Bookshelf Ambassadored: Humanities through the Arts

Chapter 1

THE HUMANITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

The Humanities: A Study of Values

Today we think of the ***humanities*** as those broad areas of human creativity and study, such as philosophy, history, social sciences, the arts, and literature, that are distinct from mathematics and the "hard" ***sciences***, mainly because in the humanities, strictly objective or scientific standards are not usually dominant.

The current separation between the humanities and the sciences reveals itself in a number of contemporary controversies. For example, the cloning of animals has been greeted by many people as a possible benefit for domestic livestock farmers. Genetically altered wheat, soybeans, and other cereals have been heralded by many scientists as a breakthrough that will produce disease-resistant crops and therefore permit us to continue to increase the world food supply. On the other hand, some people resist such modifications and purchase food identified as not being genetically altered. Scientific research into the human

genome has identified certain genes for inherited diseases, such as

breast cancer or Alzheimer's disease, that could be modified to protect individuals or their offspring. Genetic research also suggests that in a few years individuals may be able to "design" their children's intelligence, body shape, height, general appearance, and physical ability.

Scientists provide the tools for these choices. Their values are centered in science in that they value the nature of their research and their capacity to make it work in a positive way. However, the impact on humanity of such a series of dramatic changes to life brings to the fore values that clash with one another. For example, is it a positive social value for couples to decide the sex of their offspring rather than following nature's own direction? In this case who should decide if "designing" one's offspring is a positive value, the scientist or the humanist?

Even more profound is the question of cloning a human being. Once a sheep had been cloned successfully, it was clear that this science would lead directly to the possibility of a cloned human being. Some proponents of cloning support the process because we could clone a child who has died in infancy or clone a genius who has given great gifts to the world. For these people, cloning is a positive value. For others, the very thought of cloning a person is repugnant on the basis of religious belief. For still others, the idea of human cloning is objectionable because it echoes the creation of an unnatural monster, and for them it is a negative value. Because this is a worldwide problem, local laws will have limited effect on establishing a clear position on the value of cloning of all sorts. The question of how we decide on such a controversial issue is at the heart of the humanities, and some observers have pointed to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's

famous novel *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*, which in some ways enacts the conflict among these values.

These examples demonstrate that the discoveries of scientists often have tremendous impact on the values of society. Yet some scientists have declared that they merely make the discoveries and that others—presumably politicians—must decide how the discoveries are to be used. It is this last statement that brings us closest to the importance of the humanities. If many scientists believe they cannot judge how their discoveries are to be used, then we must try to understand why they give that responsibility to others. This is not to say that scientists uniformly turn such decisions over to others, for many of them are humanists as well as scientists. But the fact remains that many governments have made use of great scientific achievements without pausing to ask the "achievers" if they approved of the way their discoveries were being used. The questions are, Who decides how to use such discoveries? On what grounds should their judgments be based?

Studying the behavior of neutrinos or string theory will not help us get closer to the answer. Such study is not related to the nature of humankind but to the nature of nature. What we need is a study that will get us closer to ourselves. It should be a study that explores the reaches of human feeling in relation to ***values***—not only our own individual feelings and values but also the feelings and values of others. We need a study that will increase our sensitivity to ourselves, others, and the values in our world. To be sensitive is to perceive with insight. To be sensitive is also to feel and believe that things make a difference. Furthermore,

it involves an awareness of those aspects of values that cannot be measured by objective standards. To be sensitive is to respect the humanities, because, among other reasons, they help develop our sensitivity to values, to what is important to us as individuals.

FIGURE 1-1

Cave painting from Chauvet Caves, France. Discovered in 1994, the Chauvet Caves have yielded some of the most astonishing examples of prehistoric art the world has seen. These aurochs may have lived as many as 35,000 years ago, while the painting itself seems as modern as a contemporary work.

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There are numerous ways to approach the humanities. The way we have chosen here is the way of the arts. One of the contentions of this book is that values are clarified in enduring ways in the arts. Human beings have had the impulse to express their values since the earliest times. Ancient tools recovered from the most recent Ice Age, for example, have features designed to express an affection for beauty as well as to provide utility.

The concept of progress in the arts is problematic. Who is to say whether the cave paintings (Figure 1-1) of 30,000 years ago that were discovered in present-day France are less excellent than the work of Picasso (Figure 1-4)? Cave paintings were probably not made as works of art to be contemplated. Getting to them in the caves is almost always difficult, and they are very hard to see. They seem to have been made for a practical purpose, such as improving the prospects for the hunt. Yet the work reveals something about the power, grace, and beauty of all the animals it portrayed. These cave paintings function now as works of art. From the beginning, our species instinctively had an interest in making revealing forms.

Among the numerous ways to approach the humanities, we have

chosen the way of the arts because, as we shall try to elucidate, the arts clarify or reveal values. As we deepen our understanding of the arts, we necessarily deepen our understanding of values. We will study our experience with works of art as well as the values others

associate with them, and in this process we will also educate ourselves about our own values.

Because a value is something that matters, engagement with art—the illumination of values—enriches the quality of our lives significantly. Moreover, the *subject matter* of art—what it is about—is not limited to the beautiful and the pleasant, the bright sides of life. Art may also include and help us understand the dark sides—the ugly, the painful, and the tragic. And when it does and when we get it, we are better able to come to grips with those dark sides of life.

Art brings us into direct communication with others. As Carlos Fuentes wrote in *The Buried Mirror,* "People and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves." Art reveals the essence of our existence.

Art, Commerce, and Taste

When the great paintings of the Italian Renaissance were being made, their ultimate value hinged on how good they were, how fully they expressed the values—usually religious but sometimes political—that the culture expected. Michelangelo's great, heroic-sized statue of

David in Florence was admired for its representation of the values of self-government by the small city-state as well as for its simple beauty of proportion. No dollar figure was attached to the great works of this period—except for the price paid to the artists. Once these works were in place, no one expressed admiration for them because they would cost a great deal in the marketplace.

Today the art world has changed profoundly and is sometimes thought to be art of an essentially commercial enterprise. Great paintings today change hands for tens of millions of dollars. Moreover, the taste of the public shifts constantly. Movies, for example, survive or fail on the basis of the number of people they appeal to. Therefore, a film is often thought good only if it makes money. As a result, film producers make every effort to cash in on current popular tastes, often by making sequels until the public's taste changes—for example, the *Batman* series (1989 to 2017). The *Star Wars* series (1977 to 2019 [projected]) cashed in on the needs of science-fiction fans whose taste in films is excited by the futuristic details and the narrative of danger and excitement of space travel. These are good films despite the emphasis on commercial success. But in some ways they are also limited by the demands of the marketplace.

Our study of the humanities emphasizes that commercial success is not the most important guide to excellence in the arts. The long-term success of works of art depends on their ability to interpret human experience at a level of complexity that warrants examination and reexamination. Many commercially successful works give us what we think we want rather than what we really need with reference to insight and understanding. By satisfying us in an immediate and superficial way, commercial art can dull us to the possibilities of complex, more

deeply satisfying art.

Everyone has limitations as a perceiver of art. Sometimes we assume that we have developed our taste and that any effort to change it is bad form. The saying “Matters

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of taste are not disputable” can be credited with making many of us feel righteous about our own taste. What the saying means is that there is no accounting for what people like in the arts, for beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Thus, there is no use in trying to educate anyone about the arts. Obviously we disagree. We believe that all of us can and should be educated about the arts and should learn to respond to as wide a variety of the arts as possible: from jazz to string quartets, from Charlie Chaplin to Steven Spielberg, from Lewis Carroll to T. S. Eliot, from folk art to Picasso. Most of us defend our taste because anyone who challenges it challenges our deep feelings. Anyone who tries to change our responses to art is really trying to get inside our minds. If we fail to understand its purpose, this kind of persuasion naturally arouses resistance.

For us, the study of the arts penetrates beyond facts to the values that evoke our feelings—the way a succession of Eric Clapton’s guitar chords playing the blues can be electrifying, or the way song lyrics can give us a chill. In other words, we want to go beyond the facts about a work of art and get to the values revealed in the work. How many times have we found ourselves liking something that, months or years before, we could not stand? And how often do we find ourselves now disliking what we previously judged a masterpiece? Generally we can say the work of art remains the same. It is we who change. We learn to

recognize the values illuminated in such works as well as to understand the ways they are expressed. Such development is the meaning of "education" in the sense in which we have been using the term.

Responses to Art

Our responses to art usually involve processes so complex that they can never be fully tracked down or analyzed. At first they can only be hinted at when we talk about them. However, further education in the arts permits us to observe more closely and thereby respond more intensely to the content of the work. This is true, we believe, even with "easy" art, such as exceptionally beautiful works—for example, those by Giorgione (Figure 2-9), Cézanne (Figure 2-4), and O'Keeffe (Figure 4-12). Such gorgeous works generally are responded to with immediate satisfaction. What more needs to be done? If art were only of the beautiful, textbooks such as this would never find many users. But we think more needs to be done, even with the beautiful. We will begin, however, with three works that obviously are not beautiful.

The Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2) is a highly emotional painting, in the sense that the work seems to demand a strong emotional response. What we see is the huge head of a baby crying and, then, as if issuing from its own mouth, the baby himself. What kinds of ***emotions*** do you find stirring in yourself as you look at this painting? What kinds of emotions do you feel are expressed in the painting? Your own emotional responses—such as shock; pity for the child; irritation at a destructive, mechanical society; or any other nameable emotion—do not sum up the painting. However, they are an important starting point, since Siqueiros paints in such a

way as to evoke emotion, and our understanding of the painting increases as we examine the means by which this evocation is achieved.

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FIGURE 1-2

David Alfaro Siqueiros, Mexican, 1896–1974, *Echo of a Scream*. 1937. Enamel on wood, 48 × 36 inches (121.9 × 91.4 cm). Gift of Edward M. M. Warburg. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Siqueiros, a famous Mexican muralist, fought during the Mexican Revolution and possessed a powerful political sensibility, much of which found its way into his art. He painted some of his works in prison, held there for his political convictions. In the 1930s he centered his attention on the Spanish Civil War, represented here.

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PERCEPTION KEY *Echo of a Scream*

1. What are the important distortions in the painting?
2. What effect does the distortion of the baby's head have on you?
3. Why is the scream described as an echo?
4. What are the objects on the ground around the baby? How do they relate to the baby?
5. How does the red cloth on the baby intensify your emotional response to the painting?

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FIGURE 1-3

Peter Blume, 1906–1992, *The Eternal City*. 1934–1937. Dated on painting 1937. Oil on composition board, 34 × 47? inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. Born in Russia, Blume came to America when he was six. His paintings are marked by a strong interest in what is

now known as magic realism, interleaving time and place and the dead and the living in an emotional space that confronts the viewer as a challenge. He condemned the tyrant dictators of the first half of the twentieth century.

Art ©The Education Alliance, Inc./Estate of Peter Blume/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

Study another work, very close in temperament to Siqueiros's painting: *The Eternal City* by the American painter Peter Blume (Figure 1-3). After attending carefully to the kinds of responses awakened by *The Eternal City,* take note of some background information about the painting that you may not know. The year of this painting is the same as that of *Echo of a Scream*: 1937. *The Eternal City* is a name reserved for only one city in the world—Rome. In 1937 the world was on the verge of world war: Fascists were in power in Italy and the Nazis in Germany. In the center of the painting is the Roman Forum, close to where Julius Caesar, the alleged tyrant, was murdered by Brutus. But here we see fascist Blackshirts, the modern tyrants, beating people. In a niche at the left is a figure of Christ, and beneath him (hard to see) is a crippled beggar woman. Near her are ruins of Roman statuary. The enlarged and distorted head, wriggling out like a jack-in-the-box, is that of Mussolini, the man who invented fascism and the Blackshirts. Study the painting closely again. Has your response to the painting changed?

PERCEPTION KEY Siqueiros and Blume

1. What common ingredients do you find in the Blume and Siqueiros paintings?

2. Is your reaction to the Blume similar to or distinct from your reaction to the Siqueiros?

3. Is the effect of the distortions similar or different?

4. How are colors used in each painting? Are the colors those of the natural world, or do they suggest an artificial environment? Are they distorted for effect?

5. With reference to the objects and events represented in each painting, do you think the paintings are comparable? If so, in what ways?

6. With the Blume, are there any natural objects in the painting that suggest the vitality of the Eternal City?

7. What political values are revealed in these two paintings?

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Before going on to the next painting, which is quite different in character, we will make some observations about what we have said, however briefly, about the Blume. With added knowledge about its cultural and political implications—what we shall call the background of the painting—your responses to *The Eternal City* may have changed. Ideally they should have become more focused, intense, and certain. Why? The painting is surely the same physical object you looked at originally. Nothing has changed in that object. Therefore, something has changed because something has been added to you, information that the general viewer of the painting in 1937 would have known and would have responded to more emotionally than viewers do now. Consider how a Fascist, on the one hand, or an Italian humanist and lover of Roman culture, on the other hand, would have reacted to this painting in 1937.

A full experience of this painting is not unidimensional but multidimensional. Moreover, "knowledge about" a work of art can lead to "knowledge of " the work of art, which implies a richer experience. This is important as a basic principle, since it means that we can be educated about what is in a work of art, such as its shapes, objects, and ***structure***, as well as what is external to a work, such as its political references. It means we can learn to respond more completely. It also means that artists such as Blume sometimes produce works that demand background information if we are to appreciate them fully. This is particularly true of art that refers to historical circumstances and personages. Sometimes we may find ourselves unable to respond successfully to a work of art because we lack the background knowledge the artist presupposes.

Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4), one of the most famous paintings of the twentieth century, is also dated 1937. Its title comes from the name of an old Spanish town that was bombed during the Spanish Civil War —the first aerial bombing of noncombatant civilians in modern warfare. Examine this painting carefully.

FIGURE 1-4

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*. 1937. Oil on canvas, 11 feet 6 inches × 25 feet 8 inches. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain. Ordinarily Picasso was not a political painter. During World War II he was a citizen of Spain, a neutral country. But the Spanish Civil War excited him to create one of the world's greatest modern paintings, a record of the German bombing of a small Spanish town, Guernica. When a Nazi officer saw the painting he said to Picasso, "Did you do this?" Picasso answered scornfully, "No, you did."

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PERCEPTION KEY *Guernica*

1. Distortion is powerfully evident in this painting. How does its function differ from that of the distortion in Blume's *The Eternal City* or Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream*?

2. What are the most prominent objects in the painting? What seems to be the relationship of the animals to the humans?

3. The figures in the painting are organized by underlying geometric forms. What are they and how do they focus your attention? Is the formal organization strong or weak?

4. How does your eye move across the painting? Do you begin at the left, the right, or the middle? This is a gigantic painting, over twenty-five feet long. How must one view it to take it all in? Why is it so large?

5. Some viewers have considered the organization of the images to be chaotic. Do you agree? If so, what would be the function of chaos in this painting?

6. We know from history that *Guernica* memorializes the Nazi bombing of the town of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War in 1937. What is the subject matter of *Guernica*—what the work is about: War? Death? Horror? Suffering? Fascism? Or something else?

7. Which of these paintings by Blume, Siqueiros, and Picasso makes the most powerful statement about the human condition?

The next painting (Figure 1-5), featured in "Experiencing: The *Mona Lisa,*" is by Leonardo da Vinci, arguably one of the greatest painters of

the Italian Renaissance. Da Vinci is a household name in part because of this painting. Despite the lack of a political or historically relevant subject matter, the *Mona Lisa,* with its tense pose and enigmatic expression, has become possibly the most famous work of art in the West.

EXPERIENCING The *Mona Lisa*

1. Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* is one of the most famous paintings in the history of art. What, in your opinion, makes this painting noteworthy?

2. Because this painting is so familiar, it has sometimes been treated as if it were a cliché, an overworked image. In several cases it has been treated with satirical scorn. Why would any artist want to make fun of this painting? Is it a cliché, or are you able to look at it as if for the first time?

3. Unlike the works of Siqueiros, Blume, and Picasso, this painting has no obvious connections to historical circumstances that might intrude on your responses to its formal qualities. How does a lack of context affect your understanding of the painting?

4. It has been pointed out that the landscape on the left and the landscape on the right are totally different. If that judgment is correct, why do you think Leonardo made such a decision? What moods do the landscapes suggest?

5. The woman portrayed may be Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo, the wife of a local businessman, and the painting has long been known in Italy as *La Gioconda*. Is it necessary to our sense of

participation that we know who the sitter is, or that we know that Leonardo kept this painting with him throughout his life and took it wherever he went?

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Experiencing a painting as frequently reproduced as *Mona Lisa*, which is visited by millions of people every year at the Louvre in Paris, takes most of us some special effort. Unless we study the painting as if it were new to us, we will simply see it as an icon of high culture rather than as a painting with a formal power and a lasting value. Because it is used in advertisements and on mouse pads, playing cards, jigsaw puzzles, and a host of other banal locations, we might see this as a cliché.

However, we are also fortunate in that we see the painting as itself, apart from any social or historical events, and in a location that is almost magical or mythical. The landscape may be unreal, fantastic, and suggestive of a world of mystical opportunity. Certainly it emphasizes mystery. Whoever this woman is, she is concentrating in an unusual fashion on the viewer, whether we imagine it is us or it is Leonardo whom she contemplates. A study of her expression reminds us that for generations the "Gioconda smile" has teased authors and critics with its mystery. Is she making an erotic suggestion in that smile, or is it a smile of self-satisfaction? Or is it a smile of tolerance, suggesting that she is just waiting for this sitting to be done? Her expression has been the most intriguing of virtually any portrait subject in any museum in the world. It is no surprise, then, that Leonardo kept this for himself, although we must wonder whether he was commissioned for the painting and for some reason did not want to deliver it.

FIGURE 1-5

Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*. Circa 1503–1506. Oil on panel, 30¼ × 21 inches. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Leonardo's most personal picture has sometimes been hailed as a psychologically powerful painting because of the power of Mona Lisa's gaze, which virtually rivets the viewer to the spot. The painting is now protected under glass and, while always surrounded by a crowd of viewers, its small size proportional to its reputation has sometimes disappointed viewers because it is so hard to see. And in a crowd it is impossible to contemplate.

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The arresting quality of the painting is in part because of the enigmatic expression on Mona Lisa's face, but the form of the painting is also arresting. Leonardo has posed her so that her head is the top of an isosceles triangle in which her face glows in contrast with her dark clothing. Her hands, expressive and radiant, create a strong diagonal, leading to the base of the triangle. Her shoulders are turned at a significant angle so that her pose is not really comfortable, not easy to maintain for a long time. However, her position is visually arresting because it imparts a tension to the entire painting that contributes to our response to it as a powerful object.

The most savage satirical treatment of this painting is the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* (see Figure 14-15). By parodying this work, Duchamp thumbed his nose at high culture in 1919, after World War I, and after the *Mona Lisa* had assumed its role as an epitome of high art. His work was an expression of disgust at the middle and upper classes, which had gone so enthusiastically into a war of attrition that brought Europe to the verge of self-destruction.

Structure and Artistic Form

Your responses to the *Mona Lisa* are probably different from those you have when viewing the other paintings in this chapter, but why? You

might reply that the *Mona Lisa* is hypnotizing, a carefully structured painting depending on a subtle but basic geometric form, the triangle. Such structures, while operating subconsciously, are

obvious on analysis. Like all structural elements of the artistic form of a painting, they affect us deeply even when we are not aware of them. We have the capacity to respond to pure form even in paintings in which objects and events are portrayed. Thus, responding to *The Eternal City* will involve responding not just to an interpretation of fascism taking hold in Italy but also to the ***sensuous*** surface of the painting. This is certainly true of *Echo of a Scream*; if you look again at that painting, you will see not only that its sensuous surface is interesting intrinsically but also that it deepens your response to what is represented. Because we often respond to artistic form without being conscious that it is affecting us, the painter must make the structure interesting. Consider the contrast between the simplicity of the structure of the *Mona Lisa* and the urgent complexity of the structures of the Siqueiros and the Blume.

The composition of any painting can be analyzed because any painting has to be organized: Parts have to be interrelated. Moreover, it is important to think carefully about the composition of individual paintings. This is particularly true of paintings one does not respond to immediately—of "difficult" or apparently uninteresting paintings. Often the analysis of structure can help us gain access to such paintings so that they become genuinely exciting.

PERCEPTION KEY *The Eternal City*

1. Sketch the basic geometric shapes of the painting.

2. Do these shapes relate to one another in such a way as to help reveal the obscenity of fascism? If so, how?

Artistic form is a composition or structure that makes something—a subject matter—more meaningful. The Siqueiros, Blume, and Picasso reveal something about the horrors of war and fascism. But what does the *Mona Lisa* reveal? Perhaps just the form and structure? For us, structures or forms that do not give us insight are not artistic forms. Some critics will argue the point. This major question will be pursued throughout the text.

Perception

We are not likely to respond sensitively to a work of art that we do not perceive properly. What is less obvious is what we referred to previously—the fact that we can often give our attention to a work of art and still not perceive very much. The reason for this should be clear from our previous discussion. Frequently we need to know something about the background of a work of art that would aid our perception. Anyone who did not know something about the history of Rome, or who Christ was, or what fascism was, or what Mussolini meant to the world would have a difficult time making sense of *The Eternal City*. But it is also true that anyone who could not perceive Blume's composition might have a completely superficial response to the painting. Such a person could indeed know all about the background and understand the symbolic statements made by the painting, but that is only part

of the painting. From seeing what da Vinci can do with form, structure, pose, and expression, you can understand that the formal qualities of a painting are neither accidental nor unimportant. In Blume's painting, the form focuses attention and organizes our perceptions by establishing the relationships between the parts.

Abstract Ideas and Concrete Images

Composition is basic in all the arts. Artistic form is essential to the success of any art object. To perceive any work of art adequately, we must perceive its structure. Examine the following poem by Robert Herrick (1591-1674) and consider the purpose of its shape. This is one of many shaped poems designed to have a visual formal structure that somehow illuminates its subject matter.

THE PILLAR OF FAME

Fame's pillar here at last we set,
Out-during marble, brass or jet;
Charmed and enchanted so
As to withstand the blow
Of overthrow;
Nor shall the seas,
Or OUTRAGES
Of storms, o'erbear
What we uprear;
Tho' Kingdoms fall,
This pillar never shall
Decline or waste at all;
But stand forever by his own
Firm and well-fixed foundation.

PERCEPTION KEY "The Pillar of Fame"

1. What is a pillar and in what art form are pillars used?
2. In what sense is fame the subject matter of the poem?
3. Herrick is using a number of metaphors in this poem. How many can you identify? What seems to be their purpose?
4. In what sense is the shape of the poem a metaphor?
5. To whom does the word "his" in the last line refer?
6. The poem includes abstract ideas and concrete things. What is abstract here? And what is the function of the concrete references?

Robert Herrick, a seventeenth-century poet, valued both honor and fame. During the English Civil War he lost his job as a clergyman because he honored his faith and refused to abandon his king. He hoped to achieve fame as a poet, in imitation of the great Roman poets. His "outrages" and "storms" refer to the war and the decade following, in which he stayed in self-exile after the "overthrow" of King Charles I. He portrayed fame as a pillar because pillars hold up buildings, and when the buildings become ruins pillars often survive as testimony to greatness. Herrick hoped his poem

would endure longer than physical objects, such as marble, brass, and jet (a black precious jewel made of coal), because fame is an abstraction and cannot wear or erode. Shaping the poem to resemble

a pillar with a capital and a stylobate (foundation) is an example of wit. When he wrote poetry, one of Herrick's greatest achievements was the expression of wit, a poetic expression of intelligence and understanding. This poem achieves the blending of ideas and objects, of the abstract and the concrete, through its structure. The poem is a concrete expression of an abstract idea.

In *Paradise Lost,* John Milton describes hell as a place with "Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death." Now, neither you nor the poet has ever seen "shades of death," although the idea is in Psalm 23, "the valley of the shadow of death." Milton gets away with describing hell this way because he has linked the abstract idea of shades of death to so many concrete images in this single line. He is giving us images that suggest the mood of hell just as much as they describe the landscape, and we realize that he gives us so many topographic details in order to get us ready for the last detail—the abstract idea of shades of death.

There is much more to be said about poetry, of course, but on a preliminary level poetry worked in much the same way in the seventeenth-century England of Milton as it does in contemporary America. The same principles are at work: Described objects or events are used as a means of bringing abstract ideas to life. The descriptions take on a wider and deeper significance—wider in the sense that the descriptions are connected with the larger scope of abstract ideas, deeper in the sense that because of these descriptions the abstract ideas become vividly focused and more meaningful.

The following poem is highly complex: the memory of an older culture (simplicity, in this poem) and the consideration of a newer culture (complexity). It is an African poem by the contemporary Nigerian poet

Gabriel Okara; and knowing that it is African, we can begin to appreciate the extreme complexity of Okara's feelings about the clash of the old and new cultures. He symbolizes the clash in terms of music, and he opposes two musical instruments: the drum and the piano. They stand, respectively, for the African and the European cultures. But even beyond the musical images that abound in this poem, look closely at the images of nature, the pictures of the panther and leopard, and see how Okara imagines them.

PIANO AND DRUMS

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouch with spears poised;
And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
topples the years and at once I'm
in my mother's lap a suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts

in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.
Then I hear a wailing piano

solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
of far-away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a daggerpoint.
And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.

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PERCEPTION KEY "Piano and Drums"

1. What are the most important physical objects in the poem? What cultural significance do they have?

2. Why do you think Okara chose the drum and the piano to help reveal the clash between the two cultures? Where are his allegiances?

Such a poem speaks directly to legions of the current generation of Africans. But consider some points in light of what we have said earlier. In order to perceive the kind of emotional struggle that Okara talks about—the subject matter of the poem—we need to know

something about Africa and the struggle African nations have in modernizing themselves along the lines of more technologically advanced nations. We also need to know something of the history of Africa and the fact that European nations, such as Britain in the case of Nigeria, once controlled much of Africa. Knowing these things, we know, then, that there is no thought of the "I" of the poem accepting the "complex ways" of the new culture without qualification. The "I" does not think of the culture of the piano as manifestly superior to the culture of the drum. That is why the labyrinth of complexities ends at a "daggerpoint." The new culture is a mixed blessing.

We have argued that the perception of a work of art is aided by background information and that sensitive perception must be aware of form, at least implicitly. But we believe there is much more to sensitive perception. Somehow the form of a work of art is an artistic form that clarifies or reveals values, and our response is intensified by our awareness of those revealed values. But how does artistic form do this? And how does this awareness come to us? In the next chapter we shall consider these questions, and in doing so we will also raise that most important question, What is a work of art? Once we have examined each of the arts, it will be clear, we hope, that the principles developed in these opening chapters are equally applicable to all the arts.

Participate, analyze, and participate again with Edward Hopper's *Early Sunday Morning* (Figure 1-6).

FIGURE 1-6

Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning*. 1930. Oil on canvas, 35 × 60 inches. When the Whitney

Museum of American Art purchased *Early Sunday Morning* in 1930, it was their most expensive acquisition. Hopper's work, centered in New York's Greenwich Village, revealed the character of city life. His colors—vibrant, intense—and the early morning light—strong and unyielding—created indelible images of the city during the Great Depression.

