + to the eventual ouster of Pinochet in 1988: “CADA’s No +, which referred to a specific political struggle, No more Pinochet … found an extension in the … ‘No’ [vote] of the Plebiscite [on Pinochet’s rule], which soon after led to the restoration of democratic elections in the country.” Whether or not No+ actually had a measurable effect on the vote, the action penetrated into public consciousness to such an extent that it even appeared on the scoreboard of the stadium during the inauguration ceremony of Chile’s democratically elected government in 1990.

SECTION VI SUMMARY

- In the 1950s and increasingly in the 1960s, the body became a medium for artistic expression on both sides of the Iron Curtain.
- Yoko Ono’s Cut Piece (1964) invited members of the audience to come up and cut off pieces of her clothing with a pair of scissors as she knelt silently on a stage.
- This work has commonly been understood as a foundational work of feminist art whose central themes range from voyeurism, to women’s subjugation under patriarchy, to violence against women.
- However, reading the work in its specific historical and international contexts, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson has argued persuasively that Ono’s performance makes reference to the visual aspects of atomic war in a way that allows the work to deliberately address the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta used primal materials like blood, earth, fire, and water to develop the themes of magic and ritual and the sacred and the secular in ephemeral, site-specific sculptures and outlines using her body in natural environments.
- Mendieta’s Siluetas series consisted of traced or sculpted outlines of Mendieta’s body on the ground using ignited gunpowder, leaves, grass, mud, stones, other natural elements, or cloth.
- Having been a child refugee to the United States after Fidel Castro’s takeover of Cuba, Mendieta explored her Cuban heritage in Roman Catholic and Santería rituals and used her art to try to bridge the gap that she always felt from having been displaced from her family and culture at an early age.
- The Hungarian Endre Tót used language and the number zero as poetic elements that
undermined the Hungarian government’s repressions.

- Tót declared that his work had reached a “ZERO (0)” point, signaling his turn away from painting and expression and toward a Conceptual Art that used such methods as typed and printed texts, cut-up newspapers, poster actions, telegrams, postcards, rubber stamps, t-shirts, artist books, telegrams, and mail art.

- Tót developed the nearly absurd motif of “gladdnesses” to proclaim his joy at being able to do utterly mundane activities, humorously pointing to the nearly invisible regime of censorship.

- The two works *I Am Glad If I Can Look at the Wall* and *I Would Be Glad If I Could Write Something on the Other Side of the Wall* (1979), both produced in Berlin, speak to the Cold War condition of division by the wall and demonstrate a melancholic yearning for a state in which the wall did not create a barrier between people, causing conditions of inequality between East and West.

- The art actions of the Chilean group Colectivos Acciones de Arte or Art Actions Collective (abbreviated as CADA) used poetic images to respond to the silencing of Chilean society by staging actions that involved ordinary people and invited them to actively question the conditions of life in Chile under dictatorship.

- CADA’s first action, *To Not Starve in Art (Para no morir de hambre en el arte)*, distributed one hundred half-liter bags of milk to residents of a low-income neighborhood of Santiago, recalling the social welfare programs of the ousted socialist government.

- At the same time, a poetic text published simultaneously in a popular magazine invites the reader to reimagine the silence of society under dictatorial repression as being like white milk or an empty magazine page.

- Between the end of 1983 and 1984, members of CADA along with many collaborators would go out at night to write *No*+ (which reads as “no más” or “no more” in Spanish) on the walls of Santiago.

- The fact that the phrase was left open and did not call for the end of something specific, as might be done with a traditional political slogan or propaganda poster, had the effect of mobilizing people in their everyday lives to start to imagine what they would like to see come to an end.

**Important Terms**

- performance art
- body art
- site-specific
- Viennese Actionism
- Conceptual Art
- censorship
Conclusion

As we have explored throughout this resource guide, the Cold War operated through a binary logic that divided the world into two opposing sides, the capitalist West and the communist East. For each side, cultural life and cultural policies became a way to express deeply held political values, whether individualism, freedom, and democracy in the West or collective striving to build a socialist society in the East. Artistic styles—whether the “pure” abstract forms of Abstract Expressionism or Socialist Realism’s idealized images of society under construction—became tools of political expression, as well as targets of criticism from the opposing side. The distorting effects of Cold War vision made it difficult for audiences and critics from both sides of the Iron Curtain to see each other’s art on its own terms.