©Whitney Museum of American Art/akg-images

PERCEPTION KEY *Early Sunday Morning*

1. If you did not know the title of the painting, what emotions might it excite in you?
2. How does Hopper's title, *Early Sunday Morning*, direct or enrich your emotional response?
3. What are the concrete objects represented in the painting? Which are most obvious and visually demanding? Which provide you with the most information about the scene?
4. What abstract ideas are suggested by the painting?
5. Is this an urban or rural scene? Why is no one present in the painting?
6. Would the painting be any different if it were titled *Early Wednesday Morning*?
7. What is the subject matter of the painting?

On one level the subject matter is a city street scene. Packed human habitation is portrayed, but no human being is in sight (incidentally but noteworthy, a human figure originally placed behind one of the windows was painted out). We seem to be at the scene alone on New York's Seventh Avenue. We seem to be strangely located across the

street at about the level of the second-story windows. We see storefronts,

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concrete examples of business activity. But above the storefronts are windows, some with curtains, some open, some closed, implying the presence of people in their homes. The barber pole suggests a particular neighborhood. What is missing is people to make the street active. Are they at church? Or is the painting portraying loneliness of the kind that is sometimes associated with living in a city? Loneliness is usually accompanied by anxiety. And anxiety is expressed by the silent windows, especially the ominous dark storefronts, the mysterious translucent lighting, and the strange dark rectangle (what is it?) on the upper right. The street and buildings, despite their rectilinear format, seem to lean slightly downhill to the left, pushed by the shadows, especially the unexplainable, weird, flaglike one wrapping over the second window on the left of the second story. Even the bright barber pole is tilted to the left, the tilt accentuated by the uprightness of the door and window frames in the background and the wonderfully painted, toadlike fire hydrant. These subtle oddities of the scene accent our separateness.

Summary

Unlike scientists, humanists generally do not use strictly objective standards. The arts reveal values; other humanities study values. “Artistic form” refers to the structure or organization of a work of art. Values are clarified or revealed by a work of art. Judging from the most ancient efforts to make things, we can assert that the arts represent one of the most basic human activities. They satisfy a need to explore

and express the values that link us together. By observing our responses to a work of art and examining the means by which the artist evokes those responses, we can deepen our understanding of art. Our approach to the humanities is through the arts, and our taste in art connects with our deep feelings. Yet our taste is continually improved by experience and education. Background information about a work of art and increased sensitivity to its artistic form intensify our responses.

VitalSource Bookshelf: Humanities through the Arts

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Chapter 2

WHAT IS A WORK OF ART?

No definition for a ***work of art*** seems completely adequate, and none is universally accepted. We shall not propose a definition here, therefore, but rather attempt to clarify some criteria or distinctions that can help us identify works of art. Since the term "work of art" implies the concept of "making" in two of its words—"work" and "art" (short for "artifice")—a work of art is usually said to be something made by a person. Hence, sunsets, beautiful trees, "found" natural objects such as grained driftwood, "paintings" by insects or songs by birds, and a host of other natural phenomena are not considered works of art, despite their beauty. You may not wish to accept the proposal that a work of art must be of human origin, but if you do accept it, consider the construction shown in Figure 2-1, Jim Dine's *Shovel*.

Shovel is part of a valuable collection and was first shown at an art gallery in New York City. Furthermore, Dine is considered an important American artist. However, he did not make the shovel himself. Like most shovels, the one in his construction, although designed by a person, was mass-produced. Dine mounted the shovel in front of a

painted panel and presented this construction for serious consideration. The construction is described as "mixed media," meaning it consists of several materials: paint, wood, a cord, and metal. Is *Shovel* a work of art?

We can hardly discredit the construction as a work of art simply because Dine did not make the shovel; after all, we often accept objects manufactured to specification by factories as genuine works of sculpture (see the Calder construction,

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Figure 5-10). ***Collages*** by Picasso and Braque, which include objects such as paper and nails mounted on a panel, are generally accepted as works of art. Museums have even accepted objects such as a signed urinal by Marcel Duchamp, one of the ***Dadaist*** artists of the early twentieth century, which in many ways anticipated the works of Dine, Warhol, and others in the ***Pop Art*** movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

FIGURE 2-1

Jim Dine, *Shovel.* 1962. Mixed media. Using off-the-shelf products, Dine makes a statement about the possibilities of art.

©2017 Jim Dine/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery

Identifying Art Conceptually

Three criteria for determining whether something is a work of art are that (1) the object or event is made by an artist, (2) the object or event is intended to be a work of art by its maker, and (3) recognized experts agree that it is a work of art. Unfortunately, one cannot always determine whether a work meets these criteria only by perceiving it. In

many cases, for instance, we may confront an object such as *Shovel* (Figure 2-1) and not know whether Dine constructed the shovel, thus not satisfying the first criterion that the object be made by an artist; or whether Dine intended it to be a work of art; or whether experts agree that it is a work of art. In fact, Dine did not make this particular shovel, but because this fact cannot be established by perception, one has to be told.

PERCEPTION KEY Identifying a Work of Art

1. Why not simply identify a work of art as what an artist makes?

2. If Dine actually made the shovel, would *Shovel* then unquestionably be a work of art?

3. Suppose Dine made the shovel, and it was absolutely perfect in the sense that it could not be readily distinguished from a mass-produced shovel. Would that kind of perfection make the piece more a work of art or less a work of art? Suppose Dine did not make the shovel but did make the panel and the box. Then would it seem easier to identify *Shovel* as a work of art?

4. Find people who hold opposing views about whether *Shovel* is a work of art. Ask them to point out what it is about the object itself that qualifies it for or disqualifies it from being identified as a work of art.

Identifying art conceptually seems to us as not very useful. Because someone intends to make a work of art tells us little. It is the *made* rather than the *making* that counts. The third criterion—the judgment of experts—is important but debatable.

Identifying Art Perceptually

Perception, what we can observe, and ***conception***, what we know or think we know, are closely related. We often recognize an object because it conforms to our conception of it. For example, in architecture we recognize churches and office buildings as distinct because of our conception of what churches and office buildings are supposed to look like. The ways of identifying a work of art mentioned in the previous

section depend on the conceptions of the artist and experts on art and not enough on our perceptions of the work itself.

We suggest an approach here that is simple and flexible and that depends largely on perception. The distinctions of this approach will not lead us necessarily to a definition of art, but they will offer us a way to examine objects and events with reference to whether they possess artistically perceivable qualities. And in some cases at least, it should bring us to reasonable grounds for distinguishing certain objects or events as art. We will consider four basic terms related primarily to the perceptual nature of a work of art:

Artistic form″:?the organization of a medium that results in clarifying some subject matter

Participation″:?sustained attention and loss of self-awareness

Subject matter″:?some value expressed in the work of art

Content″:?the interpretation of subject matter

Understanding any one of these terms requires an understanding of the others. Thus, we will follow what may appear to be an illogical order: artistic form; participation; participation and artistic form; content; subject matter; subject matter and artistic form; and, finally, participation, artistic form, and content.

Artistic Form

All objects and events have form. They are bounded by limits of time and space, and they have parts with distinguishable relationships to one another. Form is the interrelationships of part to part and part to whole. To say that some object or event has form means it has some degree of perceptible unity. To say that something has ***artistic form***, however, usually implies a strong degree of perceptible unity. It is artistic form that distinguishes a work of art from objects or events that are not works of art.

Artistic form implies that the parts we perceive—for example, line, color, texture, shape, and space in a painting—have been unified for the most profound effect possible. That effect is revelatory. Artistic form reveals, clarifies, enlightens, and gives fresh meaning to something valuable in life, some subject matter. A form that lacks a significant degree of unity is unlikely to accomplish this. Our daily experiences usually are characterized more by disunity than by unity. Consider, for instance, the order of your experiences during a typical day or even a segment of that day. Compare that order with the order most novelists give to the experiences of their characters. One impulse for reading novels is to experience the tight unity that artistic form usually imposes, a unity almost none of us comes close to achieving in our daily lives. Much the same is true of music. Noises

and random tones in everyday experience lack the order that most composers impose.

Since strong, perceptible unity appears so infrequently in nature, we tend to value the perceptible unity of artistic form. Works of art differ in the power of their unity. If that power is weak, then the question arises: Is this a work of art? Consider Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Figure 4-10) with reference to its artistic form. If its parts were not carefully proportioned in the overall structure of the painting, the tight balance that produces a strong unity would be lost. Mondrian was so

concerned with this balance that he often measured the areas of lines and rectangles in his works to be sure they had a clear, almost mathematical, relationship to the totality. Of course, disunity or playing against expectations of unity can also be artistically useful at times. Some artists realize how strong the impulse toward unity is in those who have perceived many works of art. For some people, the contemporary attitude toward the loose organization of formal elements is a norm, and the highly unified work of art is thought of as old-fashioned. However, it seems that the effects achieved by a lesser degree of unity succeed only because we recognize them as departures from our well-known, highly organized forms.

Artistic form, we have suggested, is likely to involve a high degree of perceptible unity. But how do we determine what is a high degree? And if we cannot be clear about this, how can this distinction be helpful in distinguishing works of art from things that are not works of art? A very strong unity does not *necessarily* identify a work of art.

That formal unity must give us insight into something important.

Consider the news photograph—taken on one of the main streets of Saigon in February 1968 by Eddie Adams, an Associated Press photographer—showing Brigadier General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, then South Vietnam's national police chief, killing a Vietcong captive (Figure 2-2). Adams stated that his picture was an accident, that his hand moved the camera reflexively as he saw the general raise the revolver. The lens of the camera was set in such a way that the background was thrown out of focus. The blurring of the background helped bring out the drama of the foreground scene. Does this photograph have a high degree of perceptible unity? Certainly the experience of the photographer is evident. Not many amateur photographers would have had enough skill to catch such a fleeting event with such stark clarity. If an amateur

FIGURE 2-2

Eddie Adams, *Execution in Saigon*. 1968. Silver halide. Adams captured General Loan's execution of a Vietcong captive. He said later, "The general killed the Vietcong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world."

©Eddie Adams/AP Photo

FIGURE 2-3

Francisco Goya, *May 3, 1808*. 1814–1815. Oil on canvas, 8 feet 9 inches × 13 feet 4 inches. The Prado, Madrid. Goya's painting of Napoleonic soldiers executing Spanish guerrillas the day after the Madrid insurrection portrays the faces of the victims, but not of the killers.

©Copyright of the image Museo Nacional del Prado/Art Resource, NY

had accomplished this, we would be inclined to believe that it was more luck than skill. Adams's skill in catching the scene is even more evident, and he risked his life to get it. But do we admire this work the

way we admire Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2)? Do we experience these two works in the same basic way?

Compare a painting of a somewhat similar subject matter—Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3). Goya chose the most terrible moment, that split second before the crash of the guns. There is no doubt that the executions will go on. The desolate mountain pushing down from the left blocks escape, while from the right the firing squad relentlessly hunches forward. The soldiers' thick legs—planted wide apart and parallel—support like sturdy pillars the blind, pressing wall formed by their backs. These are men of a military machine. Their rifles, flashing in the bleak light of the ghastly lantern, thrust out as if they belonged to their bodies. It is unimaginable that any of these men would defy the command of their superiors. In the dead of night, the doomed are backed up against the mountain like animals ready for slaughter. One man flings up his arms in a gesture of utter despair—or is it defiance? The uncertainty increases the intensity of our attention. Most of the rest of the men bury their faces, while a few, with eyes staring out of their sockets, glance out at what they cannot help seeing—the sprawling dead smeared in blood.

With the photograph of the execution in Vietnam, despite its immediate and powerful attraction, it takes only a glance or two to grasp what is presented. Undivided attention, perhaps, is necessary to become aware of the significance of the event, but not sustained attention. In fact, to take careful notice of all the details—such as the

patterns on the prisoner's shirt—does not add to our awareness of the significance of the photograph. If anything, our awareness will be

sharper and more productive if we avoid such detailed examination. Is such the case with the Goya? We believe not. Indeed, without sustained attention to the details of this work, we would miss most of what is revealed. For example, block out everything but the dark shadow at the bottom right. Note how different that shadow appears when it is isolated. We must see the details individually and collectively, as they work together. Unless we are aware of their collaboration, we are not going to grasp fully the total form.

Close examination of the Adams photograph reveals several efforts to increase the unity and thus the power of the print. For example, the flak jacket of General Loan has been darkened so as to remove distracting details. The buildings in the background have been "dodged out" (held back in printing so that they are not fully visible). The shadows of trees on the road have been softened so as to lead the eye inexorably to the hand that holds the gun. The space around the head of the victim is also dodged out so that it appears that something like a halo surrounds the head. All this has been done in the act of printing sometime after the picture was taken. Careful printing helps achieve the photograph's artistic formal unity.

Yet we are suggesting that the Goya has a higher degree of perceptible unity than Adams's photograph, that perhaps only the Goya has artistic form. We base these conclusions on what is given for us to perceive: the fact that the part-to-part and the part-to-whole relationships are much stronger in the Goya. Now, of course, you may disagree. No judgment about such matters is indisputable. Indeed, that is part of the fun of talking about whether something is or is not a work of art—we can learn how to perceive from one another.

PERCEPTION KEY Adams and Goya

1. How is the painting different from Adams's photograph in the way the details work together?

2. Could any detail in the painting be changed or removed without weakening the unity of the total design? What about the photograph?

3. Does the photograph or the painting more powerfully reveal human barbarity?

4. Do you find yourself participating more with the Adams photograph or the Goya painting?

5. How does blurring out the buildings in the background of the photograph improve its visual impact? Compare the effect of the looming architecture in the painting.

6. What do the shadows on the street add to the significance of the photograph? Compare the shadows on the ground in the painting.

7. Does it make any significant difference that the Vietcong prisoner's shirt is checkered? Compare the white shirt on the gesturing man in the painting.

8. Is the expression on the soldier's face, along the left edge of the photograph, appropriate to the situation? Compare the facial expressions in the painting.

9. Can these works be fairly compared when one is in black and white and the other is in full color? Why or why not?

10. What are some basic differences between viewing a photograph of a real man being killed and viewing a painting of such an event? Does that distinction alone qualify or disqualify either work as a work of art?

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Participation

Both Adams's photograph (Figure 2-2) and the Goya (Figure 2-3) tend to grasp our attention. Initially for most of us, probably, the photograph has more pulling power than the painting, especially as the two works are illustrated here. In its setting in the Prado in Madrid, however, the great size of the Goya and its powerful lighting and color draw the eye like a magnet. But the term "participate" is more accurately descriptive of what we are likely to be doing in our experience of the painting. With the Goya, we must not only give but also sustain our undivided attention so that we lose our self-consciousness—our sense of being separate, of standing apart from the painting. We participate. And only by means of participation can we come close to a full awareness of what the painting is about.

Works of art are created, exhibited, and preserved for us to perceive with not only undivided but also sustained attention. Artists, critics, and philosophers of art (aestheticians) generally are in agreement about this. Thus, if a work requires our participation in order to understand and appreciate it fully, we have an indication that the work is art. Therefore—unless our analyses have been incorrect, and you should satisfy yourself about this—the Goya would seem to be a work of art. Conversely, the photograph is not as obviously a work of art as the painting, and this is the case despite the fascinating impact of the

photograph. Yet these are highly tentative judgments. We are far from being clear about why the Goya requires our participation and the photograph may not. Until we are clear about these "whys," the grounds for these judgments remain shaky.

Goya's painting tends to draw us on until, ideally, we become aware of all the details and their interrelationships. For example, the long, dark shadow at the bottom right underlines the line of the firing squad, and the line of the firing squad helps bring out the shadow. Moreover, this shadow is the darkest and most opaque part of the painting. It has a forbidding, blind, fateful quality, which in turn reinforces the ominous appearance of the firing squad. The dark shadow on the street just below the forearm of General Loan seems less powerful. Sustained attention or participation cannot be achieved by acts of will. The splendid singularity of what we are attending to must fascinate and control us to the point that we no longer need to will our attention. We can make up our minds to give our undivided attention to something. But if that something lacks the pulling power that grasps our attention, we cannot participate with it.

The ultimate test for recognizing a work of art, then, is how it works in us, what it does to us. ***Participative experiences*** of works of art are communions—experiences so full and fruitful that they enrich our lives. Such experiences are life-enhancing not just because of the great satisfaction they may give us at the moment but also because they make more or less permanent contributions to our future lives. Does da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5) heighten your perception of a painting's underlying structure, the power of simplicity of form, and the importance of a figure's pose? Does Robert Herrick's "The Pillar of Fame" (Chapter 1) affect your concept of fame? Do you see shovels

differently, perhaps, after experiencing *Shovel* by Dine (Figure 2-1)? If not, presumably they are not works of art. But this assumes that we have really participated with these works, that we have allowed them to work fully in our experience, so that if the meaning or content were present, it had a chance to reveal itself to our awareness. Of the four basic distinctions—subject matter, artistic

form, content, and participation—the most fundamental is participation. We must not only understand what it means to participate but also be able to participate. Otherwise, the other basic distinctions, even if they make good theoretical sense, will not be of much practical help in making art more important in our lives. The central importance of participation requires further elaboration.

As participators, we do not think of the work of art with reference to categories applicable to objects—such as what kind of thing it is. We grasp the work of art directly. When, for example, we participate with Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4), we are not making geographical or geological observations. We are not thinking of the mountain as an object. If we were, Mont Sainte-Victoire would pale into a mere instance of the appropriate scientific categories. We might judge that the mountain is a certain type. But in that process, the vivid impact of Cézanne's mountain would be lessened as the focus of our attention shifted beyond in the direction of generality. This is the natural thing to do with mountains if you are a geologist.

When we are participators, our thoughts are dominated so much by something that we are unaware of our separation from that something. Thus, the artistic form initiates and controls thought and feeling. We

see the Cézanne—name it, identify its maker, classify its style, recall its background information—but this approach will not lead us into the Cézanne as a work of art. Of course, such knowledge can be very helpful, but only when it is under the control of our experience of participating with the painting. Otherwise, the painting will fade away. Its splendid specificity will be sacrificed for some generality. Its content or meaning will be missed.

FIGURE 2-4

Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. 1886–1887. Oil on canvas, 23½ × 28½ inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Cézanne painted Mont Sainte-Victoire in Aix, France, throughout his life. Local legend is that the mountain was home to a god and therefore a holy place.

©Painting/Alamy

These are strong claims, and they may not be convincing. In any case, before concluding our search for what a work of art is, let us seek further clarification of our other basic distinctions—artistic form, content, and subject matter. Even if you disagree with the conclusions, clarification helps understanding. And understanding helps appreciation.

Participation and Artistic Form

The participative experience—the undivided and sustained attention to an object or event that makes us lose our sense of separation from that object or event—is induced by strong or artistic form. Participation is not likely to develop with weak form because weak form tends to allow our attention to wander. Therefore, one indication of a strong form is the fact that participation occurs. Another indication of artistic form is the way it clearly identifies a whole, or

totality. In the visual arts, a whole is a visual field limited by boundaries that separate that field from its surroundings.

Both Adams's photograph (Figure 2-2) and Goya's painting (Figure 2-3) have visual fields with boundaries. No matter what wall these two pictures are placed on, the Goya will probably stand out more distinctly and sharply from its background. This is partly because the Goya is in vibrant color and on a large scale—eight feet nine inches by thirteen feet four inches—whereas the Adams photograph is normally exhibited as an eight by ten-inch print. However carefully such a photograph is printed, it will probably include some random details. No detail in the Goya, though, fails to play a part in the total structure. To take one further instance, notice how the lines of the soldiers' sabers and their straps reinforce the ruthless forward push of the firing squad. The photograph, however, has a relatively weak form because a large number of details fail to cooperate with other details. For example, running down the right side of General Loan's body is a very erratic line that fails to tie in with anything else in the photograph. If this line were smoother, it would connect more closely with the lines formed by the Vietcong prisoner's body. The connection between killer and killed would be more vividly established.

Artistic form normally is a prerequisite if our attention is to be grasped and held. Artistic form makes our participation possible. Some philosophers of art, such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry, even go so far as to claim that the presence of artistic form—what they call "significant form"—is all that is necessary to identify a work of art. And by "significant form," in the case of painting, they mean the interrelationships of elements: line to line, line to color, color to color, color to shape, shape to shape, shape to texture, and so on. The

elements make up the artistic medium, the “stuff” the form organizes. According to Bell and Fry, any reference of these elements and their interrelationships to actual objects or events should be basically irrelevant in our awareness.

According to the proponents of significant form, if we take explicit notice of the executions as an important part of Goya’s painting, then we are not perceiving properly. We are experiencing the painting not as a work of art but rather as an illustration telling a story, thus reducing a painting that is a work of art to the level of commercial communications. When the lines, colors, and the like pull together tightly, independently of any objects or events they may represent, there is a significant form. That is what we should perceive when we are perceiving a

work of art, not a portrayal of some object or event. Anything that has significant form is a work of art. If you ignore the objects and events represented in the Goya, significant form is evident. All the details depend on one another and jell, creating a strong structure. Therefore, the Goya is a work of art. If you ignore the objects and events represented in the Adams photograph, significant form is not evident. The organization of the parts is too loose, creating a weak structure. Therefore, the photograph, according to Bell and Fry, would not be a work of art. “To appreciate a work of art,” according to Bell, “we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions.”

Does this theory of how to identify a work of art satisfy you? Do you find that in ignoring the representation of objects and events in the

Goya, much of what is important in that painting is left out? For example, does the line of the firing squad carry a forbidding quality partly because you recognize that this is a line of men in the process of killing other men? In turn, does the close relationship of that line with the line of the long shadow at the bottom right depend to some degree on that forbidding quality? If you think so, then it follows that the artistic form of this work legitimately and relevantly refers to objects and events. Somehow artistic form goes beyond itself, referring to objects and events from the world beyond the form. Artistic form informs us about things outside itself. These things—as revealed by the artistic form—we shall call the "content" of a work of art. But how does the artistic form do this?

Content

Let us begin to try to answer the question posed in the previous section by examining more closely the meanings of the Adams photograph (Figure 2-2) and the Goya painting (Figure 2-3). Both basically, although oversimply, are about the same abstract idea—barbarity. In the case of the photograph, we have an example of this barbarity. Since it is very close to any knowledgeable American's interests, this instance is likely to set off a lengthy chain of thoughts and feelings. These thoughts and feelings, furthermore, may seem to lie "beyond" the photograph. Suppose a debate developed over the meaning of this photograph. The photograph itself would play an important role primarily as a starting point in a discussion of man's inhumanity to man.

In the debate about the Goya, every detail and its interrelationships with other details become relevant. The meaning of the painting may

seem to lie “within” the painting. And yet, paradoxically, this meaning, as in the case of the Adams photograph, involves ideas and feelings that lie beyond the painting. How can this be? Let us first consider some background information. On May 2, 1808, guerrilla warfare had flared up all over Spain. By the following day, Napoleon’s men were completely back in control in Madrid and the surrounding area. Many of the guerrillas were executed. And, according to tradition, Goya portrayed the execution of forty-three of these guerrillas on May 3 near the hill of Principe Pio just outside Madrid. This background information is important if we are to understand and appreciate the painting fully.

The execution in Adams’s photograph was of a man who had just murdered one of General Loan’s best friends and had then knifed to death his wife and six children. The general was part of the Vietnamese army fighting with the assistance of the United States, and this photograph was widely disseminated with a caption describing the victim as a suspected terrorist. What shocked Americans who saw

the photograph was the summary justice that Loan meted out. It was not until much later that the details of the victim’s crimes were published.

With the Goya, the background information, although very helpful, is not as essential. Test this for yourself. Would your interest in Adams’s photograph last very long if you completely lacked background information? In the case of the Goya, the background information helps us understand the where, when, and why of the scene. But even

without this information, the painting probably would still grasp and hold the attention of most of us because it would still have significant meaning. We would still have a powerful image of barbarity, and the artistic form would hold us on that image. In the Prado Museum in Madrid, Goya's painting continually draws and holds the attention of innumerable viewers, many of whom know little or nothing about the rebellion of 1808. Adams's photograph is also a powerful image, of course—and probably initially more powerful than the Goya—but the form of the photograph is not strong enough to hold most of us on that image for very long.

With the Goya, the abstract idea (barbarity) and the concrete image (the firing squad in the process of killing) are tied tightly together because the form of the painting is tight. We see the barbarity in the lines, colors, masses, shapes, groupings, and lights and shadows of the painting itself. The details of the painting keep referring to other details and to the totality. They keep holding our attention. Thus, the ideas and feelings that the details and their organization awaken within us keep merging with the form. We are prevented from separating the meaning or content of the painting from its form because the form is so fascinating. The form constantly intrudes, however unobtrusively. It will not let us ignore it. We see the firing squad killing, and this evokes the idea of barbarity and the feeling of horror. But the lines, colors, mass, shapes, and shadowings of that firing squad form a pattern that keeps exciting and guiding our eyes. And then the pattern leads us to the pattern formed by the victims. Ideas of fatefulness and feelings of pathos are evoked but they, too, are fused with the form. The form of the Goya is like a powerful magnet that allows nothing within its range to escape its pull. Artistic form fuses or embodies its meaning with itself.

In addition to participation and artistic form, then, we have come upon another basic distinction—***content***. Unless a work has content—meaning that is fused or embodied with its form—we shall say that the work is not art. Content is the meaning of artistic form. If we are correct (for our view is by no means universally accepted), artistic form always informs—has meaning, or content. And that content, as we experience it when we participate, is always ingrained in the artistic form. We do not perceive an artistic form and then a content. We perceive them as inseparable. Of course, we can separate them analytically. But when we do so, we are not having a participative experience. Moreover, when the form is weak—that is, less than artistic—we experience the form and its meaning separately.

PERCEPTION KEY Adams and Goya Revisited

We have argued that the painting by Goya is a work of art and the photograph by Adams is questionable. Even if the three basic distinctions we have made so far—artistic form, participation, and content—are useful, we may have misapplied them. Bring out every possible argument against the view that the painting is a work of art and the photograph may not be a work of art.

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Subject Matter

The content is the meaning of a work of art. The content is embedded in the artistic form. But what does the content interpret? We shall call it subject matter. Content is the interpretation—by means of an artistic form—of some subject matter. Thus, ***subject matter*** is the fourth basic distinction that helps identify a work of art. Since every work of

art must have a content, every work of art must have a subject matter, and this may be any aspect of experience that is of human interest. Anything related to a human interest is a value. Some values are positive, such as pleasure and health. Other values are negative, such as pain and ill health. They are values because they are related to human interests. Negative values are the subject matter of both Adams's photograph (Figure 2-2) and Goya's painting. But the photograph, unlike the painting, has no content. The less-than-artistic form of the photograph simply *presents* its subject matter. The form does not transform the subject matter, does not enrich its significance. In comparison, the artistic form of the painting enriches or interprets its subject matter, says something significant about it. In the photograph, the subject matter is directly given. But the subject matter of the painting is not just there in the painting. It has been transformed by the form. What is directly given in the painting is the content.

The meaning, or content, of a work of art is what is revealed about a subject matter. But in that revelation you must infer or imagine the subject matter. If someone had taken a news photograph of the May 3 executions, that would be a record of Goya's subject matter. The content of the Goya is its interpretation of the barbarity of those executions. Adams's photograph lacks content because it merely shows us an example of this barbarity. That is not to disparage the photograph, for its purpose was news, not art. A similar kind of photograph—that is, one lacking artistic form—of the May 3 executions would also lack content. Now, of course, you may disagree with these conclusions for very good reasons. You may find more transformation of the subject matter in Adams's photograph than in Goya's painting. For example, you may believe that transforming the

visual experience in black and white distances it from reality while intensifying its content. In any case, such disagreement can help the perception of both parties, provided the debate is focused. It is hoped that the basic distinctions we are making—subject matter, artistic form, content, and participation—will aid that focusing.

Subject Matter and Artistic Form

Whereas a subject matter is a value—something of importance—that we may perceive before any artistic interpretation, the content is the significantly interpreted subject matter as revealed by the artistic form. Thus, the subject matter is never directly presented in a work of art, for the subject matter has been transformed by the form. Artistic form transforms and, in turn, informs about life. The conscious intentions of the artist may include magical, religious, political, economic, and other purposes; the conscious intentions may not include the purpose of clarifying values. Yet underlying the artist's activity—going back to cavework (Figure 1-1)—is always the creation of a form that illuminates something from life, some subject matter.

Artistic form draws from the chaotic state of life, which, as van Gogh describes it, is like "a sketch that didn't come off "—a distillation. In our interpretation, a work of art creates an illusion that illuminates reality. Thus, such paradoxical declarations as

Delacroix's are explained: "Those things which are most real are the illusions I create in my paintings." Or Edward Weston's "The photographer who is an artist reveals the essence of what lies before the lens with such clear insight that the beholder may find the

recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual object." Camus: "If the world were clear, art would not exist." Artistic form is an economy that produces a lucidity that enables us better to understand and, in turn, manage our lives. Hence, the informing of a work of art reveals a subject matter with value dimensions that go beyond the artist's idiosyncrasies and perversities. Whether or not Goya had idiosyncrasies and perversities, he did justice to his subject matter: He revealed it. The art of a period is the revelation of the collective soul of its time.

Participation, Artistic Form, and Content

Participation is the necessary condition that makes possible our insightful perception of artistic form and content. Unless we participate with the Goya (Figure 2-3), we will fail to see the power of its artistic form. We will fail to see how the details work together to form a totality. We will also fail to grasp the content fully, for artistic form and content are inseparable. Thus, we will have failed to gain insight into the subject matter. We will have collected just one more instance of barbarity. The Goya will have basically the same effect on us as Adams's photograph except that it may be less important to us because it happened long ago. But if, on the contrary, we have participated with the Goya, we probably will never see such things as executions in quite the same way again. The insight that we have gained will tend to refocus our vision so that we will see similar subject matters with heightened awareness.

Look, for example, at the photograph by Kevin Carter (Figure 2-5), which was published in the *New York Times* on March 26, 1993, and which won the Pulitzer

FIGURE 2-5

Kevin Carter, *Vulture and Child in Sudan*. 1993. Silver halide. Carter saved this child but became so depressed by the terrible tragedies he had recorded in Sudan and South Africa that he committed suicide a year after taking this photograph.

©Kevin Carter/Sygma/Getty Images

Prize for photography in 1994. The form isolates two dramatic figures. The closest is a starving Sudanese child making her way to a feeding center. The other is a plump vulture waiting for the child to die. This powerful photograph raised a hue and cry, and the *New York Times* published a commentary explaining that Carter chased away the vulture and took the child to the feeding center. Carter committed suicide in July 1994.

PERCEPTION KEY Adams, Goya, and Carter

1. How does our discussion of the Adams photograph affect your response to Carter's photograph?

2. To what extent does Carter's photograph have artistic form?

3. Why are your answers to these questions fundamentally important in determining whether Adams's photograph, Carter's photograph, Goya's painting, or all of them are works of art?

4. Describe your experience regarding your participation with either Adams's or Carter's photograph or Goya's painting. Can you measure the intensity of your participation with each of them? Which work do you reflect upon most when you relax and are not thinking directly on the subject of art?

5. The intensity of your reactions to the Adams and Carter photographs may well be stronger than the intensity of your experience with the Goya. If so, should that back up the assertion that the photographs are works of art?

Artistic Form: Examples

Let us examine artistic form in two examples of work by an anonymous cartoonist and Roy Lichtenstein. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lichtenstein became interested in comic strips as subject matter. The story goes that his two young boys asked him to paint a Donald Duck "straight," without the encumbrances of art. But much more was involved. Born in 1923, Lichtenstein grew up before the invention of television. By the 1930s the comic strip had become one of the most important of the mass media. Adventure, romance, sentimentality, and terror found expression in the stories of Tarzan, Flash Gordon, Superman, Wonder Woman, Steve Roper, Winnie Winkle, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Batman and Robin, and the like.

The purpose of the comic strip for its producers is strictly commercial. And because of the large market, a premium has always been put on making the processes of production as inexpensive as possible. And so generations of mostly unknown commercial artists, going far back into the nineteenth century, developed ways of quick, cheap color printing. They developed a technique that could turn out cartoons like the products of an assembly line. Moreover, because their market included a large number of children, they developed ways of producing images that were immediately understandable and striking.

Lichtenstein reports that he was attracted to the comic strip by its stark simplicity—the blatant primary colors, the ungainly black lines

that encircle the shapes, the balloons that isolate the spoken words or thoughts of the characters.

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He was struck by the apparent inconsistency between the strong emotions of the stories and the highly impersonal, mechanical style in which they were expressed. Despite the crudity of the comic strip, Lichtenstein saw power in the directness of the medium. Somehow the cartoons mirrored something about ourselves. Lichtenstein set out to clarify what that something was. At first people laughed, as was to be expected.

However, Lichtenstein saw how adaptable the style was for his work. He produced a considerable number of large oil paintings that, in some cases, referred specifically to popular cartoon strips. They were brash in much the same way cartoons are, and they used brilliant primary colors that were sensational and visually overwhelming. Much of his early work in this vein involved war planes, guns, and action scenes. For him the cartoon style permitted him to be serious in what he portrayed.

Examine Figures 2-6 and 2-7. Lichtenstein saw artistic potential for the anonymous cartoon panel with a woman tearing up in reaction to an unknown problem. Because these two representations of a sad woman are detached from the narrative in which the original cartoon appeared, we are left to respond only to the image we see. Lichtenstein did not expect that his painting would relate to any missing narrative: It was made to stand alone. However, the anonymous cartoon was created in greater haste partly because its significance would have been understood in a dramatic context.

FIGURE 2-6
Anonymous cartoon panel.

FIGURE 2-7
Roy Lichenstein, *Hopeless*. 1963. Magna on canvas.
©Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

PERCEPTION KEY Cartoon Panel and Lichtenstein's Transformation

1. Begin by establishing which formal elements are similar or the same in both works. Consider the shape of the face and hair, the features of the woman.

2. Then establish what Lichtenstein removed from the original cartoon. What seems to you the most important omission? Does it strengthen or weaken the overall visual force of the work?

3. The power of the line makes cartoons distinct. Compare the strength of the line in each work. Which is more satisfying? Which is stronger?

4. What has Lichtenstein added to the composition? What has he changed from the original?

5. Is it fair to say one of these is a work of art and the other is not? Or would you say they are both works of art?

6. Is either of these works an example of artistic form? How would you describe artistic form?

7. Discuss with others who have seen these works what you and they think is their subject matter. Do they have the same content?

Hopeless treats an emotional moment that is familiar to everyone who has ever been involved in the breakup of a love affair. Comparing the two panels, it is clear that Lichtenstein has simplified the portrayal of the woman by making her hair light in color, thus changing the focal point of the image. In the cartoon the hair is the darkest form, taking up the most room and attention in the panel. Lichtenstein's revision shifts the viewer's attention to the face. By smoothing out the tone of the skin—by removing the mechanical "dots" in the cartoon version—he makes the face more visually prominent. The addition of the fingers gives the viewer the sense that the woman is holding on. By placing the balloon (with the dialogue) close to the woman's ear and removing the background—very prominent in the cartoon—Lichtenstein gives the woman's representation much more space in the panel. These are subtle differences, and while both panels treat the same subject matter, it seems to us that the content of the Lichtenstein is greater and more significant because his control of artistic form informs us more fully of the circumstances represented in the painting. Compare our analyses of these works. You may disagree with our view but, if so, make an effort to establish your own assessment of these two examples in terms of artistic form.

Examine Figure 2-8, Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting*.

PERCEPTION KEY Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting*

1. Compare the painter's arms. How effective is their contrast in

terms of their movement and their pose?

2. How does the simplicity of the background help clarify the essential form of the painter? What are the most powerful colors in the compostion?

3. What is the figure actually doing? How does Gentileschi make us aware of her action?

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4. Place yourself in the same pose as Gentileschi. How would you paint yourself in that position?

5. What forms in the painting work best to achieve a visual balance? Which forms best express a sense of energy in the painting?

6. How does Gentileschi achieve artistic form? If you think she does not achieve it, explain why.

7. The painting is titled *Allegory*. Allegory is a special kind of symbol; what is this painting a symbol for? Does it work for you as a symbol?

8. How does answering these questions affect your sense of participating with the painting?

FIGURE 2-8

Artemisia Gentileschi, Rome 1593–Naples 1652, *Self-portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (La Pittura). Circa 1638–1639.

©Fine Art Images/Superstock

We feel this is a particularly powerful example of artistic form. For one thing, Gentileschi's challenge of painting her own portrait likeness in this pose is extraordinary. It has been supposed that she may have needed at least two mirrors to permit her to position herself. Or her visual memory may have been unusually powerful. Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the most famous female artists of the seventeenth century. This painting was done in England for King Charles I and remains in the Royal Collection. The painting is an *allegory*, which is to say it represents the classical idea of the painter, which was expressed as female, Pittura. Because no male painter could do a self-portrait as Pittura, Gentileschi's painting is singular in many respects. The color of her clothing—silken, radiant—is rich and appropriate to the painter. Her right arm is strong in terms of its being brilliantly lighted as well as strong in reaching out dramatically in the act of painting. Her clothing and decolletage emphasize her femininity. Her straggly hair and the necklace containing a mask (a symbol of imitation) were required by the conventional allegorical representations of the time describing Pittura. The contrasting browns of the background simplify the visual space and give more power to the figure and the color of her garment. One powerful aspect of the painting is the light source. Gentileschi is looking directly at her painting, and the painting—impossibly—seems to be the source of that light.

The subject matter of the painting seems to be, on one level, the idea of painting. On another level, it is the act of painting by a woman painter. On yet another level, it is the act of Artemisia Gentileschi painting her self-portrait. The content of the painting may be simply painting itself. On the other hand, this was an age in which women rarely achieved professional status as royal painters. The power of the

physical expression of the self-portrait implies a content expressing the power of woman, both allegorically and in reality. Artemisia is declaring herself as having achieved what was implied in having the allegory of painting expressed as a female deity.

As in the painting by Goya and the photograph by Adams, the arms are of great significance in this work. Instead of a representation of barbarity, the painting is a representation of art itself, and therefore of cultivated society. The richness of the garment, the beauty of Artemisia, and the vigor of her act of painting imply great beauty, strength, and power. We are virtually transfixed by the light and the urgency of the posture. Some viewers find themselves participating so deeply that they experience a kinesthetic response as they imagine themselves in that pose.

What significance does the artistic form of the painting reveal for you? How would you describe the content of the painting? Would the content of this painting be different for a woman than for a man? Would it be different for a painter than for a non-painter? What content does it have for you?

Subject Matter and Content

While the male nude was a common subject in Western art well into the ***Renaissance***, images of the female body have since predominated. The variety of treatment of the female nude is bewildering, ranging from the Greek idealization of erotic love in the *Venus de Milo* to the radical reordering of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2.* A number of female nude studies follow (Figures 2-9 through 2-18). Consider, as you look at them, how the form of the work interprets the female body. Does it reveal it in such a

way that you have an increased understanding of and sensitivity to the female body? In other words, does it have content? Also ask yourself whether the content is different in the two paintings by women compared with those by men.

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FIGURE 2-9

Giorgione, *Sleeping Venus*. 1508–1510. Oil on canvas, 43 × 69 inches. Gemaldegalerie, Dresden. Giorgione established a Renaissance ideal in his painting of the goddess Venus asleep in the Italian countryside.

©Superstock

FIGURE 2-10

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Bather Arranging Her Hair*. 1893. Oil on canvas, 36⅜ × 29⅛ inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection. Renoir's impressionist interpretation of the nude provides a late-nineteenth-century idealization of a real-life figure who is not a goddess.

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection

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FIGURE 2-11

***Venus de Milo*. Greece. Circa 100 BCE. Marble, 5 feet ½ inch. Louvre, Paris.** Since its discovery in 1820 on the island of Cyclades, the *Venus de Milo* has been thought to represent the Greek ideal in feminine beauty. It was originally decorated with jewelry and may have been polychromed.

©DeA Picture Library/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 2-12

***Rokeby Venus*. Circa 1647–1651. 48 × 49.7 inches (122 × 177 cm). National Gallery, London.** Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus (Toilet of Venus)* is an idealized figure of the goddess. Cupid holds a mirror for Venus to admire herself.

©VCG Wilson/Corbis/Getty Images

FIGURE 2-13

Tom Wesselmann, 1931–2004, *Study for Great American Nude*. 1975. Watercolor and pencil, 19½ × 54 inches. Private collection. Wesselmann's study leaves the face blank and emphasizes the telephone as a suggestion of this nude's availability in the modern world.

Art: ©Estate of Tom Wesselmann/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: ©Connaught Brown, London/Bridgeman Images

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FIGURE 2-14

Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. 1912. Oil on canvas, 58 × 35 inches. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. This painting provoked a riot in 1913 and made Duchamp famous as a chief proponent of the distortions of cubism and modern art at that time.

©Association Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2017. Photo: ©Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 2-15

***Standing Woman*. Ivory Coast. Nineteenth or twentieth century. Wood and beads, 20⅜ × 7⅝ × 5⅜ inches. Detroit Institute of Arts.** *Standing Woman* was once owned by Tristan Tzara, a friend of Picasso. Sculpture such as this influenced modern painters and sculptors in France and elsewhere in the early part of the twentieth century. It is marked by a direct simplicity, carefully modeled and polished.

©Detroit Institute of Arts/Bridgeman Images

FIGURE 2-16

Suzanne Valadon, *Reclining Nude*. 1928. Oil on canvas, 23⅝ × 30 inches. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Robert Lehman Collection, 1975. Valadon interprets the nude simply, directly. To what extent is the figure idealized?

Source: Robert Lehman Collection, 1975/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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FIGURE 2-17

Alice Neel, *Margaret Evans Pregnant*. 1978. Oil on canvas, 57¾ × 38 inches. Collection, John McEnroe Gallery. Neel's *Margaret Evans Pregnant* is one of a series of consciously anti-idealized nude portraits of pregnant women.

Courtesy of David Zwirner, New York/London. ©The estate of Alice Neel

FIGURE 2-18

Philip Pearlstein, *Two Female Models in the Studio*. 1967. Oil on canvas, 50⅛ × 60¼ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen B. Booke. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Pearlstein's attention to anatomy, his even lighting, and his unsensuous surroundings seem to eliminate the erotic content associated with

the traditional female nude.

Courtesy of the Artist and Betty Cuningham Gallery. Photo: ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY

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Most of these works are highly valued—some as masterpieces—because they are powerful interpretations of their subject matter, not just presentations of the human body as erotic objects. Notice how different the interpretations are. Any important subject matter has many different facets. That is why shovels and soup cans have limited utility as subject matter. They have very few facets to offer for interpretation. The female nude, however, is almost limitless. The next artist interprets something about the female nude that had never been interpreted before, because the female nude seems to be inexhaustible as a subject matter, more so perhaps than the male nude.

More precisely, these works all have somewhat different subject matters. All are about the nude, but the painting by Giorgione is about the nude as idealized, as a goddess, as Venus. Now there is a great deal that all of us could say in trying to describe Giorgione's interpretation. We see not just a nude but an idealization that presents the nude as Venus, the goddess who the Romans felt best expressed the ideal of woman. She represents a form of beautiful perfection that humans can only strive toward. A description of the subject matter can help us perceive the content if we have missed it. In understanding what the form worked on—that is, the subject matter—our perceptive apparatus is better prepared to perceive the ***form-content***, the work of art's structure and meaning.

The subject matter of Renoir's painting is the nude more as an earth

mother. In the *Venus de Milo,* the subject matter is the erotic ideal, the goddess of love. In the Duchamp, it is a mechanized dissection of the female form in action. In the Wesselmann, it is the nude as exploited. In the Velazquez, the nude is idealized; however, with Cupid holding the mirror for Venus to admire herself, we sense a bit of coyness, perhaps a touch of narcissism. This painting is the only surviving nude by Velazquez. Because the Spanish Inquisition was in power when he painted, it was dangerous to have and display this work in Spain. In 1813 it was purchased by an English aristocrat and taken to Rokeby Park. In all eight paintings by men, the subject matter is the female nude—but qualified in relation to what the artistic form focuses upon and makes lucid.

The two paintings by Suzanne Valadon and Alice Neel treat the female nude somewhat differently than those painted by men. Neel's painting emphasizes an aspect of femaleness that the men usually ignore—pregnancy. Her painting does not show the alluring female but the female who is beyond allure. Valadon's nude is more traditional, but a comparison with Renoir and Giorgione should demonstrate that she is far from their ideal.

PERCEPTION KEY Ten Female Nudes

1. Which of these nudes is most clearly idealized? What visual qualities contribute to that idealization?

2. Which of these nudes seem to be aware of being seen? How does their awareness affect your interpretation of the form of the nude?

3. *Nude Descending a Staircase* caused a great uproar when it was exhibited in New York in 1913. Do you feel it is still a controversial

painting? How does it interpret the female nude in comparison with the other paintings in this group? Could the nude be male? Why not? Suppose the title were *Male Descending* or *Body Descending*. Isn't the sense of human movement the essential subject matter?

4. If you were not told that Suzanne Valadon and Alice Neel painted, would you have known they were painted by women? What are the principal differences in the treatment of the nude figure on the part of all these artists? Does their work surprise you?

5. Decide whether *Standing Woman* is the work of a male artist or a female artist. What criteria do you use in your decision?

EXPERIENCING Interpretations of the Female Nude

1. Is there an obvious difference between the representations of the female nude by male and female artists?

2. Does distortion of the human figure help distance the viewer from the subject?

3. To what extent does the represented figure become a potential sexual object?

Following are some suggestions for analysis.

First, working backward, we can see that the question of the figure being a sexual object is to a large extent parodied by Tom Wesselmann's *Study for Great American Nude*. The style and

approach to painting are couched in careful design, including familiar objects—the telephone, the rose, the perfume bottle, the sofa cushions, the partial portrait—all of which imply the boudoir and the commodification of women and sex. The figure's face is totally anonymous, implying that this is not a painting of a woman but of the idea of the modern American woman, with her nipple carefully exposed to accommodate advertising's breast fetish as a means of selling goods.

Even Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus*, a painting whose subject is more sensual than ideal, is less a sexual object than Wesselmann's. For one thing, her body is less revealed than Wesselmann's, and her face, shown to us in a mirror, is looking at her reflection, suggesting that she is in command of herself and is not to be taken lightly. The colors in the painting are sumptuous and sensuous—rich red fabrics, an inviting bed, and a delighted boy-god Cupid. Since Cupid is the archer who causes people to fall in love, could it be that some of the subject matter is Venus loving herself? What does the form of the painting reveal to you in terms of its content?

Then, the question of the distortion of the subject is powerfully handled by Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. This painting provoked a riot in 1913 because it seemed to be a contemptuous portrait of the nude at a time when the nude aesthetic was still academic in style. Duchamp was taunting the audience for art while also finding a modern technological representation of the nude on canvas that mimed the cinema of his time. Philip Pearlstein's study of two nudes moves toward a de-idealization of the nude. He asks us to look at the nudes without desire, yet with careful attention to form and color.

Finally, we may partly answer the question of whether women paint nude females differently by looking at Suzanne Valadon's and Alice Neel's paintings. Neel represents Margaret Evans in a manner emphasizing her womanness, not her sexual desirability. Hers is the only pregnant female figure—emphasizing the power of women to create life. Valadon's nude makes an effort to cover herself while looking at the viewer. She is relaxed yet apprehensive. There is no attempt at commodification of either of these figures, which means we must look at them very differently than the rest of the paintings represented here.

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Further Thoughts on Artistic Form

Artistic form is an organized structure, a design, but it is also a window opening on and focusing our world, helping us to perceive and understand what is important. This is the function of artistic form. The artist uses form as a means to understanding some subject matter, and in this process the subject matter exerts its own imperative. A subject matter has, as Edmund Husserl puts it, a "structure of determination," which to some significant degree is independent of the artist. Even when the ideas of the artist are the subject matter, they challenge and resist, forcing the artist to discover their significance by discarding irrelevancies.

Subject matter is friendly, for it assists interpretation, but subject matter is also hostile, for it resists interpretation. Otherwise, there would be no fundamental stimulus or challenge to the creativity of the artist. Only subject matter with interesting latent or uninterpreted values can challenge the artist, and the artist discovers these values

through form. If the maker of a work takes the line of least resistance by ignoring the challenge of the subject matter—pushing the subject matter around for entertaining or escapist effects instead of trying to uncover its significance—the maker functions as a decorator rather than an artist.

Whereas decorative form merely pleases, artistic form informs about subject matter embedded in values that to an overwhelming extent are produced independently of the artist. By revealing those values, the artist helps us understand ourselves and our world, provided we participate with the work and understand the way artistic form produces content. The artist reveals the content in the work—the content is revealed to us through the act of participation and close attention to artistic form.

Participation is a flowing experience. One thought, image, or sensation merges into another, and we don't know where we are going for certain, except that what we are feeling is moving and controlling the flow, and clock time is irrelevant.

Participation is often interrupted—someone moves in front of the painting, the telephone call breaks the reading of the poem, someone goes into a coughing fit at the concert—but as long as we keep coming back to the work as dominant over distraction, we have something of the wonder of participation.

Summary

A work of art is a form-content. An artistic form is a form-content. An artistic form is more than just an organization of the elements of an artistic medium, such as the lines and colors of painting. The artistic

form interprets or clarifies some subject matter. The subject matter, strictly speaking, is not in a work of art. When participating with a work of art, one can only imagine the subject matter, not perceive it. The subject matter is only suggested by the work of art. The interpretation of the subject matter is the content, or meaning, of the work of art. Content is embodied in the form. The content, unlike the subject matter, is in the work of art, fused with the form. We can separate content from form only by analysis. The ultimate justification of any analysis is whether it enriches our participation with that work, whether it helps that work "work" in us. Good analysis or criticism does just that. But, conversely, any analysis not based on participation is unlikely to be helpful. Participation is the only way to get into direct contact with the form-content, so any analysis that is not based upon a participative experience inevitably misses the work of art. Participation and good analysis, although necessarily occurring at different times, end up hand in hand.

Bookshelf Ambassadored: Humanities through the Arts

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Chapter 3

BEING A CRITIC OF THE ARTS

The goals of responsible ***criticism*** aim for the fullest understanding and participation possible. Being a responsible critic demands being at the height of awareness while examining a work of art in detail, establishing its context, and clarifying its achievement. It is not to be confused with popular journalism, which can sidetrack the critic into being flashy, negative, and cute. The critic aims at a full understanding of a work of art.

You Are Already an Art Critic

On a practical level, everyday criticism is an act of choice. You decide to change from one program to another on television because you have made a critical choice. When you find that certain programs please you more than others, that, too, is a matter of expressing choices. If you decide that Albert Inaurrato's film *Revenant* is better than John Ford's film *The Searchers*, you have made a critical choice. When you stop to admire a powerful piece of architecture while ignoring a nearby building, you have again made a critical choice. You are active every day in art criticism of one kind or another. Most of the

time it is low-level criticism, almost instinctive, establishing your preferences in music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, film, and video art. You have made such judgments since you were young. The question now is how to move on to

a higher-level criticism that accounts for the subtlest distinctions in the arts and therefore the most-complex choices.

What qualifies us to make critical distinctions when we are young and uninformed about art? Usually it is a matter of simple pleasure. Art is designed to give us pleasure, and for most children the most pleasurable art is simple: representational painting, lyrical and tuneful melodies, recognizable sculpture, light verse, action stories, and animated videos. It is another thing to move from that pleasurable beginning to account for what may be higher-level pleasures, such as those in Cézanne's still lifes, Beethoven's symphonies, Jean Arp's sculpture *Growth,* Amy Lowell's poem "Venus Transiens," Sophocles's tragedy *Oedipus Rex,* or David Simon's video triumph *The Wire*. One of the purposes of this chapter is to point to the kinds of critical acts that help us expand our repertoire of responses to the arts.

Participation and Criticism

Participation with a work of art is complex but also sometimes immediate. Participation is an essential act that makes art significant in our lives. We have described it as a loss of self, by which we mean that when contemplating, or experiencing, a work of art we tend to become one with the experience. As in films such as *Citizen Kane, Thelma and Louise,* or *Dunkirk,* we become one with the narrative and lose a sense

of our physical space. We can also achieve a sense of participation with painting, music, and the other arts. The question is not so much how we become outside ourselves in relation to the arts, but why we may not achieve that condition in the face of art that we know has great power but does not yet speak to us. Developing critical skills will help bridge that gap and allow participation with art that may not be immediately appealing. In essence, that is the purpose of an education in the arts.

Patience and perception are the keys to beginning high-level criticism. Using painting as an example, it is clear that careful perceptions of color, rhythm, line, form, and balance are useful in understanding the artistic form and its resultant content. Our discussion of Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3) in terms of the emphasis of the line at the bottom of the painting and the power of the lines formed by the soldiers' rifles, while in contrast with the white blouse of one of the men being executed, helps us perceive the painting's artistic form. Coming to such a huge and demanding painting with enough patience to stand and perceive the underlying formal structures, while seeing the power of the color and details designed to heighten our awareness of the significance of the action, makes it possible to achieve participation. From there it is possible to go back to the Eddie Adams photograph *Execution in Saigon* (Figure 2-2) and decide whether the same kind of participation is possible and whether the formal significance of the photograph is comparable. Any decision we make in this context is an act of art criticism.

Three Kinds of Criticism

We point to three kinds of criticism that aim toward increasing our

ability to participate with works of art. In Chapter 2, we argued that a work of art is a form-content and that good criticism, which involves careful examination and thoughtful analysis,

will sharpen our perception and deepen our understanding. Descriptive criticism aims at a careful accounting of the formal elements in the work. As its name implies, this stage of criticism is marked by an examination of the large formal elements as well as the details in the composition. Interpretive criticism focuses on the content of the work, the discovery of which requires reflection on how the formal elements transform the subject matter. Evaluative criticism, on the other hand, is an effort to qualify the relative merits of a work.

CONCEPTION KEY Kinds of Criticism

1. In Chapter 2, which portions of the discussion of Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3) and Adams's *Execution in Saigon* (Figure 2-2) are descriptive criticism? How do they help you better perceive the formal elements of the works?

2. Comment on the usefulness of the descriptive criticism of Robert Herrick's poem "The Pillar of Fame" in Chapter 1. When does that discussion become interpretive criticism?

3. "Experiencing: Interpretations of the Female Nude" (Figures 2-9 through 2-18) introduces a series of interpretive criticisms of some of the paintings in the chapter. Which of these interpretations, in your opinion, is most successful in sharpening your awareness of the content of the painting? What are the most

useful interpretive techniques used in the discussion of the paintings of female nudes?

4. Evaluative criticism is used in Chapters 1 and 2. To what extent are you most enlightened by this form of criticism in our discussion of the Goya painting and the Adams photograph?

5. In what other discussions in this book do you find evaluative criticism? How often do you practice it on your own while examining the works in this book?