Many artists, aware of the Cold War’s blind spots, tried to make this political reality visible through a variety of artistic means. Pop artists, Sots artists, and Conceptual artists tried to expose the ideological underpinning of American consumer culture, Socialist Realism’s exhausted slogans, and the difficult situation of art under military dictatorship. Some artists condemned the devastating effects of war and modern technology through art that destroyed itself or brought the war home. Other artists tried to harness technologies to improve society by engaging the public through participatory art and by imagining a global community linked by the mass circulation of images and media. Performance artists made their own bodies and their viewers’ bodies into artistic media, marking the ways that bodies crossed—or were prevented from crossing—Cold War borders, encouraging viewers to participate in acts of memorialization and creating opportunities for citizens to articulate their wishes for a better world.
### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930s –</td>
<td>Many American artists, including future practitioners of Abstract Expressionism, are employed by the Federal Arts Project and other federal agencies to produce public art and document life under President Roosevelt’s New Deal. Dorothea Lange and other photographers travel around the U.S. to document the effects of the Great Depression on American farmers. Jackson Pollock works in the Communist workshop of the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros in New York. Many artists are involved in leftist politics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 23, 1932 –</td>
<td>The Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party issues the Decree on the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organizations, dissolving all independent art groups, and proposes a single Union of Soviet Artists.</td>
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<td>August 17–September 2, 1934 –</td>
<td>The First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers is held in Moscow. The Secretary of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R., Andrei Zhdanov, delivers a speech advocating for Socialist Realism as the only viable artistic style for Soviet literature and art.</td>
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<td>September 1, 1939 –</td>
<td>Hitler invades Poland, leading to the outbreak of World War II.</td>
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<td>1939 –</td>
<td>Gustav Metzger is evacuated with his brother to Great Britain from Nazi Germany; his parents stay behind and perish in the Holocaust.</td>
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<td>1943 –</td>
<td>Alberto Burri’s military unit is captured by British forces in Tunisia, and he is sent to a prisoner of war camp in Hereford, Texas. Burri is not repatriated to Italy until 1946.</td>
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<td>April 30, 1945 –</td>
<td>Hitler commits suicide, and Germany surrenders shortly thereafter.</td>
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<td>August 6 and 9, 1945 –</td>
<td>The U.S. bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki leads to Japan’s surrender. The U.S. continues to occupy Japan militarily until 1952.</td>
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<td>1948 –</td>
<td>Congress passes the Foreign Assistance Act of 1948, ushering in the European Recovery Program, also known as the Marshall Plan, and giving approximately $13 billion to help with the postwar economic recovery of Western Europe.</td>
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<td>1949 –</td>
<td>Fyodor Shurpin paints <em>The Dawn of our Fatherland.</em></td>
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<td>1948 –</td>
<td>Eduardo Paolozzi makes <em>It’s a Psychological Fact Pleasure Helps your Disposition,</em> from his collage series <em>Bunk,</em> using popular imagery from magazines and other printed matter.</td>
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<td>1949 –</td>
<td>Postwar Germany is divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany).</td>
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<td>1949–60 –</td>
<td>Burri creates hundreds of <em>Sacchi</em> using the nontraditional artistic material of burlap sacks used to transport flour and sugar.</td>
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<td>Summer 1950 –</td>
<td>Hans Namuth captures Jackson Pollock painting in more than five hundred photographs and on film.</td>
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<td>1950–53</td>
<td>The Korean War is the first military conflict of the Cold War, with the U.S.S.R. and China backing the North Korean People's Army and the U.S. and United Nations fighting alongside the pro-Western Republic of Korea. The conflict results in approximately 5 million military and civilian casualties and the continued division of the Korean peninsula.</td>
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<td>Early 1951</td>
<td>The third Yomiuri Independent exhibition in Tokyo introduces Japanese audiences to Abstract Expressionist paintings.</td>
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<td>1950s–early 1960s</td>
<td>Germany experiences rapid reconstruction and development, referred to as the “German economic miracle.”</td>
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<td>1952</td>
<td>The Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, holds its first meeting; Eduardo Paolozzi uses an epidiascope to project vernacular imagery without commentary in a gallery setting, ushering in Pop Art in Great Britain.</td>
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<td>March 5, 1953</td>
<td>Joseph Stalin dies of a heart attack. He is succeeded by Nikita Khrushchev.</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Alberto Burri paints <em>Composition</em> using burlap sacks as a support; Yoko Ono moves to the U.S. and attends Sarah Lawrence College.</td>
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<td>1953–59</td>
<td>The Cuban Revolution overthrows the military government of President Fulgencio Batista and replaces it with a revolutionary socialist state. One year later, in 1960, Operation Pedro Pan, a U.S. government program run by Catholic Charities, begins transporting 14,000 unaccompanied children out of Cuba to the United States.</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>The Gutai Art Association is founded in Osaka, Japan.</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td><em>The Family of Man</em> exhibition, curated by Edward Steichen, debuts at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Steichen’s previous MoMA exhibitions on wartime themes included <em>Road to Victory</em> (1942); <em>Power in the Pacific</em> (1945); and <em>Korea—the Impact of War in Photographs</em> (1951).</td>
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<td>Spring 1955</td>
<td>Clement Greenberg publishes his influential essay “‘American-Type’ Painting” in the quarterly magazine <em>Partisan Review</em>.</td>
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<td>October 1955</td>
<td>Kazuo Shiraga carries out his performance <em>Challenging Mud</em> in the courtyard of a Tokyo exhibition hall.</td>
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<td>1955–73</td>
<td>The U.S. is involved in a military conflict in Vietnam. The conflict is between communist North Vietnam, supported by the U.S.S.R. and China, and South Vietnam, supported by the U.S., South Korea, and other anti-communist allies. The war drags on for nearly two decades, with over a million military deaths and as many as 2 million civilian deaths. The war is regularly broadcast on U.S. television, strongly dividing American public opinion.</td>