Descriptive Criticism

Descriptive criticism concentrates on the form of a work of art, describing, sometimes exhaustively, the important characteristics of that form in order to improve our understanding of the part-to-part and part-to-whole interrelationships. At first glance this kind of criticism may seem unnecessary. After all, the form is all there, completely given—all we have to do is observe. Yet we can spend time attending to a work we are very much interested in and still not perceive all there is to perceive. We miss things, often things that are right there for us to observe.

Good descriptive critics call our attention to what we otherwise might miss in an artistic form. And more important, they help us learn how to do their work when they are not around. We can, if we carefully attend to descriptive criticism, develop and enhance our own powers of observation. Descriptive criticism, more than any other type, is most likely to improve our participation with a work of art, for such criticism turns us directly to the work itself.

Study Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* (Figure 3-1), damaged by repeated restorations. Leonardo unfortunately experimented with dry fresco, which, as in this case, deteriorates rapidly. Still, even in its present condition, this painting can be overwhelming.

FIGURE 3-1

Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper.* Circa 1495–1498. Oil and tempera on plaster, 15 feet 1⅛ inches × 28 feet 10½ inches. Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan. Leonardo's painting was one of many on this subject, but his is the first to represent recognizably human figures with understandable facial expressions. This is the dramatic moment when Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him.

©Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

PERCEPTION KEY *Last Supper*

Descriptively criticize the *Last Supper*. Point out every facet of form that seems important. Look for shapes that relate to each other, including shapes formed by groupings of figures. Do any shapes stand out as unique—for example, the shapes of Christ and Judas, who leans back, fourth from the left? Describe the color relationships. Describe the symmetry, if any. Describe how the lines tend to meet in the landscape behind Christ's head.

Leonardo planned the fresco so that the perspectival vanishing point would reside in the head of Jesus, the central figure in the painting (Figure 3-2). He also used the concept of the trinity, in the number 3, as he grouped each of the disciples in threes, two groups on each side of the painting. Were you to diagram them, you would see they form the basis of triangles. The three windows in the back wall also repeat the idea of three. The figure of Jesus is itself a perfect isosceles triangle, while the red and blue garment centers the eye. In some

paintings, this kind of architectonic organization might be much too static, but because Leonardo gathers the figures in dramatic poses, with facial expressions that reveal apparent emotions, the viewer is distracted from the formal organization while being subliminally affected by its perfection. It seems that perfection—appropriate to his subject matter—was what Leonardo aimed at in creating the underlying structure of the fresco. Judas, the disciple who will betray Jesus, is the fourth figure from the left, his face in shadow, pulling back in shock.

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FIGURE 3-2

The *Last Supper* is geometrically arranged with the single-point vanishing perspective centered on the head of Jesus. The basic organizing form for the figures in the painting is the triangle. Leonardo aimed at geometric perfection.

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Detail and Structural Relationships When we address a painting we concern ourselves both with the ***structural relationships*** and the ***detail*** that control our visual attention. For example, the dominant structures in the *Last Supper* are the white rectangular table cloth contrasting with the high receding white walls that create the single-point vanishing perspective ending in the head of Jesus. These dynamic lines of force imply a dramatic moment. As you examine the painting and consider the following discussion, decide whether the relationship of structural elements or detail elements is dominant in how you see this painting.

When we talk about details, we are concerned with how the smaller elements of the work function together. For example, in the *Last Supper*, we see that the figure of Jesus at the center is a geometric

shape, an isosceles triangle. Within this painting, this triangle constitutes a detail. Moreover, when examining the painting for more details, we see that all the apostles are grouped in patterns of three. However, their triangular shapes are not as perfect as the center triangle. If you draw the implied triangle for any other group of three, you will see that it is not isosceles, but somewhat misshapen. Perfection in this painting is reserved for only one figure.

In examining other details in the painting we see that the three open windows in the rear are details that replicate the idea of three, echoing the three lines of the triangle. The four tapestries on each wall act as background, but may refer to the traditional "perfect" number, eight, which signifies the new beginning. (The eight white keys on a piano illustrate that idea: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C.)

The triangular figure of Jesus, with red and blue garments, in the center of the *Last Supper* is a dominant settling force for the eye, but it contrasts immediately with the other triangular arrangements of the apostles. Among other contrasting details are the colors of the garments of the apostles. They are paler complementary

FIGURE 3-3

Jackson Pollock, *The Flame* (1934–1938). Oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard, 20½ × 30 inches (51.1 × 76.2 cm). Enid A. Haupt Fund. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

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colors of red, blue, and ochre, competing with the dominant darkness of the rear wall and the tapestries on the left and right walls. Observing the apostles's colored garments and their less than equilateral

triangular grouping is important for interpreting their relationship to the main figure in the painting and its main dramatic moment.

In Jackson Pollock's *The Flame* (Figure 3-3), the details of the flames, in the brilliant reds, the orange-whites, and the deep contrasts in the blacks of the composition, are so vigorous that on first inspection it is difficult to see the forms that begin to appear. If we did not know the name of the painting, we might have no idea whether something is being represented or if the painting is an example of abstraction, a style for which Pollock was usually known. But closer examination shows the formal order in the center of the painting, creating a triangular structure controlled by the angular red flames rising to the top center. The central flame in orange-white seems to rise from two angular forms in white (possibly parts of a skeleton?) that angle down in the middle, the base for the central flames. All the detailed shapes angle upward, as we expect fire to do. The subject matter of the painting is flame, but the intensity of the colors and the power of the contrasts of black, white, and red reveal an energy in the flame that suggests something dreadful. If this were a painting made in the Middle Ages, we would assume it an allusion to the pits of hell. However, Pollock was influenced in 1936 by the work of José Clemente Orozco portraying war in Mexico

and threats to civilization. Destruction and skeletons figure in much of Orozco's work in the 1930s. Could the content of the painting point to an apocalypse?

Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4) is more or less balanced with respect to detail and structure. The detail relationships are organized into

three major regions: the great triangle—with the apex at the candle and two sides sloping down to the lower corners—and the two large rectangles, vertically oriented, running down along the left and right borders. Moreover, these regions are hierarchically ordered. The triangular region takes precedence in both size and interest, and the left rectangle, mainly because of the fascination of the impassive bull (what is he doing here?), dominates the right rectangle, even though both are about the same size. Despite the complexity of the detail relationships in *Guernica,* we gradually perceive the power of a very strong, clear structure.

The basic formal element in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5) is the isosceles triangle, but in this portrait the roundness of the three points of the triangle soften the impact of the form. We are drawn to the hands, which are crossed in such a way as to create an "upside down" triangle with the elbows and the other points. The flesh of her neck and bosom creates another triangle, while her oval face dominates the composition. Naturally her smile has been an enigma because it implies an understanding between the painter and the model. Its enigmatic quality is echoed slightly by the strange landscapes in the background—they carefully avoid any stable geometric figure as a way of contrast. Return to the discussion of this painting in "Experiencing: The *Mona Lisa*" in Chapter 1 and consider the descriptive criticism offered there.

PERCEPTION KEY Detail and Structural Dominance

1. In the *Last Supper*, do you find that detail or structural relationships dominate—or are equal? Which analysis, of structure or detail, yields the most understanding of the painting's

content?

2. Whether detail or structural relationships dominate—or are equal—often varies widely from work to work. Compare Pollock's *The Flame*, Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4), and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5). In which painting or paintings, if any, do detail relationships dominate? Structural relationships?

Interpretive Criticism

Interpretive criticism explicates the content of a work of art. It helps us understand how form transforms subject matter into content: what has been revealed about some subject matter and how that has been accomplished. The content of any work of art will become clearer when the structure is perceived in relation to the details and regions. The Le Corbusier and Sullivan examples (Figures 3-4 and 3-5) demonstrate that the same principle holds for architecture as for painting. The subject matter of a building—or at least an important component of it—is traditionally the practical function the building serves. We have no difficulty telling which of these buildings was meant to serve as a bank and which was meant to serve as a church.

FIGURE 3-4

Le Corbusier, Notre Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamps, France. 1950–1955. The chapel is built on a hill where a pilgrimage chapel was destroyed during the Second World War. Le Corbusier used soaring lines to lift the viewer's eyes to the heavens and the surrounding horizon, visible on all four sides.

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PERCEPTION KEY Le Corbusier and Sullivan

1. If you had not been told, would you know that Le Corbusier's building is a church? Now, having been told, which structural details help identify it as a church?

2. Which of these buildings better uses its basic structure to suggest solidity? Which better uses formal patterns to suggest flight and motion?

3. In which of these buildings does detail better complement the overall structure?

4. Comment on how the formal values of these buildings contribute to their content as serving their established functions as bank and church.

5. One of these buildings is symmetrical and one is not. Symmetry is often praised in nature as a constituent of beauty. How important is symmetry in evaluating these buildings?

FIGURE 3-5

Louis Henry Sullivan, Guaranty (Prudential) Building, Buffalo, New York. 1894. Sullivan's building, among the first high-rise structures, was made possible by the use of mass-produced steel girders supporting the weight of each floor.

©Buffalo History Museum

Form-Content The interpretive critic's job is to find out as much about an artistic form as possible in order to explain its meaning. This is a particularly useful task for the critic—which is to say, for us as critics—since the forms of numerous works of art seem important but are not immediately understandable. When we look at the examples of the bank and the church, we ought to realize that the significance of these buildings is expressed by means of the ***form-content***. It is true

that without knowing the functions of these buildings we could appreciate them as structures without special functions, but knowing about their functions deepens our appreciation. Thus, the lofty arc of Le Corbusier's roof soars heavenward more mightily when we recognize the building as a church. The form moves our eyes upward. For a Christian church, such a reference is perfect. The bank, however, looks like a pile of square coins or banknotes and moves our eyes downward. Certainly the form "amasses"

something, an appropriate suggestion for a bank. We will not belabor these examples, since it should be fun for you to do this kind of critical job yourself. Observe how much more you get out of these examples of architecture when you consider each form in relation to its meaning —that is, the form as form-content. Furthermore, such analyses should convince you that interpretive criticism operates in a vacuum unless it is based on descriptive criticism. Unless we perceive the form with sensitivity—and this means that we have the basis for good descriptive criticism—we simply cannot understand the content. In turn, any interpretive criticism will be useless.

Participate with a poem by William Butler Yeats:

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,

And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;

Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,

And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,

Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,

And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day

I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;

While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,

I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Source: William Butler Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," *The Collected Works in the Verse and Prose of William Butler Yeats, Volume 8 (of 8)*. Project Gutenberg.

PERCEPTION KEY Yeats's Poem

1. Offer a brief description of the poem, concentrating on the nature of the rhyme-words, the contrasting imagery, the rhythms of the lines.

2. What does the poet say he intends to do? Do you think he will actually do it?

"The Lake Isle of Innisfree" is a lyric written from the first person, "I." Its three stanzas of four lines each rhyme in simple fashion with full

vowel sounds, and as a result, the poem lends itself to being sung, as indeed it has often been set to music. The poet portrays himself as a simple person preferring the simple life. The descriptive critic will notice the basic formal qualities of the poem: simple rhyme, steady meter, the familiar quatrain stanza structure. But the critic will also move further to talk about the imagery in the poem: the image of the simply built cabin, the small garden with bean rows, the bee hive, the sounds of the linnet's wings and the lake water lapping the shore, the look of noon's purple glow. The interpretive critic will address the entire project of the poet, who is standing "on the roadway, or on the pavements gray," longing to return to the distant country and the simple life. The poet "hears" the lake waters "in the deep heart's core," which is to say that the

simple life is absolutely basic to the poet. The last three words actually repeat the same idea. The heart is always at the core of a person, and it is always deep in that core. Such emphasis helps produce in the reader a sense of completion and significance. In a sense the triangular shape of the heart is replicated in the three words applied to it, as if the idea of the number 3 were a stabilizing "shape" similar to the visually stabilizing shape of the triangles in the paintings we have been describing.

Yeats later commented on this poem and said it was the first poem of his career to have a real sense of music. He also said that the imagery came to him when he was stepping off a curb near the British Museum in the heart of London and heard the sound of splashing water. The sounds immediately brought to mind the imagery of the island, which is in the west of Ireland.

It is important that we grasp the relative nature of explanations about the content of works of art. Even descriptive critics, who try to tell us about what is really there, will perceive things in a way that is relative to their own perspective. An amusing story in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* illustrates the point. Sancho Panza had two cousins who were expert wine tasters. However, on occasion, they disagreed. One found the wine excellent except for an iron taste; the other found the wine excellent except for a leather taste. When the barrel of wine was emptied, an iron key with a leather thong was found. As N. J. Berrill points out in *Man's Emerging Mind,*

The statement you often hear that seeing is believing is one of the most misleading ones a man has ever made, for you are more likely to see what you believe than believe what you see. To see anything as it really exists is about as hard an exercise of mind and eyes as it is possible to perform.[1]

Two descriptive critics can often "see" quite different things in an artistic form. This is not only to be expected but also desirable; it is one of the reasons great works of art keep us intrigued for centuries. But even though they may see quite different aspects when they look independently at a work of art, when they talk it over, the critics will usually come to some kind of agreement about the aspects each of them sees. The work being described, after all, has verifiable, objective qualities each of us can perceive and talk about. But it has subjective qualities as well, in the sense that the qualities are observed only by "subjects."

In the case of interpretive criticism, the subjectivity and, in turn, the relativity of explanations are more obvious than in the case of descriptive criticism. The content is "there" in the form, and yet, unlike

the form, it is not there in a directly perceivable way. It must be interpreted.

Interpretive critics, more than descriptive critics, must be familiar with the subject matter. Interpretive critics often make the subject matter more explicit for us at the first stage of their criticism, bringing us closer to the work. Perhaps the best way initially to get at Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4) is to discover its subject matter. Is it about a fire in a building or something else? If we are not clear about this, perception of the painting is obscured. But after the subject matter has been elucidated, good interpretive critics go much further: exploring and discovering meanings about the subject matter as revealed by the form. Now they are concerned with helping us grasp the content directly, in all of its complexities and subtleties. This final stage of interpretive criticism is the most demanding of all criticism.

Evaluative Criticism

To evaluate a work of art is to judge its merits. At first this seems to suggest that ***evaluative criticism*** is prescriptive criticism, which prescribes what is good as if it were a medicine and tells us that this work is superior to that work. However, our approach is somewhat different. Evaluative criticism functions to establish the quality and excellence of the work. To some extent, our discussion will include comparisons that inevitably urge us to make quality decisions. Those decisions are best made after descriptive and interpretive criticism have taken part in examining the work of art.

PERCEPTION KEY Evaluative Criticism

1. Suppose you are a judge of an exhibition of painting, and in Chapter 2 (Figures 2-9 through 2-18) have been placed into competition. You are to award first, second, and third prizes. What would your decisions be? Why?

2. Suppose, further, that you are asked to judge which is the best work of art from the following selection: Le Corbusier's church, Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," and Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). What would your decision be? Why?

It may be that this kind of evaluative criticism makes you uncomfortable. If so, we think your reaction is based on good instincts. First, each work of art is unique, so a relative merit ranking of several of them seems arbitrary. This is especially the case when the works are in different media and have different subject matters, as in the second question of the Perception Key. Second, it is not clear how such judging helps us in our basic critical purpose—to learn from our reflections about works of art how to participate with these works more intensely and enjoyably.

Nevertheless, evaluative criticism of some kind is generally necessary. As authors, we have been making such judgments continually in this book—in the selections for illustrations, for example. You make such judgments when, as you enter a museum, you decide to spend your time with this painting rather than that. Obviously directors of museums must also make evaluative criticisms, because usually they cannot display every work owned by the museum. If a van Gogh is on sale—and one of his paintings, *Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers,* was bought in 1997 for $90 million—someone has to decide its worth. Evaluative criticism, then, is always functioning, at least implicitly.

The problem, then, is how to use evaluative criticism as constructively as possible. How can we use such criticism to help our participation with works of art? Whether Giorgione's painting (Figure 2-9) or Pearlstein's (Figure 2-18) deserves first prize seems trivial. But if almost all critics agree that Shakespeare's poetry is far superior to Edward Guest's, and if we have been thinking Guest's poetry is better, we should do some reevaluating. Or if we hear a music critic whom we respect state that the music of Duke Ellington is worth listening to—and up to this time we have dismissed it—then we should make an effort to listen. Perhaps the basic importance of evaluative criticism lies in its commendation of works that we might otherwise dismiss. This may lead us to delightful experiences. Such criticism may also make us more skeptical about our own judgments.

Evaluative criticism presupposes three fundamental standards: perfection, insight, and inexhaustibility. When the evaluation centers on the form, it usually values a form highly only if the detail and regional relationships are organically related. If they fail to cohere with the structure, the result is distracting and thus inhibits participation. An artistic form in which everything works together may be called perfect. A work may have perfect organization, however, and still be evaluated as poor unless it satisfies the standard of insight. If the form fails to inform us about some subject matter—if it just pleases, interests, or excites us but doesn't make some significant difference in our lives—then, for us, that form is not artistic. Such a form may be valued below artistic form because the participation it evokes, if it evokes any at all, is not lastingly significant. Incidentally, a work lacking representation of objects and events may possess artistic form.

Abstract art has a definite subject matter—the sensuous. Who is to say that the Pollock is a lesser work of art because it informs only about the sensuous? The sensuous is with us all the time, and to be sensitive to it is exceptionally life-enhancing.

Finally, works of art may differ greatly in the breadth and depth of their content. The subject matter of Pollock's *The Flame*—the sensuous—is not as broad as the subject of Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). Yet it does not follow necessarily that the Cézanne is a superior work. The stronger the content—that is, the richer the insight into the subject matter—the more intense our participation, because we have more to keep us involved in the work. Such works apparently are inexhaustible, and evaluative critics usually will rate only those kinds of works as masterpieces.

The sensuous was central to the British art show titled Sensation, which showed controversial works that caused the Royal Academy of Art to restrict entry to those over age eighteen. Some of the works were perceived as repugnant by some churchmen and politicians in New York. Ron Mueck's four-foot-long *Mask II: Self-portrait* (Figure 3-6) was a sensation because of its hugeness and its hyper-real style. The Saatchi Gallery commissioned this work for the Sensation show in London.

FIGURE 3-6

Ron Mueck, *Mask II*. 2001–2002. Mixed media, 30⅜ × 46½ × 33½ inches (77.2 × 118.1 × 85.1 cm). Collection of the Art Supporting Foundation to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Mueck's huge sculptures were part of the original Sensation show in London. Their effect on the viewer is one of surprise and, ultimately, delight.

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FIGURE 3-7

Chris Ofili, *Holy Virgin Mary*. 1996. Mixed media, 96 × 72 inches. Victoria Miro Gallery, London. This is another example of shock art, by Ofili, a British artist noted for works referencing his African heritage. Audiences were alarmed when they discovered one of the media was elephant dung, a substance common in African art but not easily accepted by Western audiences.

Courtesy of Chris Ofili/Afroco and David Zwirner

Rudolph Giuliani, mayor of New York at the time, did not see the show but was horrified by complaints from William Donahue, president of the Catholic League, and cut off funding to the museum. He later restored it, but not until protesters accused him of censorship. Churchmen and politicians thought the most shocking work of art was by Chris Ofili, a young black painter whose *Holy Virgin Mary* (Figure 3-7) alarmed religious New Yorkers because images of naked female bottoms and elephant dung were part of the mixed media that went into the painting.

PERCEPTION KEY The Sensation Show

1. David Bowie said Sensation was the most important show since the 1913 New York Armory show in which Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (Figure 2-14) created a scandal, protest, and intense controversy. Most art that was once shocking seems tame a few years later. To what extent do any of these works of art still have shock value?

2. Should politicians, like the mayor of New York, punish major museums for showing art that the politicians feel is offensive? Does such an act constitute a legitimate form of evaluative art criticism? Does it constitute art criticism if, like ex-mayor Giuliani, the politician has not seen and experienced the art?

3. The Sensation show was described as shock art. Ofili's use of naked female bottoms and dung in a portrait of the Madonna shocked many people. Why would it have been shocking? To what extent is shock an important value in art? Would you agree with those who said Chris Ofili's work was not art? What would be the basis for such a position?

4. Would Chris Ofili's painting be shocking if people were unaware that he painted some of it with elephant dung? Would people be less alarmed if they knew that in Africa such a practice in art is relatively common? Does any of this matter in making a judgment about the painting's success as a work of art? What matters most for you in evaluating this painting?

The Polish Rider (Figure 3-8), featured in "Experiencing: *The Polish Rider,*" was originally attributed to Rembrandt. But in 1982 a group of five scholars, members of the Rembrandt Research Project, "disattributed" the painting. Studying subtleties such as brushwork, color transitions, transparency, shadowing, and structuring, they concluded that Willem Drost, a student of Rembrandt, was probably the artist. In the Frick Museum in New York City, *The Polish Rider* no longer draws crowds. Another work, presumably by Rembrandt, had been expected to sell for at least $15 million. It, too, was disattributed and was sold for *only* $800,000!

EXPERIENCING *The Polish Rider*

1. Does knowing *The Polish Rider* was probably painted by Willem Drost instead of Rembrandt van Rijn diminish your participation

with the painting? Does the fact that it was painted by a student negatively affect your evaluation of the painting?

2. Should a work of art be evaluated completely without reference to its creator?

3. How should our critical judgment of the painting be affected by knowing it was once valued at millions of dollars and is now worth vastly less?

One of the authors, as a young adult, saw this painting in the Frick Museum and listened to a discussion of its merits when it was thought to be by Rembrandt. Although today the painting is neglected, it is no less excellent than it was.

FIGURE 3-8

Willem Drost, *The Polish Rider*. 1655. Oil on canvas, 46 × 53⅛ inches. Frick Collection, New York. Long thought to be a painting by Rembrandt, *The Polish Rider* is now credited to one of his gifted students. The Frick removed it from a prominent place after Julius Held determined that it is probably the work of Willem Drost.

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One school of thought holds that paintings are to be evaluated wholly on their own merit without reference to the artist who created it. *The Polish Rider*, for instance, would still be held in great esteem if it had not been assumed to be by Rembrandt. But another school of thought holds that a

painting is best evaluated when seen in the context of other paintings by the same artists, or even in the context of other paintings with similar style and subject matter.

FIGURE 3-9

Amedeo Modigliani, *Nu Couché* (*Sleeping Nude*). 1917–1918. Via Christies.

©Christie's Images/Bridgeman Images

Because in modern times artworks have sometimes been investment opportunities for wealthy people, the question of value has become a financial question even more than an aesthetic question. The result is that some works of art have been grossly overvalued by art critics who are swayed by the dollar value, not the artistic value. We believe art must be valued for its capacity to provide us with insight and to promote our participation, not for its likelihood to be worth a fortune.

4. Which school of thought do you belong to: those who evaluate a painting on its own merits or those who consider the reputation of the artist?

5. Prices for art soared enormously beginning in the 1980s. The highest recent price paid at auction for a work of art was $170 million for Amedeo Modigliani's nude, *Nu Couché* (*Sleeping Nude*) (Figure 3-9). How does its money value affect its artistic value?

This painting surprised the art world by selling for $170 million to a Chinese collector, a taxi driver who became a billionaire. It took nine minutes to sell this painting via an international telephone call. Examine this painting in terms of descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative criticism. How does it compare with the nudes in Chapter 2? Why would any information regarding its sale or the price paid for it affect our sense of the artistic value of the painting? What is your judgment of *Nu Couché*'s artistic value?

SUMMARY

Being a responsible critic demands being at the height of awareness while examining a work of art in detail, establishing its subject matter, and clarifying its achievement. There are three main types of criticism: Descriptive criticism focuses on form, interpretive criticism focuses on content, and evaluative criticism focuses on the relative merits of a work.

Good critics can help us understand works of art while giving us the means or techniques that will help us become good critics ourselves. They can teach us about what kinds of questions to ask. Each of the following chapters on the individual

arts is designed to do just that—to give some help about what kinds of questions a serious viewer should ask in order to come to a clearer perception and deeper understanding of any specific work. With the arts, unlike many other areas of human concern, the questions are often more important than the answers. The real lover of the arts will often not be the person with all the answers but rather the one who asks the best questions. This is not because the answers are worthless but because the questions, when properly applied, lead us to a new awareness, a more exalted consciousness of what works of art have to offer. Then when we get to the last chapter, this preparation will lead to a better understanding of how the arts are related to other branches of the humanities.

[1]N. J. Berrill, *Man's Emerging Mind* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1955), p. 147.

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Part 2 THE ARTS

Chapter 4

PAINTING

Our Visual Powers

Painting awakens our visual senses so as to make us see color, shape, light, and form in new ways. Painters such as Siqueiros, Goya, Cézanne, Gentileschi, Neel, and virtually all the painters illustrated in this book make demands on our sensitivity to the visual field, rewarding us with challenges and delights that only painting can provide. But at the same time, we are also often dulled by day-to-day experience or by distractions of business or study that make it difficult to look with the intensity that great art requires. Therefore, we sometimes need to refresh our awareness by sharpening our attention to the surfaces of paintings as well as to their overall power. For example, by referring to the following Perception Key we may prepare ourselves to look deeply and respond in new ways to some of the paintings we considered in earlier chapters.

PERCEPTION KEY Our Visual Powers

1. Jackson Pollock, *The Flame* (Figure 3-3). Identify the three major

colors Pollock uses. How do these colors establish a sense of visual rhythm? Which of the colors is most intense? Which most surprising?

2. Suzanne Valadon, *Reclining Nude* (Figure 2-16). Examine the piece of furniture, the sofa, on which Valadon's nude reclines. What color is it? Why is it an effective

contrast to the nude? What are the designs on the sofa? What color are the lines of the designs? How do they relate to the subject matter of the painting?

3. Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning* (Figure 1-6). What are the most important colors in the painting? How do they balance and complement each other? Why does Hopper limit the intensity of the colors as he does? What is the visual rhythmic effect of the patterns formed in the windows of the second floor? Are any two windows the same? How does Hopper use unexpected forms to break the rhythm of the first level of shops? What emotional qualities are excited by Hopper's control of the visual elements in the painting?

4. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). How many colors does Cézanne use in this painting? Which color is dominant? Which figure in the painting is most dominant? How do the most important lines in the painting direct your vision? Describe the way your eye moves through the painting. How does Cézanne use line and color to direct your attention?

Our point is that everyday life tends to dull our senses so that we do

not observe our surroundings with the sensitivity that we might. For help we must go to the artists, especially the painter and the sculptor—those who are most sensitive to the visual appearances of things. Their works make things and their qualities much clearer than they usually appear. The artist purges from our sight the films of familiarity. Painting, with its "all-at-onceness," more than any other art, gives us the time to allow our vision to focus.

The Media of Painting

Throughout this book we will be talking about the basic materials and ***media*** in each of the arts, because a clear understanding of their properties will help us understand what artists do and how they work. The most prominent media in Western painting—and most painting in the rest of the world—are tempera, fresco, oil, watercolor, and acrylic. In early paintings the ***pigment***—the actual color—required a ***binder*** such as egg yolk, glue, or casein to keep it in solution and permit it to be applied to canvas, wood, plaster, and other substances.

Tempera

Tempera is pigment bound by egg yolk and applied to a carefully prepared surface like the wood panels of Cimabue's thirteenth-century *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels* (Figure 4-1). The colors of tempera sometimes look slightly flat and are difficult to change as the artist works, but the marvelous precision of detail and the subtlety of linear shaping are extraordinary. The purity of colors, notably in the lighter range, can be wondrous, as with the tinted white of the inner dress of Giotto's *Madonna Enthroned* (Figure 4-2). In the fourteenth century, Giotto achieves an astonishing level of detail in the

gold ornamentation below and around the Madonna. At the same time, his control of the medium of tempera permitted him to represent figures with a high degree of individuality and realism, representing a profound change in the history of art.