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<td>December 1956</td>
<td>The Gutai Art Manifesto, written by Yoshihara Jirō, is published in the art magazine <em>Geijutsu Shinchō</em>.</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>Kazuo Shiraga paints <em>Untitled</em> using his feet in a form of action painting.</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Endre Tót is expelled from Budapest’s Academy of Fine Art for failing to toe the Socialist Realist party line.</td>
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<td>September 1958</td>
<td>An exhibition of Gutai art at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York introduces Kazuo Shiraga’s art to the American public; critics dismiss it as derivative of American action painting.</td>
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<td>1960–</td>
<td>Horacio Garcia-Rossi and Julio Le Parc from Argentina, Francisco Sobrino from Spain, and François Morellet, Joël Stein, and Yvaral (Jean-Pierre Vasarely) from France form the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel (Visual Art Research Group, or GRAV). They show their work in international exhibitions of Op and kinetic art throughout the 1960s.</td>
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<td>1960–</td>
<td>Clement Greenberg delivers his lecture “Modernist Painting” on Voice of America; it is published as an article in <em>Arts Yearbook</em> the following year.</td>
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<td>September 26, 1960 –</td>
<td>The first televised presidential debates take place in the U.S. between Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy, Jr.</td>
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<td>1960 –</td>
<td>Gustav Metzger creates his <em>Acid Action Painting</em>, part of his demonstration <em>Auto-Destructive Art</em> on London’s South Bank.</td>
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<td>August 13, 1961 –</td>
<td>Construction begins on the Berlin Wall, separating East and West Germany. The wall remains standing until it is brought down as a result of a popular uprising in 1989.</td>
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<td>1961–67</td>
<td>Sigmar Polke studies at the Düsseldorf Art Academy, where he meets Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg.</td>
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<td>1962 –</td>
<td>Gerald Laing paints <em>Souvenir (of the Cuban Missile Crisis Oct 16–28 1962)</em>.</td>
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<td>October 11, 1963 –</td>
<td>Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg found Capitalist Realism with the performance <em>Living with Pop—A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism</em> at the Berges furniture store in Düsseldorf.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963 –</td>
<td>Sigmar Polke paints <em>Der Wurstesser (The Sausage Eater)</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 22, 1963 –</td>
<td>U.S. President John F. Kennedy, Jr. is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Gerald Laing paints <em>Lincoln Convertible</em> depicting the assassination the following year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964 –</td>
<td>The Brazilian military, with the support of the U.S., ousts the democratically elected Labor Party government and sets up a military dictatorship, which lasts until 1985.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964 –</td>
<td>Nam June Paik immigrates to New York and begins to use a portable video camcorder in art. The following year he makes <em>Magnet TV</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965–72</td>
<td>Martha Rosler makes her photomontage series <em>Body Beautiful: Beauty Knows No Pain</em> using images from advertising and mass-market magazines to criticize women’s position in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 –</td>
<td>Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid graduate from Moscow’s Stroganov Institute of Art and Design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967–72</td>
<td>Martha Rosler makes her agitational antiwar photomontage series <em>House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969–73</td>
<td>The Brazilian “economic miracle,” a period of exceptional economic growth, takes place under the military dictatorship of President Emílio Garrastazu Médici.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 –</td>
<td>Endre Tót declares that his work has reached a ZERO (0) point, signaling his turn away from painting and toward Conceptual Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 –</td>
<td>Cildo Meireles begins his Conceptual Art project <em>Insertions into Ideological Circuits</em>, including <em>Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca-Cola Project</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 –</td>
<td>Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid paint the paradigmatic Sots Art work <em>Our Goal Is Communism!</em>, part of their <em>Sots-art</em> series, and publish their “Sots-Art Manifesto.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 –</td>
<td>Ana Mendieta makes <em>Grass on Woman</em>, foreshadowing her later <em>Siluetas</em> series of body earth works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973 –</td>
<td>Nam June Paik and technician John J. Godfrey make the video <em>Global Groove</em> for the experimental TV division of WNET/Thirteen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 11, 1973 –</td>
<td>General Augusto Pinochet overthrows Chile’s socialist government led by Salvador Allende in a violent military coup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973–77 –</td>
<td>Ana Mendieta creates a series of performative earth works called <em>Siluetas</em>, in which she documents the outline of her body in the earth, including in Oaxaca, Mexico, and later in Cuba.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 –</td>
<td>The first issues of <em>Malasartes</em> are published, including an editorial by Cildo Meireles and the Experimental Unit of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 –</td>
<td>Ana Mendieta completes her MFA degree in multimedia and video art at the University of Iowa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978 –</td>
<td>Endre Tót travels to Germany on a German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) grant. The following year, he produces his works <em>I Am Glad If I Can Look at the Wall</em> and <em>I Would Be Glad If I Could Write Something on the Other Side of the Wall</em> at the Berlin Wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979 –</td>
<td>The interdisciplinary collective CADA is founded in 1979 in Santiago, Chile. Their first action <em>To Not Starve in Art</em> involves distributing milk packets to impoverished citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983–84 –</td>
<td>CADA carries out the art action <em>No+</em>, inspiring ordinary people to complete the phrase, painted in public spaces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract Expressionism – an American art movement of the 1940s and 1950s (sometimes referred to as the New York School or action painting), encompassing a number of different styles but all linked by their use of abstract idioms to convey emotional or expressive content; the movement was used by certain critics to promote a sense of freedom, directness, virility, and rugged American individualism to viewers abroad, including in communist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