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FIGURE 4-1

Cimabue, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels*. Circa 1285–1290. Tempera and gold on wood, 12 feet 7¾ inches × 7 feet 4 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Cimabue's painting is typical of Italian altarpieces in the thirteenth century. The use of tempera and gold leaf creates a radiance appropriate to a religious scene.

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FIGURE 4-2

Giotto, *Madonna Enthroned*. Circa 1310. Tempera and gold on wood, 10 feet 83?16 inches × 6 feet 83?8 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Giotto, credited with creating a realistic portrayal of figures from nature in religious art, lavishes his *Madonna Enthroned* with extraordinary detail permitted by the use of tempera and gold leaf. Giotto was one of Florence's greatest painters.

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The power of these works, when one stands before them in Florence's Uffizi Galleries, is intense beyond what can be shown in a reproduction. Cimabue's painting is more than twelve feet tall and commands the space as few paintings of the period can. The brilliance of the colors and the detail of the expressions of all the figures in the painting demand a remarkable level of participation. By comparison, the Giotto, only a few years later, uses contrasting colors to affect us. But Giotto's faces are more realistic than Cimabue's, marking an important shift in Renaissance art. Giotto achieves an illusion of depth and a sense that the figures are distinct, as if they were portraits.

Fresco

Because many churches and other buildings required paintings directly on plaster walls, artists perfected the use of ***fresco***, pigment dissolved in lime water applied to wet plaster as it is drying. In the case of wet fresco, the color penetrates to about

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FIGURE 4-3

Michelangelo, *Creation of Adam*, detail. Circa 1508–1512. Fresco. Michelangelo's world-famous frescoes in the Sistine Chapel have been cleaned to reveal intense, brilliant colors. This detail from the ceiling reveals the long-lasting nature of fresco painting. The period 1508–1512 marks the High Renaissance in Italy.

©Killer Stock Inc./Getty Images

one-eighth of an inch and is bound into the plaster. There is little room for error because the plaster dries relatively quickly, and the artist must understand how the colors will look when embedded in plaster and no longer wet. One advantage of this medium is that it will last as long as the wall itself. One of the greatest examples of the use of fresco is Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, on the ceiling of which is the famous *Creation of Adam* (Figure 4-3).

Oil

Oil painting uses a mixture of pigment, linseed oil, varnish, and turpentine to produce either a thin or thick consistency, depending on the artist's desired effect. In the fifteenth century, oil painting dominated because of its flexibility, the richness of its colors, and the extraordinary durability and long-lasting qualities. Because oil paint dries slowly and can be put on in thin layers, it offers the artist

remarkable control over the final product. No medium in painting offers a more flexible blending of colors or subtle portrayal of light and textures, as in Parmigianino's *The Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 4-4). Oil paint can be messy, and it takes sometimes months or years to dry completely, but it has been the dominant medium in easel painting since the Renaissance.

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FIGURE 4-4

Parmigianino, *The Madonna with the Long Neck*. Circa 1535. Oil on panel, 85 × 52 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Humanistic values dominate the painting, with recognizably distinct faces, young people substituting for angels, and physical distortions designed to unsettle a conservative audience. This style of oil painting, with unresolved figures and unanswered questions, is called Mannerism—painting with an attitude.

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FIGURE 4-5

Winslow Homer, Sketch for "*Hound and Hunter*." 1892. Watercolor on wove paper. $131^{5}/_{16} \times 191^{5}/_{16}$ inches. Gift of Ruth K. Henschel in memory of her husband, Charles R. Henschel. Accession No. 1975.92.7. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Although a mixed-media composition, *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter"* is dominated by watercolor. An apparently unfinished quality imparts a sense of energy, spontaneity, and intensity, typical of Homer's work.

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Watercolor

The pigments of ***watercolor*** are bound in a water-soluble adhesive, such as gum- arabic, a gummy plant substance. Usually watercolor is slightly translucent so that the whiteness of the paper shows through. Unlike artists working with tempera or oil painting, watercolorists work quickly, often with broad strokes and in broad washes. The color

resources of the medium are limited in range, but often striking in effect. Modern watercolor usually does not aim for precise detail. In his *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter"* (Figure 4-5), Winslow Homer delights in the unfinished quality of the watercolor and uses it to communicate a sense of immediacy. He controls the range of colors as a way of giving us a sense of atmosphere and weather.

Acrylic

A modern synthetic polymer medium, ***acrylic*** is fundamentally a form of plastic resin that dries very quickly and is flexible for the artist to apply and use. One advantage of acrylic paints is that they do not fade, darken, or yellow as they age. They can support luminous colors and look sometimes very close to oil paints in their

FIGURE 4-6
Morris Louis, *Beta Lambda*. 1961. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 8 feet 73?8 inches × 13 feet 4¼ inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Mrs. Abner Brenner. Object number 428.1983. The painting reveals the fluid qualities of acrylics, essentially sensuous color permitted to radiate through a range of tones. Its size, more than 8 by 13 feet, intensifies our reaction to the shapes the colors take.

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final effect. Many modern painters use this medium. Morris Louis's *Beta Lamda* (Figure 4-6) is a large abstract painting whose colors suggest a range of intensities similar to what we see in oil paintings.

The ease of using acrylic shows in the fluidity of the lines of stark colors balancing a huge open space of uncolored canvas. This painting was done in Louis's small dining room, but its size is such that

only a few spaces can exhibit it. In viewing, one is captured by its gigantic presence. The triangular forms that dominate give the color a power that seems to radiate from the wall. Louis was a colorist experimenting with acrylic up to his death only a year after this painting was finished.

Other Media and Mixed Media

The great Japanese artist Hokusai was prominent in the first half of the nineteenth century in the medium of woodcuts, using ink for his color. The process is extremely complex, but he dominated in the Edo period, when many artists produced brilliantly colored prints that began to be seen in Europe, especially in France, where the painters found great inspiration in the brilliance of the work. *The Great Wave,* his most famous work (Figure 4-7), is from his project, *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji.* Here the mountain is tiny in comparison with the roiling waves threatening even smaller figures in two boats. The power of nature is the subject matter, and the respect for nature may be part of its content.

The dominant medium for Chinese artists has been ink, as in Wang Yuanqi's *Landscape after Wu Zhen* (Figure 4-8). Modern painters often employ ***mixed media***, using duco and aluminum paint, house paint, oils, even grit and sand. Andy Warhol used acrylic and silk-screen ink in his famous *Marilyn Monroe* series. Some basic kinds of ***prints*** are produced by methods including woodcut, engraving, linocut, etching, drypoint, lithography, and aquatint.

FIGURE 4-7

Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760–1849). *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura),* also known as *The Great Wave, from the series* Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjurokkei). Circa 1830–1832. Polychrome woodblock print; ink and color on paper; 101?8 × 1415? 16 inches (25.7 × 37.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.

Source: Robert Lehman Collection, 1975/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

PERCEPTION KEY The Media of Painting

1. Compare the detail of tempera in Giotto's *Madonna Enthroned* with the radiance of color in Parmigianino's oil painting *The Madonna with the Long Neck*. What differences do you see in the quality of detail in each painting and in the quality of the color?

2. Compare the color effects of Hokusai's *The Great Wave* woodblock print with the colors in Winslow Homer's *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter."* What seem to be the differences in the treatment of color?

3. Contrast the effect of Homer's watercolor approach to nature with Wang Yuanqi's use of ink. Which communicates a sense of nature more readily? In which is nature the most evident subject matter? Compare the formal structure of each painting.

4. Compare the traditional fresco of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* with Leonardo's experimental fresco of the *Last Supper* (Figure 3-1). To what extent does Michelangelo's use of the medium help you imagine what Leonardo's fresco would have looked like if he had used Michelangelo's technique?

FIGURE 4-8

Wang Yuanqi, *Landscape after Wu Zhen*. 1695. Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 42¾ × 20¼ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr. Typical of many of the great Chinese landscape scrolls, Wang Yuanqi uses his brush and ink prodigiously, finding a powerful energy in shaping the rising mountains and their trees. The presence of tiny houses and rising pathways to the heights places humanity in a secondary role in relation to nature and to the visual power of the mountain itself.

Source: Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Elements of Painting

The ***elements*** are the basic building blocks of a medium. For painting they are line, color, texture, and composition.* Before we discuss the elements of painting, consider the issues raised by the Perception Key associated with Frederic, Lord Leighton's painting *Flaming June* (Figure 4-9).

PERCEPTION KEY *Flaming June*

The subject matter of this painting is sleep itself. But it is also a painting with intense sensuous content. We respond to it partly because it is so vivid in color.

1. What powerful ideas does sleep imply?

2. What does the painting tell us about the pleasures of watching a beautiful woman sleeping? How difficult is it for you to imagine this a nymph rather than a living woman?

3. Comment on the color in this painting. In most visions of sleeping figures the tones are dampened, sometimes dark, as one would expect in a nighttime vision. In what ways does the astounding contrast between sleep and the brilliance of the color affect your

sense of what the subject matter is? How does it contribute to your efforts to decide on the content of the painting?

4. How does the clarity of the line in this painting help you understand its significance?

5. Compare *Flaming June* with the paintings by Giorgione (Figure 2-9), Tom Wesselmann (Figure 2-13), and Philip Pearlstein (Figure 2-18). All are slumbering women. What makes the concerns of Leighton different from those of the other painters?

Line

Line is a continuous marking made by a moving point on a surface. Line outlines shapes and can contour areas within those outlines. Sometimes contour or internal lines dominate the outlines, as with the robe of Cimabue's *Madonna* (Figure 4-1). ***Closed line*** most characteristically is hard and sharp, as in Lichtenstein's *Hopeless* (Figure 2-7). In the Cimabue and in Leighton's *Flaming June,* the line is also closed but somewhat softer. ***Open line*** most characteristically is soft and blurry, as in Renoir's *Bather Arranging Her Hair* (Figure 2-10).

PERCEPTION KEY Goya, Leighton, and Cézanne

1. Goya used both closed and open lines in his *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3). Locate these lines. Why did Goya use both kinds?

2. Does Leighton use both closed and open lines in *Flaming June*?

3. Identify outlines in Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). There seem to be no outlines drawn around the small bushes in the foreground. Yet we see these bushes as separate objects.

How can this be?

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FIGURE 4-9

Frederic, Lord Leighton, *Flaming June*. Circa 1895. Museo de Arte Ponce, Puerto Rico. Oil on canvas. 47½ × 47½ inches. Leighton was near the end of his career when he did this painting. He was an admirer of classical figures, such as Michelangelo's sculpture of *Night* in the Medici Tombs, which inspired the pose in this painting. He is said to have compared this figure with the sleeping naiads and mythic nymphs of classical literature. He aimed at a perfection of the figure as well as of the clothing.

©Universal History Archive/Getty Images

Line can suggest movement. Up-and-down movement may be indicated by the vertical, as in Parmigianino's *The Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 4-4). Lateral movement may be indicated by the horizontal and tends to stress stability, as in the same Parmigianino. Depending on the context, however, vertical and horizontal lines may appear static, as in Wesselmann's *Study for Great American Nude* and Lichtenstein's *Hopeless*. Generally, diagonal lines, as in Cézanne's *Mont Sainte- Victoire*, express more tension and movement than verticals and horizontals. Curving lines usually appear softer and more flowing, as in Leighton's *Flaming June*.

Line in Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Figure 4-10) can also suggest rhythm and movement, especially when used with vibrant colors, which in this painting are intended to echo the neon lights of 1940s Broadway. Mondrian lived and worked for twenty years in Paris, but in 1938, with Nazis threatening war, he moved to London. In 1940, with the war under way, he went to New York. He was particularly attracted to American jazz music. He arrived in New York when the swing bands reached their height of popularity and he used his signature grid style in *Broadway Boogie Woogie* to interpret jazz

visually. The basic structure is a grid of vertical and

FIGURE 4-10

Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*,1942–1943. Oil on canvas, 50 × 50 inches (127 × 127 cm). Given anonymously. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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horizontal yellow lines—and only vertical and horizontal lines. On these lines, and between these lines, Mondrian places patterns of intense blocks of color to suggest the powerful jazz rhythms he loved so much. Even the large "silent" blocks of white imply musical rests.

An ***axis line*** is an imaginary line that helps determine the basic visual directions of a painting. In Goya's *May 3, 1808*, for example, two powerful axis lines move toward and intersect at the white shirt of the man about to be shot: Lines of the rifles appear to converge and go on, and the line of those to be executed moving out of the ravine seems to be inexorably continuing. Axis lines are invisible vectors of visual force. Every visual field is dynamic, a field of forces directing our vision, some visible and some invisible but controlled by the visible. Only when the invisible lines are basic to the structuring of the image, as in the Goya, are they axis lines.

Since line is usually the main determinant of shapes, and shapes are usually the main determinant of detail, regional, and structural relationships, line is usually fundamental in the overall composition—Willem de Kooning's *Woman I* (Figure 4-11) is an exception. Here lines and colors seem to perform the same kind of operation on the canvas.

FIGURE 4-11

Willem de Kooning, American, born in the Netherlands. 1904–1997. *Woman I*, 1950–1952. Oil on canvas, 6 feet 3⅞ inches by 58 inches (192.7 × 147.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York. At more than six feet high, *Woman I* has a huge physical impact on the viewer. De Kooning worked on this painting for quite a while, beginning with sketches, then reworking the canvas again and again. He is said to have drawn inspiration from female fertility goddesses as well as images of dark female figures in literature and myth.

©2017 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: ©Peter Horree/Alamy

Examine the lines in de Kooning's *Woman I*. Critics have commented on the vigor with which de Kooning attacked the canvas, suggesting that he was working out psychological issues that bordered on misogyny. We cannot know if that was the case, but we can see how the lines—vertical, horizontal, lateral—all intersect to produce an arresting power, completely opposite of the power of Leighton's *Flaming June*.

By way of contrast, Cézanne's small bushes in *Mont Sainte-Victoire* are formed by small, juxtaposed, greenish-blue planes that vary slightly in their tinting. These planes are hatched by brushstrokes that slightly vary the textures. And from the

center of the planes to the perimeters there is usually a shading from light to dark. Thus emerges a strong sense of volume with density. We see those small bushes as somehow distinct objects, and yet we see no separating outlines. Colors and textures meet and create impressions of line. As with axis lines, the visible suggests the invisible—we project the outlines.

In the Asian tradition, the expressive power of line is achieved

generally in a very different way from the Western tradition. The stroke—made by flexible brushes of varying sizes and hairs—is intended to communicate the spirit and feelings of the artist, directly and spontaneously. The sensitivity of the inked brush is extraordinary. The ink offers a wide range of nuances: texture, shine, depth, pallor, thickness, and wetness. The brush functions as a seismograph of the painter's mind.

The brushwork in Wang Yuanqi's painting (Figure 4-8) varies with the tone of the ink. The rising forms of the mountains are made with a broad brush, almost translucent ink-tone, with intense, dark dots implying the vegetation defining the top of each ridge. The manmade structures in the painting are made with a smaller brush, as in the curved bridge at the lower right of the painting. The rooftops and buildings in the mid portion of the painting on both the left and right use a small brush with strong lines, like those of the trees in the mid foreground. The leaves of the nearest trees and bushes are deep-tone dark ink produced by chopping strokes, sometimes known as the ax-cut. The painting demands that our eyes begin with the trees in the foreground, then rise inexorably upward following the rising nearby mountains, leading us to the smooth, distant higher mountains that have no vegetation.

PERCEPTION KEY Line

1. Which of the paintings in this chapter have the most vigorous line? How does the line in these paintings interact with color?

2. When does the color in the painting actually constitute line? How can color do the work of line?

3. Try drawing a copy of one of these paintings using only the line of your pencil or pen. What do you learn about how the artist used line to clarify his subject matter?

4. Compare the brushwork of Cézanne and Wang Yuanqi with the brushwork of Frederic Leighton and Willem de Kooning.

Color

Color is composed of three distinct qualities: hue, saturation, and value. ***Hue*** is simply the name of a color. Red, yellow, and blue are the ***primary colors***. Their mixtures produce the ***secondary colors***: green, orange, and purple. Further mixing produces six more, the ***tertiary colors***. Thus, the spectrum of the color wheel shows twelve hues. ***Saturation*** refers to the purity, vividness, or intensity of a hue. When we speak of the "redness of red," we mean its highest saturation. ***Value***, or shading, refers to the lightness or darkness of a hue, the mixture in the hue of white or black. A high value of a color is obtained by mixing in white, and a low value is obtained by mixing in black. The highest value of red shows red at its lightest; the lowest value of red shows red at its darkest. ***Complementary colors*** are opposite

each other—for example, red and green, orange and blue. When two complements are equally mixed, a neutral gray appears. An addition of a complement to a hue will lower its saturation. A red will look less red—will have less intensity—by even a small addition of green. And an addition of either white or black will change both the value and the saturation of the hue.

Texture

Texture is the surface "feel" of something. When the brushstrokes have been smoothed out, the surface is seen as smooth, as in Wesselmann's *Study for Great American Nude*. When the brushstrokes have been left rough, the surface is seen as rough, as in van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (Figure 15-4) and Pollock's *The Flame* (Figure 3-3). In these two examples, the textures are real, for if—heaven forbid!—you were to run your fingers over these paintings, you would feel them as rough.

Distinctive brushstrokes produce distinctive textures. Compare, for example, the soft hatchings of Valadon's *Reclining Nude* (Figure 2-16) with the grainy effect of most of the brushstrokes in Wang Yuanqi's painting (Figure 4-8). Sometimes the textural effect can be so dominant that the specific substance behind the textures is disguised, as in the background behind the head and shoulders of Renoir's *Bather Arranging Her Hair*.

PERCEPTION KEY Texture

1. In what ways are the renditions of textures an important part in Willem de Kooning's *Woman I*?

2. Suppose the ultra-smooth surfaces of Wesselmann's nude had been used by Neel. How would this have significantly changed the content of her picture?

Neel's nude would be greatly altered, we believe, if she had used textures such as Wesselmann's. A tender, vulnerable, motherly appearance would become harsh, confident, and brazen. With the de

Kooning, the vigor of the painting would have lost power if the texture were smooth. De Kooning's constant attack at the canvas, and his overpainting, produces a unique texture.

The medium of a painting may have much to do with textural effects. Tempera usually has a dry feel. Watercolor naturally lends itself to a fluid feel. Because they can be built up in heavy layers, oil and acrylic are useful for depicting rough textures, but of course they can be made smooth. Fresco usually has a grainy, crystalline texture.

Composition

In painting or any other art, ***composition*** refers to the ordering of relationships: among details, among regions, among details and regions, and among these and the total structure. Deliberately or more usually instinctively, artists use organizing principles to create forms that inform.

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Principles Among the basic principles of traditional painting are balance, gradation, movement and rhythm, proportion, variety, and unity.

- *Balance* refers to the equilibrium of opposing visual forces. Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Figure 3-1) is an example of symmetrical balance. Details and regions are arranged on either side of a central axis. Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3) is an example of asymmetrical balance, for there is no central axis.

- *Gradation* refers to a continuum of changes in the details and regions, such as the gradual variations in shape, color value, and

shadowing in Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2).

- *Movement and rhythm* refers to the way a painting controls the movement and pace of our vision. For example, in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Figure 4-3), the implied movement of God from right to left establishes a rhythm in contrast with Adam's indolence.

- *Proportion* refers to the emphasis achieved by the scaling of sizes of shapes—for example, the way the large Madonna in the Cimabue (Figure 4-1) contrasts with the tiny prophets.

- *Unity* refers to the togetherness, despite contrasts, of details and regions to the whole, as in Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4).

- *Variety* refers to the contrasts of details and regions—for example, the color and shape oppositions in O'Keeffe's *Rust Red Hills* (Figure 4-12).

FIGURE 4-12

Georgia O'Keeffe, 1930. *Rust Red Hills*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 16 × 30 inches. Sloan Fund Purchase. Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University. O'Keefe found the American West to be a refreshing environment after living for years in New York. This is a study of hills that fascinated her near her home in Abiqui, New Mexico, where she painted many landscapes such as this.

©2017 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: ©Fine Art Images/Heritage/The Image Works

PERCEPTION KEY Principles of Composition

After defining each principle briefly, we listed an example. Go through the color photographs of paintings in the book and select another

example for each principle.

Space and Shapes Perhaps the best way to understand ***space*** is to think of it as a hollow volume available for occupation by ***shapes***. Then that space can be described by referring to the distribution and relationships of those shapes in that space; for example, space can be described as crowded or open.

Shapes in painting are areas with distinguishable boundaries, created by colors, textures, and usually—and especially—lines. A painting is a two-dimensional surface with breadth and height. But three-dimensional simulation, even in the flattest of paintings, is almost always present, even in de Kooning's *Woman I*. Colors when juxtaposed invariably move forward or backward visually. And when shapes suggest mass—three-dimensional solids—depth is inevitably seen.

The illusion of depth—***perspective***—can be made by various techniques, including setting a single vanishing point, as in Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Figure 3-2), in which all lines in the painting seem to move toward Jesus's head. The vanishing point in Figure 4-17, Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, is in the upper right corner, in which figures seem to recede into darkness. Many techniques, such as darkening and lightening colors, will help give the illusion of depth to a painting.

PERCEPTION KEY Composition

Choose four paintings not discussed so far and answer the following questions:

1. In which painting does color dominate line, or line dominate color?
2. Which painting is most symmetrical? Which most asymmetrical?
3. Which pleases your eye more: symmetry or asymmetry?
4. In which painting is the sense of depth perspective the strongest? How does the artist achieve this depth?
5. In which painting is proportion most important?
6. Which painting pleases you the most? Explain how its composition pleases you.

The Clarity of Painting

The Swing (Figure 4-13), Fragonard's painting of young libertines, seems to be the picture of innocent pleasures, but the painter and his audience knew that he was portraying a liberal society that enjoyed riches, station, and erotic opportunity. This painting has been considered one of the Wallace Collection's masterpieces.

FIGURE 4-13

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *The Swing*. 1776. Oil on canvas, 35 × 32 inches. The Wallace Collection, London. This famous painting seems at first glance to be a picture of young people at play, emulating innocent children. But the eighteenth-century audience read this as a libertine and his mistress. The swing was a code for the sexual freedom of the privileged "playmates" in the painting.

©Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/Alamy

PERCEPTION KEY *The Swing*

1. What are the most contrasting colors in this painting? Which

character is most highlighted by color? What does the color imply?

2. How is nature portrayed in the painting? What colors and contrasts seem most expressive of nature's powers?

3. Why is the richness of the garden the best locale for this scene? What do the lovers have in common with the garden?

4. One of the men on the ground is a clergyman. One is the woman's lover. Which is which? How does the use of color clarify the relationship?

5. The bough and leaves above the woman are mysteriously shaped. In what sense may it be a comment on the relationship of the woman and her lover?

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This painting was commissioned by a French baron who explicitly asked Fragonard to paint the woman as a portrait of his mistress. The baron is himself highlighted by color at the lower left looking up the skirts of his mistress. The painting established a clarity of the relationships of the figures to the eighteenth-century viewer, and of course to the characters portrayed. The figure of the man in the lower right is a clergyman who may be hopeful that the baron will marry his mistress.

The small stone sculptures are classical figures, a Cupid on the left and putti in the lower center. The overabundance of the leaves and trees implies a fruitfulness and an erotic quotient illustrated by the castoff slipper and the baron's recumbent posture.

This painting has a special clarity because it is something of an allegorical representation of erotic play. Audiences today would not necessarily be aware of the specifics of the relationship of the man on the lower left with the woman on the swing. However, a careful analysis of the details of the painting—the pink dress, the man looking up her skirt, the overabundance of the vegetation, and the Cupid with his finger to his lips—and the richness of the coloration point to erotic play and erotic joy.

The "All-at-Onceness" of Painting

In addition to revealing the visually perceptible more clearly, paintings give us time for our vision to focus, hold, and participate. Of course, there are times when we can hold on a scene in nature. We are resting with no pressing worries and with time on our hands, and the sunset is so striking that we fix our attention on its redness. But then darkness descends and the mosquitoes begin to bite. In front of a painting, however, we find that things stand still, like the red in Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2). Here the red is peculiarly impervious and reliable, infallibly fixed and settled in its place. It can be surveyed and brought out again and again; it can be visualized with closed eyes and checked with open eyes. There is no hurry, for all of the painting is present, and under normal conditions it is going to stay present; it is not changing in any significant perceptual sense.

Moreover, we can hold on any detail or region or the totality as long as we like and follow any order of details or regions at our own pace. No region of a painting strictly presupposes another region temporally. The sequence is subject to no absolute constraint. Whereas there is only one route in listening to music, for example, there is a freedom of

routes in seeing paintings. With *The Swing* (Figure 4-13), for example, we may focus on the overhanging trees, then on the figure on the lower left, and finally on the woman in her pink dress. The next time, we may reverse the order. "Paths are made," as the painter Paul Klee observed, "for the eye of the beholder which moves along from patch to patch like an animal grazing." There is a "rapt resting" on any part, an unhurried series, one after the other, of "nows," each of which has its own temporal spread.

Paintings make it possible for us to stop in the present and enjoy at our leisure the sensations provided by the show of the visible. That is the second reason paintings can help make our vision whole. They not only clarify our world but also

may free us from worrying about the future and the past, because paintings are a framed context in which everything stands still. There is the "here-now" and relatively speaking nothing but the "here-now." Our vision, for once, has time to let the qualities of things and the things themselves unfold.

Abstract Painting

Abstract, or ***nonrepresentational, painting*** may be difficult to appreciate if we are confused about its subject matter. Since no objects or events are depicted, abstract painting might seem to have no subject matter: pictures of nothing. But this is not the case. The subject matter is the sensuous. The sensuous is composed of visual qualities—line, color, texture, space, shape, light, shadow, volume, and mass. Any qualities that stimulate our vision are ***sensa***. In

representational painting, sensa are used to portray objects and events. In abstract painting, sensa are freed. They are depicted for their own sake. Abstract painting reveals sensa, liberating us from our habits of always identifying these qualities with specific objects and events. They make it easy for us to focus on sensa themselves, even though we are not artists. Then the radiant and vivid values of the sensuous are enjoyed for their own sake, satisfying a fundamental need. Abstractions can help fulfill this need to behold and treasure the images of the sensuous. Instead of our controlling the sensa, transforming them into signs that represent objects or events, the sensa control us, transforming us into participators.

Moreover, because references to objects and events are eliminated, there is a peculiar relief from the future and the past. Abstract painting, more than any other art, gives us an intensified sense of here-now, or ***presentational immediacy***. When we perceive representational paintings such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4), we may think about our chances of getting to southern France sometime in the future. Or when we perceive *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3), we may think about similar massacres. These suggestions bring the future and past into our participation, causing the here-now to be somewhat compromised. But with abstract painting—because there is no portrayal of objects or events that suggest the past or the future—the sense of presentational immediacy is more intense.

Although sensa appear everywhere we look, in paintings sensa shine forth. This is especially true with abstract paintings, because there is nothing to attend to but the sensa. What you see is what you see. In nature the light usually appears as external to the colors and surface of sensa. The light plays on the colors and surface. In paintings the

light usually appears immanent in the colors and surface, seems to come—in part at least—through them, even in the flat, polished colors of a Mondrian.