abstraction – a mode of artmaking that avoids discernible content

Art Informel – a European art movement (named by critic Michel Tapié) that flourished from the mid-1940s through the 1950s; it called for the artist’s active wrestling with the complicated, messy experience of the modern world by expressing the artist’s impulses in abstract art.

Auto-Destructive Art – a form of art that uses self-destruction as its central principle, either through natural decomposition or through an artist’s actions; it was first articulated by the artist Gustav Metzger in a manifesto. For Metzger, Auto-Destructive Art re-enacted the violence of capitalism and war in an attempt to make it visible and to condemn it in the present.

autonomy – a principle of Modernist art, articulated by critics like Clement Greenberg, in which the artwork does not refer to things in the world or attempt to teach or convince the viewer of any particular message; rather, autonomous art concerns itself only with itself, allowing the artist and viewer to fully immerse themselves in the artistic experience, which was understood by Cold War-era critics in the West as a form of freedom.

avant-garde – a term used to refer to radical art that challenges dominant modes of thinking and producing art; it comes from the military term for a small, highly skilled group of soldiers that goes ahead of the rest to explore terrain and warn of possible danger.

binary logic – a mode of thinking common in the polarized Cold War world, in which every aspect of life and culture could be reduced to good or evil, depending on the political side with which one agreed

body art – a type of performance art in which the artist uses his or her own body or those of the audience as the basis or medium for the artwork

Capitalist Realism – a short-lived form of German Pop Art advocated by Gerhard Richter, Konrad Lueg, and Sigmar Polke, among others, that used mass-produced imagery; the artists staged an art exhibition in a department store in order to parody the consumerism of German society in the wake of Germany’s “economic miracle.”