In Arshile Gorky's *Untitled 1943* (Figure 4-14), the light seems to be absorbed into the colors and surfaces. There is a depth of luminosity about the sensa of paintings that rivals nature. Generally the colors of nature are more brilliant than the colors of painting, but usually in nature the sensa are either so glittering that our squints miss their inner luminosity or so changing that we lack the time to participate and penetrate. To ignore the allure of the sensa in a painting, and in turn in nature, is to miss one of the chief glories life provides. It is especially the abstract painter—the shepherd of sensa—who is most likely to call us back to our senses.

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Study the Gorky. Then reflect on how you experienced a sense of the rhythms of your eyes as you moved across and through the painting, aware of the various shapes and their colors. The rhythmic durations are "spots of time"—ordered by the relationships between the regions of sensa. Compare your experience of this painting with listening to music. What music might be "illustrated" by this painting?

FIGURE 4-14

Arshile Gorky, *Untitled*, 1943–1948. Oil on canvas, 54½ × 64½ inches. The power of Gorky's red is dominant in the painting. The interruptions of the indefinite dark-colored objects offer a contrast that makes the red even more powerful. A close look at the painting shows the levels of color in the brushstrokes that reveal layers of color beneath the surface. We see yellows and light blues and tints of gray, but they all make us aware of the sensa that clarify our understanding of Gorky's red.

©2017 The Arshile Gorky Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Art Association Purchase, Contemporary Arts Council Fund

Intensity and Restfulness in Abstract Painting

Abstract painting reveals sensa in their primitive but powerful state of innocence. This makes possible an extraordinary intensity of vision, renewing the spontaneity of our perception and enhancing the tone of our physical existence. We clothe our visual sensations in positive feelings, living in these sensations instead of using them as means to ends. And such sensuous activity—sight, for once minus anxiety and eyestrain—is sheer delight. Abstract painting offers us a complete rest from practical concerns. Abstract painting is, as Matisse in 1908 was beginning to see,

an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which might be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer, like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.[1]

PERCEPTION KEY de Kooning, Gorky, and O'Keeffe

1. De Kooning's *Woman I* (Figure 4-11) is, we think, an example of timelessness and the sensuous. O'Keeffe's *Rust Red Hills* (Figure 4-12) also emphasizes the sensuous, especially the rich reds, browns, and blue. What makes one painting presumably more timeless?

2. Examine the sensa in the O'Keeffe. Does the fact that the painting represents real things distract you from enjoying the sensa? How crucial are the sensa to your full appreciation of the painting?

3. What difference do you perceive in de Kooning's and Gorky's treatment of sensa?

4. Look at the Gorky upside down. Is the form weakened or strengthened? Does it make a difference? If so, what?

Gorky's *Untitled 1943* (Figure 4-14) is characterized by a color field that has been worked over and over. It is essentially red, but a close look will show that there are levels of red, layers of red. And the painting seems to have a range of floating objects that, when taken symbolically, seem to impersonate ideas or messages. All the symbols have been connected to what the Dallas Museum calls a special language of Gorky's own. In this way the expression is not of abstract ideas but of concrete color, of the sensa that Gorky moves through the painting's plane. Nothing specific is represented in this painting, but instead color is itself presented. It is for us to enjoy and to respond to in a fundamental way without the imposition of meaning or ideas. Ironically we call this abstract art as a way of contrasting it with representational art. But abstract art is not abstract—it presents to us the concrete material of sensory experience. We see concrete color and form, and that may be the most profound aesthetic purpose of painting.

Representational Painting

In the participative experience with ***representational paintings***, the sense of here-now, so overwhelming in the participative experience with abstractions, is somewhat weakened. Representational paintings situate the sensuous in objects and events. A representational

painting, like an abstraction, is “all there” and “holds still.” But past and future are more relevant than in our experience of abstract paintings because we are seeing representations of objects and events. Inevitably, we are at least vaguely aware of place and date; and, in turn, a sense of past and future is a part of that awareness. Our experience is more ordinary than it is when we feel the extraordinary isolation from objects and events that occurs in the perception of abstract paintings. Representational paintings always bring in some suggestion of “once upon a time.” Moreover, we are kept closer to the experience of every day, because images that refer to objects and events usually lack something of the strangeness of the sensuous alone.

Representational painting furnishes the world of the sensuous with objects and events. The horizon is sketched out more closely and clearly, and the spaces of the sensuous are filled, more or less, with things. But even when these furnishings (subject matter) are the same, the interpretation (content) of every painting is always different.

Comparison of Five Impressionist Paintings

From time to time, painters have grouped themselves into “schools” in which like-minded artists sometimes worked and exhibited together. The Barbizon school in France in the 1840s, a group of six or seven painters, attempted to paint outdoors so that their landscapes would have a natural feel in terms of color and light, unlike the studio landscapes that were popular at the time. Probably the most famous school of art of all time is the ***Impressionist school***, which flourished between 1870 and 1905, especially in France. The Impressionists’ approach to painting was dominated by a concentration on the

impression light made on the surfaces of things.

PERCEPTION KEY Comparison of Five Impressionist Paintings

1. In which of the following paintings is color most dominant over line? In which is line most dominant over color? How important does line seem to be for the impressionist painter?

2. In terms of composition, which paintings seem to rely on diagonal lines or diagonal groups of objects or images?

3. Comment on the impressionist reliance on balance as seen in these paintings. In which painting is symmetry most effectively used? In which is asymmetry most effective? How is your response to the paintings affected by symmetry or asymmetry?

4. If you were to purchase one of these paintings, which would it be? Why?

FIGURE 4-15

Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*. 1873. Oil on canvas, 19 × 24 inches. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris. This painting gave the name to the French Impressionists and remains one of the most identifiable paintings of the age. Compared with paintings by Ingres or Giorgione, this seems to be a sketch, but that is the point. It is an impression of the way the brilliant light plays on the waters at sunrise.

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Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (Figure 4-15) was shown at the first show of the impressionist painters in Paris in 1874, and it lent its name to the entire group. The scene in *Sunrise* has a spontaneous, sketchy effect, the sunlight breaking on glimmering water. Boats and ships lack mass and definition. The solidity of things is subordinated to

shimmering surfaces. We sense that only a moment has been caught. Monet and the Impressionists painted, not so much objects they saw but the light that played on and around them.

Edouard Manet was considered the leader of the impressionist group. His striking painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Figure 4-16) is more three-dimensional than Monet's, but the emphasis on color and light is similar. In this painting the Impressionists' preference for everyday scenes with ordinary people and objects is present. Details abound in this painting—some mysterious, such as the legs of the trapeze artist in the upper left corner.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's joyful painting (Figure 4-17) also represents an ordinary scene of people dining on a warm afternoon, all blissfully unaware of the painter. The scene, like many impressionist scenes, could have been captured by a camera. The perspective is what we would expect in a photograph, while the cut-off elements of people and things are familiar from our experience with snapshots. The use of light tones and reds balances the darker greens and grays in the background. Again, color dominates in this painting.

Childe Hassam was well known for his cityscapes, particularly for his colorful views of New York and Paris. But he also spent summers in the New England countryside, capturing moments such as *Summer Evening* (Figure 4-18),

FIGURE 4-16

Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. 1881–1882. Oil on canvas, 37¾ × 51¼ inches. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. Typical of impressionist paintings, this one has for its subject matter ordinary, everyday events. Viewers may also surmise a narrative embedded in the painting, given

the character in the mirror, not to mention the feet of the trapeze artist in the upper left.

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recollecting an ordinary evening in New Hampshire. The sharp, diagonal figure of a woman is presented in contrast to the strong, horizontal lines of the window. Hassam creates a relaxed moment, a sense of the ordinary in life, by avoiding any studied traditional composition. He seems to depend upon a photographer's "trick" called the "rule of thirds," by placing the figure in the right third of the composition and placing the lower horizontal of the window one-third of the way up from the bottom of the canvas. By avoiding traditional centrality of organization, Hassam produces a painting that echoes a photograph, as if doing little more than recording a simple moment.

Mary Cassatt's sister Lydia is also posed in a sharp diagonal in *Autumn* (Figure 4-19). Cassatt's intense autumn colors create a brilliance almost unexpected. For most

FIGURE 4-17

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. 1881. Oil on canvas, 51 × 68 inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Renoir, one of the greatest of the Impressionists, portrays ordinary Parisians in *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Earlier painters would have seen this as unfit for exhibition because its subject is not heroic or mythic. The Impressionists celebrated the ordinary.

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FIGURE 4-18

Childe Hassam, *Summer Evening*. 1886. Oil on canvas, 12⅛ × 20⅜ inches. Florence Griswold Museum. The softness of both color and line implies a muted moment. Childe Hassam studied and painted in France and New York, but this scene commemorates a visit to New Hampshire. It has some of the influence of photography—an off-the-cuff pose, the figure and window both cut off—a characteristic of much impressionist painting. Hassam was considered an American Impressionist and famously connected with the Old Lyme, Connecticut, painters from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Courtesy of the Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT

people autumn suggests a duller pallette and a more somber mood. Lydia is dressed very warmly in a bulky but cheerful coat, with a warm hat and gloves, and while her expression is calm and perhaps enigmatic, she is restful in the midst of an explosion of colors. In this painting, line may be less significant in terms of composition than the vitality of the brushstrokes that seem to attack the canvas. The deep, resonant colors suggest the ripening of autumn vegetables and fruits characteristic of harvest time.

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FIGURE 4-19

Mary Cassatt, *Autumn* (Profile of Lydia Cassatt). 1880. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. Mary Cassatt and her sister Lydia shared an apartment in Paris. Lydia frequently modeled for her. This scene is rich with autumn colors set in a Parisian garden.

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FOCUS ON *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*

Historically, groups of painters have gathered together to form a "school" of painting. They are like-minded, often young and starting out, and usually disliked at first because they produce a new, unfamiliar style. The Impressionists in France faced a struggle against prevailing taste but eventually were accepted as innovative and marvelous. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is such a school. In 1848 in England, Henry Wallis (Figure 4-20), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Figure 4-21), Arthur Hughes (Figure 4-22), and William Holman Hunt (Figure 4-23), along with a few other painters, began having monthly meetings to discuss their ideas. They felt that followers of Italian Renaissance painter Raphael (1483–1520) had moved painting in the

wrong direction, toward a realistic portrayal of life. Instead, they vowed to return to some of the medieval styles, those characterized by Giotto's use of tempera (see Figure 4-2), although they used oil paint and watercolor. Much of their subject matter was spiritual and religious. 1848 was a year of revolutions in Europe, and the Pre-Raphaelites felt they were revolting against corruption and immorality in modern life.

The first paintings Rossetti and others exhibited included the letters "PRB," signaling their association, which at the time was a secret society. Their first

FIGURE 4-20

Henry Wallis, *The Death of Chatterton*. 1855–1856. Oil on canvas, 23¼ × 36 inches. Tate Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Charles Gent Clement 1899. Reference N01685. Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) was a romantic figure. At age seventeen he committed suicide after having been rejected by critics. He had written a book of poems in a medieval style and passed them off as authentic relics. John Ruskin, a great writer and critic, praised the painting as "faultless and wonderful."

©Peter Barritt/Alamy

FIGURE 4-21

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpine*. 1874. Oil on canvas, 49.3 × 24 inches. Tate Britain, London. Rossetti painted this many times in different tonalities. This version was the last he did, for a client, and soon after Rossetti died. The model was Jane Morris, a favorite of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Proserpine was taken to Hades to be wife to Pluto. Her mother, Ceres, asked Jupiter to let her go and he agreed as long as she did not eat of the fruit of Hades. But she ate one pomegranate seed and was lost forever.

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FIGURE 4-22

Arthur Hughes, *April Love*. 1855–1856. Oil on canvas, 35 × 19½ inches. Tate Gallery, London. The rich color of the young woman's gown contrasts with the green leaves (ivy?) and the bark of the trees. She looks down to the fallen petals, and the man behind her seems a vague presence. The scene is spring and

the lovers have found a quiet grotto in which to talk. Hughes married the model for this painting, and it may be a tribute to their love.

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paintings were not well received. Their purposes, however, were stated clearly by William Michael Rossetti, who explained the aims of the brotherhood: to have genuine ideas, to study nature very closely, to respond deeply to medieval and renaissance art, to produce excellent pictures.

FIGURE 4-23

William Holman Hunt, *Awakening Conscience*. 1853. Oil on canvas, 30 × 22 inches. Tate Gallery, London. This is another painting like Fragonard's *The Swing*, in that it needs to be "read" by the viewer. Because the standing woman has no wedding ring, it is clear that she is the young man's mistress. The awakening conscience is her becoming aware that she must change her ways and become "respectable." She is inspired by nature as she looks out the window to a brilliant spring garden—visible in the mirror behind her. The room is full of symbols: The music on the piano is a Tom Moore melody, "Oft in the Stilly Night"; the cat is toying with a bird; the man's tossed off glove on the floor suggests her future; the tangled skein of wool in the lower right implies disorder.

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The result of their efforts is a style that is deeply sensuous, with rich color; subject matter connected with religion, myth, and literature; and careful attention to the smallest details of nature. Their style is rich with the sensa that we see in abstract painting, but it includes a narrative that explores a moral issue.

Typical of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's approach to nature, the details of the leaves and the fallen petals are extraordinary. But the young woman's gown is portrayed with a richness that, in the dark corner these two have found, radiates so powerfully that it seems to be a source of illumination. The detail of her scarf is also notable. Only

the young man remains a mystery, although the bright floral opening in the distance implies a bright future.

These paintings have a wide variety, yet they all present a richness of sensa, profound colors that dominate the composition. Their narratives are romantic and their attention to detail roots us in the worlds they portray. They are fascinating in that they are often profoundly sensuous at the same time that they seem to reject sensuality and praise morality. We see this particularly in *The Awakening Conscience*. In the case of *The Death of Chatterton,* Wallis reminds us how fragile the life of the artist can be and pictures Chatterton as a victim of a world that did not appreciate his gifts. We are meant to be moved by the death of a youth, and most of Wallis's audience were indeed moved. In the case of Rossetti's *Proserpine,* the colors are deep and dark, suitable for a view of Hades, and the portrait of Proserpine is haunting.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began with a small group of painters in the 1840s, but it left its mark on painting because its style was modern even as it declared that it was looking backward to the Renaissance. They achieved their success in part because of their subject matter and in part because they produced intense visions in brilliant color and appealed to our sense of emotional understanding.

PERCEPTION KEY The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

1. Which of these paintings is most dominated by detail? How does color control the detail?

2. In which of the portraits is the facial expression most mysterious?

3. What do these paintings reveal about their subject matter? With which of the paintings do you find it easiest to participate?

4. In which painting does line play the most important role? In which does color play the most important role?

5. Which painting has the most complex composition? Which has the simplest?

6. Which painting tells you the most about the painter's personality? Which is most psychologically revealing?

7. Which of the paintings has the most original composition?

8. Using one of these paintings, block out the most important shapes and analyze the effectiveness of its composition.

FRAMES

Photographs of paintings, as in this book, usually do not include their frames, the exceptions being Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-10. In general, it seems obvious that a "good" or appropriate frame should harmonize and enhance rather than dominate the picture. For example, the frame of the Cimabue delicately picks up the colors and lines of the Madonna's throne. Furthermore, an appropriate frame usually should separate the picture from its surroundings, as again with the Cimabue. Sometimes the artist doesn't bother with a frame.

EXPERIENCING Frames

1. What importance does the frame have for our enjoyment of a painting?

2. Giotto's frame is plainer than Cimabue's. But would a more decorative frame be appropriate for the Giotto?

3. The fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel in Castel Capuano (Figure 4-24) is an extreme example of the domination of frames. What is the relationship of the frames in this ceiling to the paintings they support?

4. If the frames in the Sommaria Chapel ceiling rise to the level of artifacts, what might be their artistic function? How do you react to them?

Sometimes a frame overwhelms a painting, and sometimes paintings have no frames, as in almost all of Mondrian's paintings. The consensus seems to be that a frame is valuable when it complements the painting, either by establishing its preciousness—as in the ordinary gold frame—or by establishing its shape and purpose, as in the case of the Giotto and Cimabue frames. Neither is very ornate; both are sufficient and useful. Clearly the fact that almost all the paintings illustrated in this book lack frames tells us something about the frame's ultimate worth. Yet all museums include frames for most of the paintings represented here. Frames stabilize the canvas, establish the period and value of a painting, and set it off from the wall. They also "finish" the painting—almost like the final chord of a great symphony or the closing of the final curtain on a play. They say "the end."

FIGURE 4-24

Fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel, in Castel Capuano, Naples, Campania, Italy, 16th century.

©DeAgostini/Getty Images

The fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel in Naples is an example of frames that rise to the level of artifacts in themselves. The paintings in the center of the ceiling portray religious themes, as in the Ascension of Christ in the center. But the paintings themselves are overwhelmed by the frames. As a result, we look at the ceiling and respond to the astounding detail in the frames: their intersection and symmetry, their brilliance and harmony. One comes to the chapel not just to see the paintings, but to marvel at the decorative elements. The frames take on a value similar to architecture (of which they are clearly a part). In this case it would not be difficult to imagine the ceiling with no paintings at all, but merely frames. If that were the case, would we be correct in describing them as frames—since all they would frame is empty space? Or would we consider them as sculptural elements?

When you next go to a gallery or museum to see paintings, take time to examine the frames and decide what their value is to the paintings themselves. Find one example of a good relationship between painting and frame, and one poor relationship. What makes you decide one way or the other?

Summary

Painting is the art that has most to do with revealing the sensuous and the visual appearance of objects and events. Painting shows the visually perceptible more clearly. Because a painting is usually presented to us as an entirety, with an all-at-onceness, it gives time for our vision to focus, hold, and participate. This makes possible a

vision that is both extraordinarily intense and restful. Sensa are the qualities of objects or events that stimulate our sense organs. Sensa can be disassociated or abstracted from the objects or events in which they are usually joined. Sensa and the sensuous (the color field composed by the sensa) are the primary subject matter of abstract painting. Objects and events are the primary subject matter of representational painting.

*Light, shape, volume, and space are often referred to as elements, but strictly speaking, they are compounds.

[1]Source: Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” La Grande Revue, December 25, 1908.

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Part 2 THE ARTS

Chapter 4

PAINTING

Our Visual Powers

Painting awakens our visual senses so as to make us see color, shape, light, and form in new ways. Painters such as Siqueiros, Goya, Cézanne, Gentileschi, Neel, and virtually all the painters illustrated in this book make demands on our sensitivity to the visual field, rewarding us with challenges and delights that only painting can provide. But at the same time, we are also often dulled by day-to-day experience or by distractions of business or study that make it difficult to look with the intensity that great art requires. Therefore, we sometimes need to refresh our awareness by sharpening our attention to the surfaces of paintings as well as to their overall power. For example, by referring to the following Perception Key we may prepare ourselves to look deeply and respond in new ways to some of the paintings we considered in earlier chapters.

PERCEPTION KEY Our Visual Powers

1. Jackson Pollock, *The Flame* (Figure 3-3). Identify the three major

colors Pollock uses. How do these colors establish a sense of visual rhythm? Which of the colors is most intense? Which most surprising?

2. Suzanne Valadon, *Reclining Nude* (Figure 2-16). Examine the piece of furniture, the sofa, on which Valadon's nude reclines. What color is it? Why is it an effective

contrast to the nude? What are the designs on the sofa? What color are the lines of the designs? How do they relate to the subject matter of the painting?

3. Edward Hopper, *Early Sunday Morning* (Figure 1-6). What are the most important colors in the painting? How do they balance and complement each other? Why does Hopper limit the intensity of the colors as he does? What is the visual rhythmic effect of the patterns formed in the windows of the second floor? Are any two windows the same? How does Hopper use unexpected forms to break the rhythm of the first level of shops? What emotional qualities are excited by Hopper's control of the visual elements in the painting?

4. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). How many colors does Cézanne use in this painting? Which color is dominant? Which figure in the painting is most dominant? How do the most important lines in the painting direct your vision? Describe the way your eye moves through the painting. How does Cézanne use line and color to direct your attention?

Our point is that everyday life tends to dull our senses so that we do

not observe our surroundings with the sensitivity that we might. For help we must go to the artists, especially the painter and the sculptor—those who are most sensitive to the visual appearances of things. Their works make things and their qualities much clearer than they usually appear. The artist purges from our sight the films of familiarity. Painting, with its "all-at-onceness," more than any other art, gives us the time to allow our vision to focus.

The Media of Painting

Throughout this book we will be talking about the basic materials and ***media*** in each of the arts, because a clear understanding of their properties will help us understand what artists do and how they work. The most prominent media in Western painting—and most painting in the rest of the world—are tempera, fresco, oil, watercolor, and acrylic. In early paintings the ***pigment***—the actual color—required a ***binder*** such as egg yolk, glue, or casein to keep it in solution and permit it to be applied to canvas, wood, plaster, and other substances.

Tempera

Tempera is pigment bound by egg yolk and applied to a carefully prepared surface like the wood panels of Cimabue's thirteenth-century *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels* (Figure 4-1). The colors of tempera sometimes look slightly flat and are difficult to change as the artist works, but the marvelous precision of detail and the subtlety of linear shaping are extraordinary. The purity of colors, notably in the lighter range, can be wondrous, as with the tinted white of the inner dress of Giotto's *Madonna Enthroned* (Figure 4-2). In the fourteenth century, Giotto achieves an astonishing level of detail in the

gold ornamentation below and around the Madonna. At the same time, his control of the medium of tempera permitted him to represent figures with a high degree of individuality and realism, representing a profound change in the history of art.

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FIGURE 4-1

Cimabue, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels*. Circa 1285–1290. Tempera and gold on wood, 12 feet 7¾ inches × 7 feet 4 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Cimabue's painting is typical of Italian altarpieces in the thirteenth century. The use of tempera and gold leaf creates a radiance appropriate to a religious scene.

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FIGURE 4-2

Giotto, *Madonna Enthroned*. Circa 1310. Tempera and gold on wood, 10 feet 83?16 inches × 6 feet 83?8 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Giotto, credited with creating a realistic portrayal of figures from nature in religious art, lavishes his *Madonna Enthroned* with extraordinary detail permitted by the use of tempera and gold leaf. Giotto was one of Florence's greatest painters.

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The power of these works, when one stands before them in Florence's Uffizi Galleries, is intense beyond what can be shown in a reproduction. Cimabue's painting is more than twelve feet tall and commands the space as few paintings of the period can. The brilliance of the colors and the detail of the expressions of all the figures in the painting demand a remarkable level of participation. By comparison, the Giotto, only a few years later, uses contrasting colors to affect us. But Giotto's faces are more realistic than Cimabue's, marking an important shift in Renaissance art. Giotto achieves an illusion of depth and a sense that the figures are distinct, as if they were portraits.

Fresco

Because many churches and other buildings required paintings directly on plaster walls, artists perfected the use of ***fresco***, pigment dissolved in lime water applied to wet plaster as it is drying. In the case of wet fresco, the color penetrates to about

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FIGURE 4-3

Michelangelo, *Creation of Adam*, detail. Circa 1508–1512. Fresco. Michelangelo's world-famous frescoes in the Sistine Chapel have been cleaned to reveal intense, brilliant colors. This detail from the ceiling reveals the long-lasting nature of fresco painting. The period 1508–1512 marks the High Renaissance in Italy.

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one-eighth of an inch and is bound into the plaster. There is little room for error because the plaster dries relatively quickly, and the artist must understand how the colors will look when embedded in plaster and no longer wet. One advantage of this medium is that it will last as long as the wall itself. One of the greatest examples of the use of fresco is Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, on the ceiling of which is the famous *Creation of Adam* (Figure 4-3).

Oil

Oil painting uses a mixture of pigment, linseed oil, varnish, and turpentine to produce either a thin or thick consistency, depending on the artist's desired effect. In the fifteenth century, oil painting dominated because of its flexibility, the richness of its colors, and the extraordinary durability and long-lasting qualities. Because oil paint dries slowly and can be put on in thin layers, it offers the artist

remarkable control over the final product. No medium in painting offers a more flexible blending of colors or subtle portrayal of light and textures, as in Parmigianino's *The Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 4-4). Oil paint can be messy, and it takes sometimes months or years to dry completely, but it has been the dominant medium in easel painting since the Renaissance.

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FIGURE 4-4

Parmigianino, *The Madonna with the Long Neck*. Circa 1535. Oil on panel, 85 × 52 inches. Uffizi, Florence. Humanistic values dominate the painting, with recognizably distinct faces, young people substituting for angels, and physical distortions designed to unsettle a conservative audience. This style of oil painting, with unresolved figures and unanswered questions, is called Mannerism—painting with an attitude.

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FIGURE 4-5

Winslow Homer, Sketch for "*Hound and Hunter*." 1892. Watercolor on wove paper. $131^{5}/_{16} \times 191^{5}/_{16}$ inches. Gift of Ruth K. Henschel in memory of her husband, Charles R. Henschel. Accession No. 1975.92.7. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Although a mixed-media composition, *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter"* is dominated by watercolor. An apparently unfinished quality imparts a sense of energy, spontaneity, and intensity, typical of Homer's work.

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Watercolor

The pigments of ***watercolor*** are bound in a water-soluble adhesive, such as gum- arabic, a gummy plant substance. Usually watercolor is slightly translucent so that the whiteness of the paper shows through. Unlike artists working with tempera or oil painting, watercolorists work quickly, often with broad strokes and in broad washes. The color

resources of the medium are limited in range, but often striking in effect. Modern watercolor usually does not aim for precise detail. In his *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter"* (Figure 4-5), Winslow Homer delights in the unfinished quality of the watercolor and uses it to communicate a sense of immediacy. He controls the range of colors as a way of giving us a sense of atmosphere and weather.

Acrylic

A modern synthetic polymer medium, ***acrylic*** is fundamentally a form of plastic resin that dries very quickly and is flexible for the artist to apply and use. One advantage of acrylic paints is that they do not fade, darken, or yellow as they age. They can support luminous colors and look sometimes very close to oil paints in their

FIGURE 4-6
Morris Louis, *Beta Lambda*. 1961. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas. 8 feet 73?8 inches × 13 feet 4¼ inches. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of Mrs. Abner Brenner. Object number 428.1983. The painting reveals the fluid qualities of acrylics, essentially sensuous color permitted to radiate through a range of tones. Its size, more than 8 by 13 feet, intensifies our reaction to the shapes the colors take.

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final effect. Many modern painters use this medium. Morris Louis's *Beta Lamda* (Figure 4-6) is a large abstract painting whose colors suggest a range of intensities similar to what we see in oil paintings.

The ease of using acrylic shows in the fluidity of the lines of stark colors balancing a huge open space of uncolored canvas. This painting was done in Louis's small dining room, but its size is such that

only a few spaces can exhibit it. In viewing, one is captured by its gigantic presence. The triangular forms that dominate give the color a power that seems to radiate from the wall. Louis was a colorist experimenting with acrylic up to his death only a year after this painting was finished.

Other Media and Mixed Media

The great Japanese artist Hokusai was prominent in the first half of the nineteenth century in the medium of woodcuts, using ink for his color. The process is extremely complex, but he dominated in the Edo period, when many artists produced brilliantly colored prints that began to be seen in Europe, especially in France, where the painters found great inspiration in the brilliance of the work. *The Great Wave,* his most famous work (Figure 4-7), is from his project, *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji.* Here the mountain is tiny in comparison with the roiling waves threatening even smaller figures in two boats. The power of nature is the subject matter, and the respect for nature may be part of its content.