censorship – a form of political control over the free expression of ideas; throughout the Cold War, totalitarian societies used censorship to quash political or dissenting speech and art that did not follow the proscribed dictates. However, there were also times when democratic societies used mass panic to censor dissenting speech and cultural work, such as during the American Red Scare.

circulation – the modes by which ideas, objects, and currency travel through society

Conceptual Art – a form of art that began to be produced around the mid-1960s that de-emphasized art’s material properties and the viewer’s perceptual encounter with the artwork in favor of an art that explored ideas, including the artwork’s political and social conditions

consumerism – a preoccupation with acquiring consumer goods, especially in American and European societies transformed by postwar prosperity

democratic personality – a Cold War-era social theory that held that citizens could avoid falling prey to authoritarian impulses if they developed their freedom
of choice and powers of independent thinking

Existentialism – a philosophy developed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus that emphasized the individual and the individual’s ability to act in a modern world full of trauma and grief

figuration – a style of painting that uses certain visual conventions to represent things or figures in the world; the opposite of abstraction

First World, Second World, and Third World – terms used in reference to the postwar division of the world by Cold War logic, in which America, Western Europe, and the British Commonwealth countries like Australia and Canada were considered the First World; the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe were considered the Second World; and the countries not explicitly aligned with those two sides, including countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America, particularly those that had signed onto the Non-Aligned Movement, were considered the Third World

Fluxus – an international avant-garde art movement of the 1960s and 1970s that included artists from New York, Germany, and Japan whose activities often included concerts and festivals of performance

formalism – an approach to art that emphasized its formal or material qualities over any social or political message; the term was often used as a pejorative by Soviet Critics to emphasize the supposed lack of political messages in Western modernism and abstract art.

global village – a term coined by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s to suggest the potential for the mass circulation and consumption of images, media, and content by global audiences to bring people together into one connected global community

Gutai Art Association – a group of avant-garde Japanese artists active in Osaka between 1954 and 1972, led by Yoshihara Jirō; these artists experimented with performance art and action painting as well as traditional Japanese artistic traditions to try to, in their words, “advance into the unknown world.”

ideology – a system of ideas or beliefs related to politics and society that often serves as the basis for action

Independent Group – a loosely affiliated group of artists, critics, and architects that formed in 1952 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London as an alternative to the institute’s official lecture series and met as an informal discussion group until 1955; the group was dissatisfied with the conservative art theories of older critics who failed, in the group’s opinion, to properly consider the effect of consumerism and technology in modern culture.

kinetic sculpture – works of art that contain motion brought about by mechanical means or the environment; these works can be machines, mobiles, or other objects or phenomena in real motion.

Marshall Plan (1948–51) – a program of financial aid provided by the United States to help to rebuild the economies of Europe after the Second World War

Modernism – a broad cultural project that arose in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century in response to the great societal processes of Enlightenment and industrialization; Modernism sought to transform the world through the institutions of knowledge, technology, and democracy; in the fine arts, Modernism involved a turn away from academic painting and the need to accurately represent the world in favor of visual forms and pictorial devices that drew the viewer’s attention to representation itself and sought to discover the specific nature of each artistic medium. Modernist critics promoted the notion of artistic “autonomy,” a special realm for art untouched by utilitarian, commercial, or political imperatives, even while Modernism became an emblem of Western and American liberal values during the Cold War.

national culture – the culture produced by a nation and promoted by institutions like national museums that gives the nation an image of itself and its values; after World War II, many of the national cultures of Europe were discredited because they did not help prevent the rise of fascism or the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Op Art – short for “Optical Art,” an international art movement most active in the 1950s and 1960s that took advantage of optical effects or illusions to create works that were perceptually ambiguous or that seemed to vibrate or move with the viewer’s changing perspective

performance art – art that involves live events, happenings, actions, or other types of “presentations” by artists, extending the boundaries of the traditional mediums of painting and sculpture into time and space and sometimes involving the audience as participants

photomontage – the art of combining images from different photographic sources, such as mass-market
Pop Art – an international art movement that flourished in the 1960s, originating in Britain and the U.S., that was inspired by popular or mass cultural imagery, commercial design, and printing and that rejected the strong division between Modernist “high” art and mass culture

samizdat – a Russian term meaning “self-published,” referring to publications that were not published by the official Soviet publishing industry, but by private citizens, often using typewriters and carbon paper to make multiple copies at once; these could include unauthorized publications, like censored poetry and literature, political writing, or artists’ writings that did not conform to the official Socialist Realist agenda.