The dominant medium for Chinese artists has been ink, as in Wang Yuanqi's *Landscape after Wu Zhen* (Figure 4-8). Modern painters often employ ***mixed media***, using duco and aluminum paint, house paint, oils, even grit and sand. Andy Warhol used acrylic and silk-screen ink in his famous *Marilyn Monroe* series. Some basic kinds of ***prints*** are produced by methods including woodcut, engraving, linocut, etching, drypoint, lithography, and aquatint.

FIGURE 4-7

Katsushika Hokusai (Japanese, 1760–1849). *Under the Wave off Kanagawa (Kanagawa oki nami ura),* also known as *The Great Wave, from the series* Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjurokkei). Circa 1830–1832. Polychrome woodblock print; ink and color on paper; 101?8 × 1415? 16 inches (25.7 × 37.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.

Source: Robert Lehman Collection, 1975/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

PERCEPTION KEY The Media of Painting

1. Compare the detail of tempera in Giotto's *Madonna Enthroned* with the radiance of color in Parmigianino's oil painting *The Madonna with the Long Neck*. What differences do you see in the quality of detail in each painting and in the quality of the color?

2. Compare the color effects of Hokusai's *The Great Wave* woodblock print with the colors in Winslow Homer's *Sketch for "Hound and Hunter."* What seem to be the differences in the treatment of color?

3. Contrast the effect of Homer's watercolor approach to nature with Wang Yuanqi's use of ink. Which communicates a sense of nature more readily? In which is nature the most evident subject matter? Compare the formal structure of each painting.

4. Compare the traditional fresco of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* with Leonardo's experimental fresco of the *Last Supper* (Figure 3-1). To what extent does Michelangelo's use of the medium help you imagine what Leonardo's fresco would have looked like if he had used Michelangelo's technique?

FIGURE 4-8

Wang Yuanqi, *Landscape after Wu Zhen*. 1695. Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 42¾ × 20¼ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr. Typical of many of the great Chinese landscape scrolls, Wang Yuanqi uses his brush and ink prodigiously, finding a powerful energy in shaping the rising mountains and their trees. The presence of tiny houses and rising pathways to the heights places humanity in a secondary role in relation to nature and to the visual power of the mountain itself.

Source: Bequest of John M. Crawford Jr., 1988/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Elements of Painting

The ***elements*** are the basic building blocks of a medium. For painting they are line, color, texture, and composition.* Before we discuss the elements of painting, consider the issues raised by the Perception Key associated with Frederic, Lord Leighton's painting *Flaming June* (Figure 4-9).

PERCEPTION KEY *Flaming June*

The subject matter of this painting is sleep itself. But it is also a painting with intense sensuous content. We respond to it partly because it is so vivid in color.

1. What powerful ideas does sleep imply?

2. What does the painting tell us about the pleasures of watching a beautiful woman sleeping? How difficult is it for you to imagine this a nymph rather than a living woman?

3. Comment on the color in this painting. In most visions of sleeping figures the tones are dampened, sometimes dark, as one would expect in a nighttime vision. In what ways does the astounding contrast between sleep and the brilliance of the color affect your

sense of what the subject matter is? How does it contribute to your efforts to decide on the content of the painting?

4. How does the clarity of the line in this painting help you understand its significance?

5. Compare *Flaming June* with the paintings by Giorgione (Figure 2-9), Tom Wesselmann (Figure 2-13), and Philip Pearlstein (Figure 2-18). All are slumbering women. What makes the concerns of Leighton different from those of the other painters?

Line

Line is a continuous marking made by a moving point on a surface. Line outlines shapes and can contour areas within those outlines. Sometimes contour or internal lines dominate the outlines, as with the robe of Cimabue's *Madonna* (Figure 4-1). ***Closed line*** most characteristically is hard and sharp, as in Lichtenstein's *Hopeless* (Figure 2-7). In the Cimabue and in Leighton's *Flaming June,* the line is also closed but somewhat softer. ***Open line*** most characteristically is soft and blurry, as in Renoir's *Bather Arranging Her Hair* (Figure 2-10).

PERCEPTION KEY Goya, Leighton, and Cézanne

1. Goya used both closed and open lines in his *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3). Locate these lines. Why did Goya use both kinds?

2. Does Leighton use both closed and open lines in *Flaming June*?

3. Identify outlines in Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4). There seem to be no outlines drawn around the small bushes in the foreground. Yet we see these bushes as separate objects.

How can this be?

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FIGURE 4-9

Frederic, Lord Leighton, *Flaming June*. Circa 1895. Museo de Arte Ponce, Puerto Rico. Oil on canvas. 47½ × 47½ inches. Leighton was near the end of his career when he did this painting. He was an admirer of classical figures, such as Michelangelo's sculpture of *Night* in the Medici Tombs, which inspired the pose in this painting. He is said to have compared this figure with the sleeping naiads and mythic nymphs of classical literature. He aimed at a perfection of the figure as well as of the clothing.

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Line can suggest movement. Up-and-down movement may be indicated by the vertical, as in Parmigianino's *The Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 4-4). Lateral movement may be indicated by the horizontal and tends to stress stability, as in the same Parmigianino. Depending on the context, however, vertical and horizontal lines may appear static, as in Wesselmann's *Study for Great American Nude* and Lichtenstein's *Hopeless*. Generally, diagonal lines, as in Cézanne's *Mont Sainte- Victoire*, express more tension and movement than verticals and horizontals. Curving lines usually appear softer and more flowing, as in Leighton's *Flaming June*.

Line in Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Figure 4-10) can also suggest rhythm and movement, especially when used with vibrant colors, which in this painting are intended to echo the neon lights of 1940s Broadway. Mondrian lived and worked for twenty years in Paris, but in 1938, with Nazis threatening war, he moved to London. In 1940, with the war under way, he went to New York. He was particularly attracted to American jazz music. He arrived in New York when the swing bands reached their height of popularity and he used his signature grid style in *Broadway Boogie Woogie* to interpret jazz

visually. The basic structure is a grid of vertical and

FIGURE 4-10

Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*,1942–1943. Oil on canvas, 50 × 50 inches (127 × 127 cm). Given anonymously. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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horizontal yellow lines—and only vertical and horizontal lines. On these lines, and between these lines, Mondrian places patterns of intense blocks of color to suggest the powerful jazz rhythms he loved so much. Even the large "silent" blocks of white imply musical rests.

An ***axis line*** is an imaginary line that helps determine the basic visual directions of a painting. In Goya's *May 3, 1808*, for example, two powerful axis lines move toward and intersect at the white shirt of the man about to be shot: Lines of the rifles appear to converge and go on, and the line of those to be executed moving out of the ravine seems to be inexorably continuing. Axis lines are invisible vectors of visual force. Every visual field is dynamic, a field of forces directing our vision, some visible and some invisible but controlled by the visible. Only when the invisible lines are basic to the structuring of the image, as in the Goya, are they axis lines.

Since line is usually the main determinant of shapes, and shapes are usually the main determinant of detail, regional, and structural relationships, line is usually fundamental in the overall composition—Willem de Kooning's *Woman I* (Figure 4-11) is an exception. Here lines and colors seem to perform the same kind of operation on the canvas.

FIGURE 4-11

Willem de Kooning, American, born in the Netherlands. 1904–1997. *Woman I*, 1950–1952. Oil on canvas, 6 feet 3⅞ inches by 58 inches (192.7 × 147.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York. At more than six feet high, *Woman I* has a huge physical impact on the viewer. De Kooning worked on this painting for quite a while, beginning with sketches, then reworking the canvas again and again. He is said to have drawn inspiration from female fertility goddesses as well as images of dark female figures in literature and myth.

©2017 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: ©Peter Horree/Alamy

Examine the lines in de Kooning's *Woman I*. Critics have commented on the vigor with which de Kooning attacked the canvas, suggesting that he was working out psychological issues that bordered on misogyny. We cannot know if that was the case, but we can see how the lines—vertical, horizontal, lateral—all intersect to produce an arresting power, completely opposite of the power of Leighton's *Flaming June*.

By way of contrast, Cézanne's small bushes in *Mont Sainte-Victoire* are formed by small, juxtaposed, greenish-blue planes that vary slightly in their tinting. These planes are hatched by brushstrokes that slightly vary the textures. And from the

center of the planes to the perimeters there is usually a shading from light to dark. Thus emerges a strong sense of volume with density. We see those small bushes as somehow distinct objects, and yet we see no separating outlines. Colors and textures meet and create impressions of line. As with axis lines, the visible suggests the invisible—we project the outlines.

In the Asian tradition, the expressive power of line is achieved

generally in a very different way from the Western tradition. The stroke—made by flexible brushes of varying sizes and hairs—is intended to communicate the spirit and feelings of the artist, directly and spontaneously. The sensitivity of the inked brush is extraordinary. The ink offers a wide range of nuances: texture, shine, depth, pallor, thickness, and wetness. The brush functions as a seismograph of the painter's mind.

The brushwork in Wang Yuanqi's painting (Figure 4-8) varies with the tone of the ink. The rising forms of the mountains are made with a broad brush, almost translucent ink-tone, with intense, dark dots implying the vegetation defining the top of each ridge. The manmade structures in the painting are made with a smaller brush, as in the curved bridge at the lower right of the painting. The rooftops and buildings in the mid portion of the painting on both the left and right use a small brush with strong lines, like those of the trees in the mid foreground. The leaves of the nearest trees and bushes are deep-tone dark ink produced by chopping strokes, sometimes known as the ax-cut. The painting demands that our eyes begin with the trees in the foreground, then rise inexorably upward following the rising nearby mountains, leading us to the smooth, distant higher mountains that have no vegetation.

PERCEPTION KEY Line

1. Which of the paintings in this chapter have the most vigorous line? How does the line in these paintings interact with color?

2. When does the color in the painting actually constitute line? How can color do the work of line?

3. Try drawing a copy of one of these paintings using only the line of your pencil or pen. What do you learn about how the artist used line to clarify his subject matter?

4. Compare the brushwork of Cézanne and Wang Yuanqi with the brushwork of Frederic Leighton and Willem de Kooning.

Color

Color is composed of three distinct qualities: hue, saturation, and value. ***Hue*** is simply the name of a color. Red, yellow, and blue are the ***primary colors***. Their mixtures produce the ***secondary colors***: green, orange, and purple. Further mixing produces six more, the ***tertiary colors***. Thus, the spectrum of the color wheel shows twelve hues. ***Saturation*** refers to the purity, vividness, or intensity of a hue. When we speak of the "redness of red," we mean its highest saturation. ***Value***, or shading, refers to the lightness or darkness of a hue, the mixture in the hue of white or black. A high value of a color is obtained by mixing in white, and a low value is obtained by mixing in black. The highest value of red shows red at its lightest; the lowest value of red shows red at its darkest. ***Complementary colors*** are opposite

each other—for example, red and green, orange and blue. When two complements are equally mixed, a neutral gray appears. An addition of a complement to a hue will lower its saturation. A red will look less red—will have less intensity—by even a small addition of green. And an addition of either white or black will change both the value and the saturation of the hue.

Texture

Texture is the surface "feel" of something. When the brushstrokes have been smoothed out, the surface is seen as smooth, as in Wesselmann's *Study for Great American Nude*. When the brushstrokes have been left rough, the surface is seen as rough, as in van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (Figure 15-4) and Pollock's *The Flame* (Figure 3-3). In these two examples, the textures are real, for if—heaven forbid!—you were to run your fingers over these paintings, you would feel them as rough.

Distinctive brushstrokes produce distinctive textures. Compare, for example, the soft hatchings of Valadon's *Reclining Nude* (Figure 2-16) with the grainy effect of most of the brushstrokes in Wang Yuanqi's painting (Figure 4-8). Sometimes the textural effect can be so dominant that the specific substance behind the textures is disguised, as in the background behind the head and shoulders of Renoir's *Bather Arranging Her Hair*.

PERCEPTION KEY Texture

1. In what ways are the renditions of textures an important part in Willem de Kooning's *Woman I*?

2. Suppose the ultra-smooth surfaces of Wesselmann's nude had been used by Neel. How would this have significantly changed the content of her picture?

Neel's nude would be greatly altered, we believe, if she had used textures such as Wesselmann's. A tender, vulnerable, motherly appearance would become harsh, confident, and brazen. With the de

Kooning, the vigor of the painting would have lost power if the texture were smooth. De Kooning's constant attack at the canvas, and his overpainting, produces a unique texture.

The medium of a painting may have much to do with textural effects. Tempera usually has a dry feel. Watercolor naturally lends itself to a fluid feel. Because they can be built up in heavy layers, oil and acrylic are useful for depicting rough textures, but of course they can be made smooth. Fresco usually has a grainy, crystalline texture.

Composition

In painting or any other art, ***composition*** refers to the ordering of relationships: among details, among regions, among details and regions, and among these and the total structure. Deliberately or more usually instinctively, artists use organizing principles to create forms that inform.

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Principles Among the basic principles of traditional painting are balance, gradation, movement and rhythm, proportion, variety, and unity.

- *Balance* refers to the equilibrium of opposing visual forces. Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Figure 3-1) is an example of symmetrical balance. Details and regions are arranged on either side of a central axis. Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3) is an example of asymmetrical balance, for there is no central axis.

- *Gradation* refers to a continuum of changes in the details and regions, such as the gradual variations in shape, color value, and

shadowing in Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2).

- *Movement and rhythm* refers to the way a painting controls the movement and pace of our vision. For example, in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Figure 4-3), the implied movement of God from right to left establishes a rhythm in contrast with Adam's indolence.

- *Proportion* refers to the emphasis achieved by the scaling of sizes of shapes—for example, the way the large Madonna in the Cimabue (Figure 4-1) contrasts with the tiny prophets.

- *Unity* refers to the togetherness, despite contrasts, of details and regions to the whole, as in Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4).

- *Variety* refers to the contrasts of details and regions—for example, the color and shape oppositions in O'Keeffe's *Rust Red Hills* (Figure 4-12).

FIGURE 4-12

Georgia O'Keeffe, 1930. *Rust Red Hills*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 16 × 30 inches. Sloan Fund Purchase. Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University. O'Keefe found the American West to be a refreshing environment after living for years in New York. This is a study of hills that fascinated her near her home in Abiqui, New Mexico, where she painted many landscapes such as this.

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PERCEPTION KEY Principles of Composition

After defining each principle briefly, we listed an example. Go through the color photographs of paintings in the book and select another

example for each principle.

Space and Shapes Perhaps the best way to understand ***space*** is to think of it as a hollow volume available for occupation by ***shapes***. Then that space can be described by referring to the distribution and relationships of those shapes in that space; for example, space can be described as crowded or open.

Shapes in painting are areas with distinguishable boundaries, created by colors, textures, and usually—and especially—lines. A painting is a two-dimensional surface with breadth and height. But three-dimensional simulation, even in the flattest of paintings, is almost always present, even in de Kooning's *Woman I*. Colors when juxtaposed invariably move forward or backward visually. And when shapes suggest mass—three-dimensional solids—depth is inevitably seen.

The illusion of depth—***perspective***—can be made by various techniques, including setting a single vanishing point, as in Leonardo's *Last Supper* (Figure 3-2), in which all lines in the painting seem to move toward Jesus's head. The vanishing point in Figure 4-17, Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party*, is in the upper right corner, in which figures seem to recede into darkness. Many techniques, such as darkening and lightening colors, will help give the illusion of depth to a painting.

PERCEPTION KEY Composition

Choose four paintings not discussed so far and answer the following questions:

1. In which painting does color dominate line, or line dominate color?
2. Which painting is most symmetrical? Which most asymmetrical?
3. Which pleases your eye more: symmetry or asymmetry?
4. In which painting is the sense of depth perspective the strongest? How does the artist achieve this depth?
5. In which painting is proportion most important?
6. Which painting pleases you the most? Explain how its composition pleases you.

The Clarity of Painting

The Swing (Figure 4-13), Fragonard's painting of young libertines, seems to be the picture of innocent pleasures, but the painter and his audience knew that he was portraying a liberal society that enjoyed riches, station, and erotic opportunity. This painting has been considered one of the Wallace Collection's masterpieces.

FIGURE 4-13

Jean-Honore Fragonard, *The Swing*. 1776. Oil on canvas, 35 × 32 inches. The Wallace Collection, London. This famous painting seems at first glance to be a picture of young people at play, emulating innocent children. But the eighteenth-century audience read this as a libertine and his mistress. The swing was a code for the sexual freedom of the privileged "playmates" in the painting.

©Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library/Alamy

PERCEPTION KEY *The Swing*

1. What are the most contrasting colors in this painting? Which

character is most highlighted by color? What does the color imply?

2. How is nature portrayed in the painting? What colors and contrasts seem most expressive of nature's powers?

3. Why is the richness of the garden the best locale for this scene? What do the lovers have in common with the garden?

4. One of the men on the ground is a clergyman. One is the woman's lover. Which is which? How does the use of color clarify the relationship?

5. The bough and leaves above the woman are mysteriously shaped. In what sense may it be a comment on the relationship of the woman and her lover?

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This painting was commissioned by a French baron who explicitly asked Fragonard to paint the woman as a portrait of his mistress. The baron is himself highlighted by color at the lower left looking up the skirts of his mistress. The painting established a clarity of the relationships of the figures to the eighteenth-century viewer, and of course to the characters portrayed. The figure of the man in the lower right is a clergyman who may be hopeful that the baron will marry his mistress.

The small stone sculptures are classical figures, a Cupid on the left and putti in the lower center. The overabundance of the leaves and trees implies a fruitfulness and an erotic quotient illustrated by the castoff slipper and the baron's recumbent posture.

This painting has a special clarity because it is something of an allegorical representation of erotic play. Audiences today would not necessarily be aware of the specifics of the relationship of the man on the lower left with the woman on the swing. However, a careful analysis of the details of the painting—the pink dress, the man looking up her skirt, the overabundance of the vegetation, and the Cupid with his finger to his lips—and the richness of the coloration point to erotic play and erotic joy.

The "All-at-Onceness" of Painting

In addition to revealing the visually perceptible more clearly, paintings give us time for our vision to focus, hold, and participate. Of course, there are times when we can hold on a scene in nature. We are resting with no pressing worries and with time on our hands, and the sunset is so striking that we fix our attention on its redness. But then darkness descends and the mosquitoes begin to bite. In front of a painting, however, we find that things stand still, like the red in Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2). Here the red is peculiarly impervious and reliable, infallibly fixed and settled in its place. It can be surveyed and brought out again and again; it can be visualized with closed eyes and checked with open eyes. There is no hurry, for all of the painting is present, and under normal conditions it is going to stay present; it is not changing in any significant perceptual sense.

Moreover, we can hold on any detail or region or the totality as long as we like and follow any order of details or regions at our own pace. No region of a painting strictly presupposes another region temporally. The sequence is subject to no absolute constraint. Whereas there is only one route in listening to music, for example, there is a freedom of

routes in seeing paintings. With *The Swing* (Figure 4-13), for example, we may focus on the overhanging trees, then on the figure on the lower left, and finally on the woman in her pink dress. The next time, we may reverse the order. "Paths are made," as the painter Paul Klee observed, "for the eye of the beholder which moves along from patch to patch like an animal grazing." There is a "rapt resting" on any part, an unhurried series, one after the other, of "nows," each of which has its own temporal spread.

Paintings make it possible for us to stop in the present and enjoy at our leisure the sensations provided by the show of the visible. That is the second reason paintings can help make our vision whole. They not only clarify our world but also

may free us from worrying about the future and the past, because paintings are a framed context in which everything stands still. There is the "here-now" and relatively speaking nothing but the "here-now." Our vision, for once, has time to let the qualities of things and the things themselves unfold.

Abstract Painting

Abstract, or ***nonrepresentational, painting*** may be difficult to appreciate if we are confused about its subject matter. Since no objects or events are depicted, abstract painting might seem to have no subject matter: pictures of nothing. But this is not the case. The subject matter is the sensuous. The sensuous is composed of visual qualities—line, color, texture, space, shape, light, shadow, volume, and mass. Any qualities that stimulate our vision are ***sensa***. In

representational painting, sensa are used to portray objects and events. In abstract painting, sensa are freed. They are depicted for their own sake. Abstract painting reveals sensa, liberating us from our habits of always identifying these qualities with specific objects and events. They make it easy for us to focus on sensa themselves, even though we are not artists. Then the radiant and vivid values of the sensuous are enjoyed for their own sake, satisfying a fundamental need. Abstractions can help fulfill this need to behold and treasure the images of the sensuous. Instead of our controlling the sensa, transforming them into signs that represent objects or events, the sensa control us, transforming us into participators.

Moreover, because references to objects and events are eliminated, there is a peculiar relief from the future and the past. Abstract painting, more than any other art, gives us an intensified sense of here-now, or ***presentational immediacy***. When we perceive representational paintings such as *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Figure 2-4), we may think about our chances of getting to southern France sometime in the future. Or when we perceive *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3), we may think about similar massacres. These suggestions bring the future and past into our participation, causing the here-now to be somewhat compromised. But with abstract painting—because there is no portrayal of objects or events that suggest the past or the future—the sense of presentational immediacy is more intense.

Although sensa appear everywhere we look, in paintings sensa shine forth. This is especially true with abstract paintings, because there is nothing to attend to but the sensa. What you see is what you see. In nature the light usually appears as external to the colors and surface of sensa. The light plays on the colors and surface. In paintings the

light usually appears immanent in the colors and surface, seems to come—in part at least—through them, even in the flat, polished colors of a Mondrian.

In Arshile Gorky's *Untitled 1943* (Figure 4-14), the light seems to be absorbed into the colors and surfaces. There is a depth of luminosity about the sensa of paintings that rivals nature. Generally the colors of nature are more brilliant than the colors of painting, but usually in nature the sensa are either so glittering that our squints miss their inner luminosity or so changing that we lack the time to participate and penetrate. To ignore the allure of the sensa in a painting, and in turn in nature, is to miss one of the chief glories life provides. It is especially the abstract painter—the shepherd of sensa—who is most likely to call us back to our senses.

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Study the Gorky. Then reflect on how you experienced a sense of the rhythms of your eyes as you moved across and through the painting, aware of the various shapes and their colors. The rhythmic durations are "spots of time"—ordered by the relationships between the regions of sensa. Compare your experience of this painting with listening to music. What music might be "illustrated" by this painting?

FIGURE 4-14

Arshile Gorky, *Untitled*, 1943–1948. Oil on canvas, 54½ × 64½ inches. The power of Gorky's red is dominant in the painting. The interruptions of the indefinite dark-colored objects offer a contrast that makes the red even more powerful. A close look at the painting shows the levels of color in the brushstrokes that reveal layers of color beneath the surface. We see yellows and light blues and tints of gray, but they all make us aware of the sensa that clarify our understanding of Gorky's red.

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Intensity and Restfulness in Abstract Painting

Abstract painting reveals sensa in their primitive but powerful state of innocence. This makes possible an extraordinary intensity of vision, renewing the spontaneity of our perception and enhancing the tone of our physical existence. We clothe our visual sensations in positive feelings, living in these sensations instead of using them as means to ends. And such sensuous activity—sight, for once minus anxiety and eyestrain—is sheer delight. Abstract painting offers us a complete rest from practical concerns. Abstract painting is, as Matisse in 1908 was beginning to see,

an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which might be for every mental worker, be he businessman or writer, like an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue.[1]

PERCEPTION KEY de Kooning, Gorky, and O'Keeffe

1. De Kooning's *Woman I* (Figure 4-11) is, we think, an example of timelessness and the sensuous. O'Keeffe's *Rust Red Hills* (Figure 4-12) also emphasizes the sensuous, especially the rich reds, browns, and blue. What makes one painting presumably more timeless?

2. Examine the sensa in the O'Keeffe. Does the fact that the painting represents real things distract you from enjoying the sensa? How crucial are the sensa to your full appreciation of the painting?

3. What difference do you perceive in de Kooning's and Gorky's treatment of sensa?

4. Look at the Gorky upside down. Is the form weakened or strengthened? Does it make a difference? If so, what?

Gorky's *Untitled 1943* (Figure 4-14) is characterized by a color field that has been worked over and over. It is essentially red, but a close look will show that there are levels of red, layers of red. And the painting seems to have a range of floating objects that, when taken symbolically, seem to impersonate ideas or messages. All the symbols have been connected to what the Dallas Museum calls a special language of Gorky's own. In this way the expression is not of abstract ideas but of concrete color, of the sensa that Gorky moves through the painting's plane. Nothing specific is represented in this painting, but instead color is itself presented. It is for us to enjoy and to respond to in a fundamental way without the imposition of meaning or ideas. Ironically we call this abstract art as a way of contrasting it with representational art. But abstract art is not abstract—it presents to us the concrete material of sensory experience. We see concrete color and form, and that may be the most profound aesthetic purpose of painting.

Representational Painting

In the participative experience with ***representational paintings***, the sense of here-now, so overwhelming in the participative experience with abstractions, is somewhat weakened. Representational paintings situate the sensuous in objects and events. A representational

painting, like an abstraction, is “all there” and “holds still.” But past and future are more relevant than in our experience of abstract paintings because we are seeing representations of objects and events. Inevitably, we are at least vaguely aware of place and date; and, in turn, a sense of past and future is a part of that awareness. Our experience is more ordinary than it is when we feel the extraordinary isolation from objects and events that occurs in the perception of abstract paintings. Representational paintings always bring in some suggestion of “once upon a time.” Moreover, we are kept closer to the experience of every day, because images that refer to objects and events usually lack something of the strangeness of the sensuous alone.

Representational painting furnishes the world of the sensuous with objects and events. The horizon is sketched out more closely and clearly, and the spaces of the sensuous are filled, more or less, with things. But even when these furnishings (subject matter) are the same, the interpretation (content) of every painting is always different.

Comparison of Five Impressionist Paintings

From time to time, painters have grouped themselves into “schools” in which like-minded artists sometimes worked and exhibited together. The Barbizon school in France in the 1840s, a group of six or seven painters, attempted to paint outdoors so that their landscapes would have a natural feel in terms of color and light, unlike the studio landscapes that were popular at the time. Probably the most famous school of art of all time is the ***Impressionist school***, which flourished between 1870 and 1905, especially in France. The Impressionists’ approach to painting was dominated by a concentration on the

impression light made on the surfaces of things.

PERCEPTION KEY Comparison of Five Impressionist Paintings

1. In which of the following paintings is color most dominant over line? In which is line most dominant over color? How important does line seem to be for the impressionist painter?

2. In terms of composition, which paintings seem to rely on diagonal lines or diagonal groups of objects or images?

3. Comment on the impressionist reliance on balance as seen in these paintings. In which painting is symmetry most effectively used? In which is asymmetry most effective? How is your response to the paintings affected by symmetry or asymmetry?

4. If you were to purchase one of these paintings, which would it be? Why?

FIGURE 4-15

Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*. 1873. Oil on canvas, 19 × 24 inches. Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris. This painting gave the name to the French Impressionists and remains one of the most identifiable paintings of the age. Compared with paintings by Ingres or Giorgione, this seems to be a sketch, but that is the point. It is an impression of the way the brilliant light plays on the waters at sunrise.

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Claude Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (Figure 4-15) was shown at the first show of the impressionist painters in Paris in 1874, and it lent its name to the entire group. The scene in *Sunrise* has a spontaneous, sketchy effect, the sunlight breaking on glimmering water. Boats and ships lack mass and definition. The solidity of things is subordinated to

shimmering surfaces. We sense that only a moment has been caught. Monet and the Impressionists painted, not so much objects they saw but the light that played on and around them.