site-specific – when an artwork’s meaning is inextricably linked to the physical site for which it was created, and often also the site’s historical, cultural, and political histories

Socialist Realism – the official style of Soviet art, proclaimed by Andrei Zhdanov in an address to the first congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934; the style aimed “to depict reality in its revolutionary development”; although the exact style was not prescribed, most Socialist Realist artists employed an easily legible realist style of representation and chose subjects from Soviet life, such as laboring workers, the party leaders, or Soviet people during celebrations, to depict a bright socialist utopia of the future.

Sots Art – an unofficial Soviet art movement of the 1970s and 1980s that took its name from the first syllable of the Russian word for Socialist Realism (sotsialistichesky realizm), “sots,” and the “art” from Pop Art. The style, invented by the artistic duo Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, took as its subject matter the style and subjects of Socialist Realism, but mimicked it in order to make visible the role that official images and slogans played in maintaining Soviet systems of belief and power.

technocracy – a government run by technical experts or the belief that society would be more efficiently organized if decisions were made based on scientific or technical research

video art – art that uses video and/or television as its medium, either recording original imagery or using broadcast recordings; video art can be projected in a gallery, distributed as tapes or disks, or integrated into sculptural installations. Nam June Paik is considered the most prolific and recognized practitioner of video art of the twentieth century.

Viennese Actionism – a performance art movement of the 1960s that responded to the conservative political and cultural scenes of postwar Austria by using the human body and its various fluids, like blood, sweat, and excrement, in shocking and taboo-breaking theatricalized rituals.
Notes


2 For a detailed discussion of Cold War cultural policy, see Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “Culture and the Cold War in Europe,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 398–419.


7 Turner, 58.

8 This phrase and the main ideas in this section are borrowed from John J. Curley, *Global Art and the Cold War* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2018), 7.


11 “‘Avant-garde’ is a term used to refer to the most advanced art. It comes from the military term for a small, highly skilled group of soldiers that goes ahead of the rest to explore terrain and warn of possible danger.”


13 Much of the information about Burri and the interpretation of his *Sacchi* as a grappling with Modernist painting comes from Hamilton, “Making Art Matter: Alberto Burri’s *Sacchi*,” cited above.


15 “The Wild Ones” is the name of an anonymously authored 1956 article in *Time* magazine that introduced American readers to the movement; “The Irascibles” is the title of a now famous photograph of fifteen Abstract Expressionist artists taken by Nina Leen for *Life* magazine in 1950.


19 The essay was published with no revisions in *Arts Yearbook* in the following year.


23 Anfam, 106.

24 This quote is attributed to George Dondero, the Republican senator from Michigan. Guilbaut, 4.


27 Bowlt, 293.


30 Kachur, 153.


32 Barbara Rose, “Dada Then and Now,” *Art International* 3 (January 1963): 22–8; quoted in Mehring, 71.


34 Quoted in Mehring, 74.


39 Quoted in Irene V. Small, “Insertions into Historiographic Circuits,” *October* 161 (Summer 2017), 71.

40 “Introdução,” *Malasartes* 1 (September-November 1975), 4; quoted in Small, 76.

41 Small, 75.

43 Wilson, 178.
46 Rosler, 57–8.
48 Filippone, 39.
50 Woodruff, 20.
51 Woodruff, 29.
54 Hanhardt, 13.
58 Bryan-Wilson, 103.
60 Bryan-Wilson, 104.
61 Bryan-Wilson, 112.
62 Bryan-Wilson, 113.
63 Yoshimoto, Into Performance, 101.
64 Yoko Ono, email quoted in Yoshimoto, Into Performance, 79.
68 Herzberg, 151.
69 Herzberg, 173.
70 Herzberg, 177.
71 Herzberg, 177–8.
73 Roulet, 23.
74 Roulet, 21–2.
77 Kemp-Welch, 156.
78 Tumbas, “Endre Tót.”
80 Quoted in Neustadt, 166.
81 Neustadt, 171.
82 Neustadt, 171.
83 Quoted in Neustadt, 171.
84 https://www.history.com/topics/korea/korean-war.
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