Edouard Manet was considered the leader of the impressionist group. His striking painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Figure 4-16) is more three-dimensional than Monet's, but the emphasis on color and light is similar. In this painting the Impressionists' preference for everyday scenes with ordinary people and objects is present. Details abound in this painting—some mysterious, such as the legs of the trapeze artist in the upper left corner.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir's joyful painting (Figure 4-17) also represents an ordinary scene of people dining on a warm afternoon, all blissfully unaware of the painter. The scene, like many impressionist scenes, could have been captured by a camera. The perspective is what we would expect in a photograph, while the cut-off elements of people and things are familiar from our experience with snapshots. The use of light tones and reds balances the darker greens and grays in the background. Again, color dominates in this painting.

Childe Hassam was well known for his cityscapes, particularly for his colorful views of New York and Paris. But he also spent summers in the New England countryside, capturing moments such as *Summer Evening* (Figure 4-18),

FIGURE 4-16

Edouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. 1881–1882. Oil on canvas, 37¾ × 51¼ inches. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London. Typical of impressionist paintings, this one has for its subject matter ordinary, everyday events. Viewers may also surmise a narrative embedded in the painting, given

the character in the mirror, not to mention the feet of the trapeze artist in the upper left.

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recollecting an ordinary evening in New Hampshire. The sharp, diagonal figure of a woman is presented in contrast to the strong, horizontal lines of the window. Hassam creates a relaxed moment, a sense of the ordinary in life, by avoiding any studied traditional composition. He seems to depend upon a photographer's "trick" called the "rule of thirds," by placing the figure in the right third of the composition and placing the lower horizontal of the window one-third of the way up from the bottom of the canvas. By avoiding traditional centrality of organization, Hassam produces a painting that echoes a photograph, as if doing little more than recording a simple moment.

Mary Cassatt's sister Lydia is also posed in a sharp diagonal in *Autumn* (Figure 4-19). Cassatt's intense autumn colors create a brilliance almost unexpected. For most

FIGURE 4-17

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. 1881. Oil on canvas, 51 × 68 inches. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C. Renoir, one of the greatest of the Impressionists, portrays ordinary Parisians in *Luncheon of the Boating Party*. Earlier painters would have seen this as unfit for exhibition because its subject is not heroic or mythic. The Impressionists celebrated the ordinary.

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FIGURE 4-18

Childe Hassam, *Summer Evening*. 1886. Oil on canvas, 12⅛ × 20⅜ inches. Florence Griswold Museum. The softness of both color and line implies a muted moment. Childe Hassam studied and painted in France and New York, but this scene commemorates a visit to New Hampshire. It has some of the influence of photography—an off-the-cuff pose, the figure and window both cut off—a characteristic of much impressionist painting. Hassam was considered an American Impressionist and famously connected with the Old Lyme, Connecticut, painters from the 1880s to the 1920s.

Courtesy of the Florence Griswold Museum, Old Lyme, CT

people autumn suggests a duller pallette and a more somber mood. Lydia is dressed very warmly in a bulky but cheerful coat, with a warm hat and gloves, and while her expression is calm and perhaps enigmatic, she is restful in the midst of an explosion of colors. In this painting, line may be less significant in terms of composition than the vitality of the brushstrokes that seem to attack the canvas. The deep, resonant colors suggest the ripening of autumn vegetables and fruits characteristic of harvest time.

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FIGURE 4-19

Mary Cassatt, *Autumn* (Profile of Lydia Cassatt). 1880. Musée du Petit Palais, Paris. Mary Cassatt and her sister Lydia shared an apartment in Paris. Lydia frequently modeled for her. This scene is rich with autumn colors set in a Parisian garden.

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FOCUS ON *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*

Historically, groups of painters have gathered together to form a "school" of painting. They are like-minded, often young and starting out, and usually disliked at first because they produce a new, unfamiliar style. The Impressionists in France faced a struggle against prevailing taste but eventually were accepted as innovative and marvelous. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is such a school. In 1848 in England, Henry Wallis (Figure 4-20), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (Figure 4-21), Arthur Hughes (Figure 4-22), and William Holman Hunt (Figure 4-23), along with a few other painters, began having monthly meetings to discuss their ideas. They felt that followers of Italian Renaissance painter Raphael (1483–1520) had moved painting in the

wrong direction, toward a realistic portrayal of life. Instead, they vowed to return to some of the medieval styles, those characterized by Giotto's use of tempera (see Figure 4-2), although they used oil paint and watercolor. Much of their subject matter was spiritual and religious. 1848 was a year of revolutions in Europe, and the Pre-Raphaelites felt they were revolting against corruption and immorality in modern life.

The first paintings Rossetti and others exhibited included the letters "PRB," signaling their association, which at the time was a secret society. Their first

FIGURE 4-20

Henry Wallis, *The Death of Chatterton*. 1855–1856. Oil on canvas, 23¼ × 36 inches. Tate Gallery, London. Bequeathed by Charles Gent Clement 1899. Reference N01685. Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) was a romantic figure. At age seventeen he committed suicide after having been rejected by critics. He had written a book of poems in a medieval style and passed them off as authentic relics. John Ruskin, a great writer and critic, praised the painting as "faultless and wonderful."

©Peter Barritt/Alamy

FIGURE 4-21

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpine*. 1874. Oil on canvas, 49.3 × 24 inches. Tate Britain, London. Rossetti painted this many times in different tonalities. This version was the last he did, for a client, and soon after Rossetti died. The model was Jane Morris, a favorite of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Proserpine was taken to Hades to be wife to Pluto. Her mother, Ceres, asked Jupiter to let her go and he agreed as long as she did not eat of the fruit of Hades. But she ate one pomegranate seed and was lost forever.

©Art Collection/Alamy

FIGURE 4-22

Arthur Hughes, *April Love*. 1855–1856. Oil on canvas, 35 × 19½ inches. Tate Gallery, London. The rich color of the young woman's gown contrasts with the green leaves (ivy?) and the bark of the trees. She looks down to the fallen petals, and the man behind her seems a vague presence. The scene is spring and

the lovers have found a quiet grotto in which to talk. Hughes married the model for this painting, and it may be a tribute to their love.

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paintings were not well received. Their purposes, however, were stated clearly by William Michael Rossetti, who explained the aims of the brotherhood: to have genuine ideas, to study nature very closely, to respond deeply to medieval and renaissance art, to produce excellent pictures.

FIGURE 4-23

William Holman Hunt, *Awakening Conscience*. 1853. Oil on canvas, 30 × 22 inches. Tate Gallery, London. This is another painting like Fragonard's *The Swing*, in that it needs to be "read" by the viewer. Because the standing woman has no wedding ring, it is clear that she is the young man's mistress. The awakening conscience is her becoming aware that she must change her ways and become "respectable." She is inspired by nature as she looks out the window to a brilliant spring garden—visible in the mirror behind her. The room is full of symbols: The music on the piano is a Tom Moore melody, "Oft in the Stilly Night"; the cat is toying with a bird; the man's tossed off glove on the floor suggests her future; the tangled skein of wool in the lower right implies disorder.

©Christophel Fine Art/UIG/Getty Images

The result of their efforts is a style that is deeply sensuous, with rich color; subject matter connected with religion, myth, and literature; and careful attention to the smallest details of nature. Their style is rich with the sensa that we see in abstract painting, but it includes a narrative that explores a moral issue.

Typical of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's approach to nature, the details of the leaves and the fallen petals are extraordinary. But the young woman's gown is portrayed with a richness that, in the dark corner these two have found, radiates so powerfully that it seems to be a source of illumination. The detail of her scarf is also notable. Only

the young man remains a mystery, although the bright floral opening in the distance implies a bright future.

These paintings have a wide variety, yet they all present a richness of sensa, profound colors that dominate the composition. Their narratives are romantic and their attention to detail roots us in the worlds they portray. They are fascinating in that they are often profoundly sensuous at the same time that they seem to reject sensuality and praise morality. We see this particularly in *The Awakening Conscience*. In the case of *The Death of Chatterton,* Wallis reminds us how fragile the life of the artist can be and pictures Chatterton as a victim of a world that did not appreciate his gifts. We are meant to be moved by the death of a youth, and most of Wallis's audience were indeed moved. In the case of Rossetti's *Proserpine,* the colors are deep and dark, suitable for a view of Hades, and the portrait of Proserpine is haunting.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began with a small group of painters in the 1840s, but it left its mark on painting because its style was modern even as it declared that it was looking backward to the Renaissance. They achieved their success in part because of their subject matter and in part because they produced intense visions in brilliant color and appealed to our sense of emotional understanding.

PERCEPTION KEY The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

1. Which of these paintings is most dominated by detail? How does color control the detail?

2. In which of the portraits is the facial expression most mysterious?

3. What do these paintings reveal about their subject matter? With which of the paintings do you find it easiest to participate?

4. In which painting does line play the most important role? In which does color play the most important role?

5. Which painting has the most complex composition? Which has the simplest?

6. Which painting tells you the most about the painter's personality? Which is most psychologically revealing?

7. Which of the paintings has the most original composition?

8. Using one of these paintings, block out the most important shapes and analyze the effectiveness of its composition.

FRAMES

Photographs of paintings, as in this book, usually do not include their frames, the exceptions being Figures 4-1, 4-2, and 4-10. In general, it seems obvious that a "good" or appropriate frame should harmonize and enhance rather than dominate the picture. For example, the frame of the Cimabue delicately picks up the colors and lines of the Madonna's throne. Furthermore, an appropriate frame usually should separate the picture from its surroundings, as again with the Cimabue. Sometimes the artist doesn't bother with a frame.

EXPERIENCING Frames

1. What importance does the frame have for our enjoyment of a painting?

2. Giotto's frame is plainer than Cimabue's. But would a more decorative frame be appropriate for the Giotto?

3. The fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel in Castel Capuano (Figure 4-24) is an extreme example of the domination of frames. What is the relationship of the frames in this ceiling to the paintings they support?

4. If the frames in the Sommaria Chapel ceiling rise to the level of artifacts, what might be their artistic function? How do you react to them?

Sometimes a frame overwhelms a painting, and sometimes paintings have no frames, as in almost all of Mondrian's paintings. The consensus seems to be that a frame is valuable when it complements the painting, either by establishing its preciousness—as in the ordinary gold frame—or by establishing its shape and purpose, as in the case of the Giotto and Cimabue frames. Neither is very ornate; both are sufficient and useful. Clearly the fact that almost all the paintings illustrated in this book lack frames tells us something about the frame's ultimate worth. Yet all museums include frames for most of the paintings represented here. Frames stabilize the canvas, establish the period and value of a painting, and set it off from the wall. They also "finish" the painting—almost like the final chord of a great symphony or the closing of the final curtain on a play. They say "the end."

FIGURE 4-24
Fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel, in Castel Capuano, Naples, Campania, Italy, 16th century.

©DeAgostini/Getty Images

The fresco on the ceiling of the Sommaria Chapel in Naples is an example of frames that rise to the level of artifacts in themselves. The paintings in the center of the ceiling portray religious themes, as in the Ascension of Christ in the center. But the paintings themselves are overwhelmed by the frames. As a result, we look at the ceiling and respond to the astounding detail in the frames: their intersection and symmetry, their brilliance and harmony. One comes to the chapel not just to see the paintings, but to marvel at the decorative elements. The frames take on a value similar to architecture (of which they are clearly a part). In this case it would not be difficult to imagine the ceiling with no paintings at all, but merely frames. If that were the case, would we be correct in describing them as frames—since all they would frame is empty space? Or would we consider them as sculptural elements?

When you next go to a gallery or museum to see paintings, take time to examine the frames and decide what their value is to the paintings themselves. Find one example of a good relationship between painting and frame, and one poor relationship. What makes you decide one way or the other?

Summary

Painting is the art that has most to do with revealing the sensuous and the visual appearance of objects and events. Painting shows the visually perceptible more clearly. Because a painting is usually presented to us as an entirety, with an all-at-onceness, it gives time for our vision to focus, hold, and participate. This makes possible a

vision that is both extraordinarily intense and restful. Sensa are the qualities of objects or events that stimulate our sense organs. Sensa can be disassociated or abstracted from the objects or events in which they are usually joined. Sensa and the sensuous (the color field composed by the sensa) are the primary subject matter of abstract painting. Objects and events are the primary subject matter of representational painting.

*Light, shape, volume, and space are often referred to as elements, but strictly speaking, they are compounds.

[1]Source: Matisse, “Notes of a Painter,” La Grande Revue, December 25, 1908.

Bookshelf Ambassadored: Humanities through the Arts

Chapter 5

SCULPTURE

The concept of "all-at-onceness" that usually relates to painting does not relate to sculpture because in most cases sculpture is a ***mass*** extending into space inviting us to walk around and view it from several positions. While some sculpture seems best viewed from a single position, as in carved reliefs such as the *Temple Carving* (see Figure 5-2), most sculpture, such as Michelangelo's *David* (see Figure 5-8) or Rodin's *Danaïde* (see Figure 5-9), must be viewed from a number of positions. As we move around a sculpture, we build in our imagination's eye the whole, but at no instant in time can we conceive its wholeness.

Henry Moore, one of the most influential sculptors of the twentieth century, said that the sculptor "gets the solid shape, as it were, inside his head—he thinks of it, whatever its size, as if he were holding it completely enclosed in the hollow of his hand." Moore continues: The sculptor "mentally visualizes a complex form *all round itself*; he knows while he looks at one side what the other side is like; he identifies himself with its center of gravity, its mass, its weight; he realizes its volume, as the space that the shape displaces in the air."[1] In a sense,

Moore tells us that sculpture is perceptible not only by sight, as with painting, but by our either real or imagined sense of touch. The ***tactile*** nature of sculpture is important for us to recognize, just as it is important to recognize imaginatively the density and weight of a piece of sculpture.

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Sensory Interconnections

It is an oversimplification to distinguish the various arts on the basis of which sense organ is activated—for example, to claim that painting is experienced solely by sight and sculpture solely by touch. Our nervous systems are far more complicated than that. Generally no clear separation is made in experience between the faculties of sight and touch. The sensa of touch, for instance, are normally joined with other sensa—visual, aural, oral, and olfactory. Even if only one kind of sensum initiates a perception, a chain reaction triggers other sensations, either by sensory motor connections or by memory associations. We are constantly grasping and handling things as well as seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling them. And so when we see a thing, we have a pretty good idea of what its surface would feel like, how it would sound if struck, how it would taste, and how it would smell if we approached. And if we grasp or handle a thing in the dark, we have some idea of what its shape looks like.

Sculpture and Painting Compared

Compare Arshile Gorky's *Untitled 1943* (Figure 4-14) with Arp's *Growth* (Figure 5-1). Both works are abstract, we suggest, for neither has objects or events as its primary subject matter. Arp's sculpture has

something to do with growth, of course, as confirmed by the title. But is it human, animal, or vegetable growth? Male or female? Clear-cut answers do not seem possible. Specificity of reference, just as in the Gorky, is missing. And yet, if you agree that the subject matter of the Gorky is the sensuous, would you say the same for the Arp? To affirm this may bother you, for Arp's marble is dense material. This substantiality of the marble is very much a part of its appearance as sculpture. Conversely, *Untitled 1943* as a painting—that is, as a work of art rather than as a physical canvas of such and such a weight—does not appear as a material thing. The weight of the canvas is irrelevant to our participation with *Untitled 1943* as a work of art.

Gorky has abstracted sensa, especially colors, from objects or things, whereas Arp has brought out the substantiality of a thing—the density of the marble. Figuration is not "in" Gorky's painting. Conversely, Arp has made the marble relevant to his sculpture. This kind of difference is perhaps the underlying reason the term "abstract painting" is used more frequently than the term "abstract sculpture." There is an awkwardness about describing as abstract something as material as most sculpture. Still, the distinction between abstract and representational sculpture is worth making, just as with painting, for being clear about the subject matter of a work of art is essential to all sensitive participation. It is the key to understanding the content, for the content is the subject matter interpreted by means of the form.

PERCEPTION KEY Gorky and Arp

1. Which work seems to invite you to touch it? Why?
2. Would you expect either the Gorky or the Arp to feel hot or cold to your touch?

3. Which work seems to require the more careful placement of lighting? Why?

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FIGURE 5-1

Jean Arp, *Growth*. 1938. Marble, 39½ inches high. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of Curt Valentin. Shown here in marble, *Growth* was also cast in bronze. Arp showed his work with the Surrealists, who often included chance in abstract pieces that suggest organic natural forms.

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4. Which of the two works appears to be the more unchangeable in your perception?

5. Why do the authors claim that *Untitled 1943* is more abstract than *Growth*? Can you think of other reasons—for example, the shapes in the two works?

Most sculpture, whether abstract or representational, returns us to the voluminosity (bulk), density (mass), and tactile quality of things. Thus, sculpture has touch or tactile appeal. Most sculptures appear resistant, substantial. Hence, the primary subject matter of most abstract sculpture is the density of sensa. Sculpture is more than skin deep. Abstract painting can only represent density, whereas sculpture,

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whether abstract or representational, presents density. Abstract painters generally emphasize the surfaces of sensa, as in *Untitled 1943*. Their interest is in the vast ranges of color qualities, lines, and the play of light that bring out textural nuances. Abstract sculptors, on the other hand, generally restrict themselves to a minimal range of

color, line, and textural qualities and emphasize light not only to play on these qualities but also to bring out the inherence of these qualities in things. Whereas abstract painters are shepherds of surface sensa, abstract sculptors are shepherds of depth sensa.

Sculpture and Space

A painting is usually set off by a frame, the painting space being imaginary, separate and distinct from real space. Between the painting and us, space is transparent. With sculpture, the space between is translucent, the space from the material body of a work of art to the participator we call "the between." With sculpture, even if we do not actually touch the material body, we can still sense the solidity of the material body permeating and animating the surrounding space. Shadows cast by a sculpture, for example, slant into the space between us and the material body of the sculpture, charging the between with energy, whereas shadows cast by the things represented in a painting stay within the painting. The convexities of a sculpture are actively outgoing into the between, and the between invades the concavities, whereas the convexities and concavities of a painting stay within the frame.

With sculpture, however, in our view there is *also* a direct or physical impact. The space between us and any three-dimensional thing that we are perceiving comes forth into our perception, by literally pushing into our bodies. Sculpture transforms real space, making the between more perceptible and impacting. To put it awkwardly but succinctly, sculpture is a "more real world."

Sunken-Relief Sculpture

The *Temple Carving* (Figure 5-2) is incised in sandstone, representing the gods Horus and Hathor. These figures have weathered for millennia, yet they are sharp and distinct. For the ancient Egyptians they told a familiar story, reassuring them that the gods are supportive in the next world. Compare this ***sunken-relief sculpture*** with Jackson Pollock's *The Flame* (Figure 3-3). While their subject matters are very different, their surfaces are curiously similar. The *Temple Carving* does not project into space, as do most sculptures, but actually projects inward, into the surface of the stone. Pollock's painting, although considered essentially flat, is built up and, in some spots, projects slightly into space.

The light helps clarify the tactile qualities of the *Temple Carving* by revealing the sharp edges of the sandstone. The density of the stone is evident. We virtually sense the weight of the object. Pollock's work lacks significant tactile appeal despite the projection of its thick paint. And while the *Temple Carving* makes us aware of its material texture and substance—perhaps even revealing essential qualities of the limestone—the painting remains an essentially two-dimensional image whose impact is much less tactile than visual.

FIGURE 5-2

***Temple Carving* at the Temple of Edfu.** Wall sculpture of ancient Egypt. The gods Horus and Hathor greet royalty.

©Lee A. Jacobus

Low-Relief Sculpture

Low-relief sculpture projects relatively slightly from its background plane, and so its depth dimension is very limited. Medium- and high-

relief sculpture project farther from their backgrounds, their depth dimensions expanded. Sculpture in the round is freed from any background plane, and so its depth dimension is unrestricted. Frank Stella's *Giufà, the Moon, the Thieves, and the Guards* (Figure 5-3) is, we think, most usefully classified as sculpture of the medium-relief species. The materiality of the magnesium, the fiberglass, and especially the aluminum is brought out very powerfully by their juxtaposition. Unfortunately, this is difficult to perceive from a photograph. Because of its three-dimensionality, sculpture generally suffers even more than painting from being seen only in a photograph.

Relief sculpture, except sunken relief, allows its materials to stand out from a background plane. Thus, relief sculpture in at least one way reveals its materials simply by showing us—directly—their surface and something of their depth. By moving to a side of *Giufà, the Moon, the Thieves, and the Guards,* we can see that

FIGURE 5-3

Frank Stella, *Giufà, the Moon, the Thieves, and the Guards*. 1984. Synthetic polymer paint, oil, urethane enamel, fluorescent alkyd, and printing ink on canvas, and etched magnesium, aluminum, and fiberglass, 9 feet 7¼ inches × 16 feet 3¼ inches × 24 inches. Museum of Modern Art. This work was done after Stella spent two years at the American Academy at Rome. Giufà is a character out of Sicilian folklore, a trickster who gets into amusing situations. This work refers to a story called "Giufà and the Judge" in which the boy kills a fly on the nose of the judge, doing great damage to the judge. Stella's sculpture was influenced by Picasso's cubist experiments.

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FIGURE 5-4

***Mithuna Couple*. Twelfth to thirteenth century. Orissa, India. Stone, 83 inches high. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.** Stone, high-relief sculpture like this, found on Indian temples built in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, represents figures combining the divine spirit with the erotic.

Source: Purchase, Florance Waterbury Bequest, 1970/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

the materials are of such and such thickness. However, this three-dimensionality in relief sculpture, this movement out into space, is not allowed to lose its ties to its background plane. Hence, relief sculpture, like painting, is usually best viewed from a frontal position.

High-Relief Sculpture

The ***high-relief sculpture*** from a thirteenth-century temple in Orissa (Figure 5-4) was carved during a period of intense temple-building in that part of India. The tenderness of the two figures is emphasized by the roundness of the bodies as well as by the rhythms of the lines of the figures and the overarching swoop of the vegetation above them. This temple carving was made in a very rough stone, which emphasizes the bulk and mass of the man and woman, despite their association with religious practice. Almost a thousand years of weathering have increased its sense of texture. The happy expression on the faces is consistent with the great erotic religious sculpture of this period.

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Sculpture in the Round

Edgar Degas's *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* (Figure 5-5), one of several of his sculptures of dancers, was not universally approved by the critics at its first showing. A number of critics thought it grotesque and others were mystified by its subject matter, which they thought rather common. But some commentators saw immediately that it was one of the most modern of sculptures and its simplicity has

helped it become one of the most admired modern sculptures.

PERCEPTION KEY *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer*

1. What details of the posture of the dancer help the sculpture seem to command its space?

2. What is the subject matter of the sculpture? What does the composition of the dancer tell us about the subject matter? What do you think the content of the work is?

3. Is this sculpture in the round? The viewer can walk around this work. But is *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* in the round in the same way as Arp's *Growth* (Figure 5-1)?

FIGURE 5-5

Edgar Degas, *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer*, 1880, cast 1922. Bronze, partially tinted, with cotton skirt and satin hair ribbon; wood base. H. 38½ × W. 17¼ × D. 14⅜ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 Accession Number: 29.100.370. Degas was better known as a painter of dancers, but *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* is his most famous sculpture. His model was Marie van Goethem, a young Belgian dancer in the Paris Opera Dance School.

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Despite the fact that the little dancer is not dancing, we sense that she is prepared to move almost immediately. The subject matter on one level is the dancer herself, and the content points to her capacity to move, even though she is bronze. Her posture, leg forward, leaning back as if to spring upon the viewer, implies great energy and power. She is small, and her tutu—which differs in every museum displaying the work—clarifies her talent for dance. As we look at her we see her

pose as only a dancer would pose. For some viewers the subject matter is not only the fourteen-year-old girl, but dance itself. It is as if Degas had somehow distilled the essence of dance in this one figure.

Sculpture and Architecture Compared

Architecture is the art of separating inner from outer space so that the inner space can be used for practical purposes. Sculpture does not provide a practically usable inner space. What about the Sphinx and the Pyramid of Cheops (Figure 5-6)? They are the densest and most substantial of all works. They attract us visually and tactilely. But since there is no usable space within the Sphinx, it is sculpture. Within the Pyramid, however, space was provided for the burial of the dead. There is a separation of inner from outer space for the functional use of the inner space. Yet the use of this inner space is so limited that the living often have a difficult time finding it. The inner space is functional only in a restricted sense—is this Pyramid, then, sculpture or architecture? The difficulty of the question points up an important factor to keep in mind. The distinctions between

FIGURE 5-6

The Sphinx and Pyramid of Cheops, Egypt. Fourth dynasty. Circa 2850 BCE. Limestone and masonry. Base of pyramid ca. 13 acres; Sphinx 66 feet high, 172 feet wide.

©Lee A. Jacobus

the arts that we have been and will be making are helpful in order to talk about them intelligibly, but the arts resist neat pigeonholing, and attempts at that are futile.

Sensory Space

The space around a sculpture is sensory rather than empty. Despite its invisibility, sensory space—like the wind—is felt. Sculptures such as Arp's *Growth* (Figure 5-1) are surrounded by radiating vectors, something like the axis lines of painting. But with sculpture, our bodies as well as our eyes are directed. *Growth* is like a magnet drawing us in and around. With relief sculptures, except for very high relief such as the *Mithuna Couple* (Figure 5-4), our bodies tend to get stabilized in one favored position. The framework of front and sides meeting at sharp angles, as in *Giufà, the Moon, the Thieves, and the Guards* (Figure 5-3), limits our movements to 180 degrees at most. Although we are likely to move around within this limited range for a while, our movements gradually slow down, as they do when we finally get settled in a comfortable chair. We are not Cyclops with just one eye, and so we see something of the three-dimensionality of things even when restricted to one position. But even low-relief sculpture encourages some movement of the body, because we sense that different perspectives, however slight, may bring out something we have not directly perceived, especially something more of the three-dimensionality of the materials.

When one of the authors participated with Arp's *Growth,* he had this response:

I find a warm and friendly presence. I find myself reaching toward the statue rather than keeping my distance.

The Arp seems not only three-dimensional but four-dimensional, because it brings in the element of time so discernibly—a cumulative drama. In addition to making equal demands upon my contemplation, at the same time, each aspect is also incomplete, enticing me on to the next for fulfillment. As I move, volumes and masses change, and

on their surfaces points become lines, lines become curves, and curves become shapes. As each new aspect unrolls, there is a shearing of textures, especially at the lateral borders. The marble flows. The leading border uncovers a new aspect, and the textures of the old aspect change. The light flames. The trailing border wipes out the old aspect. The curving surface continuously reveals the emergence of volumes and masses in front, behind, and in depth. What is hidden behind the surfaces is still indirectly perceived, for the textures indicate a mass behind them. As I move, what I have perceived and what I will perceive stand in defined positions with what I am presently perceiving. My moving body links the aspects. A continuous metamorphosis evolves, as I remember the aspects that were and anticipate the aspects to come, the leaping and plunging lights glancing off the surface helping to blend the changing volumes, shapes, and masses. The remembered and anticipatory images resonate in the present perception. My perception of the Arp is alive with motion. The sounds in the museum room are caught, more or less, in the rhythm of that motion. As I return to my starting point, I find it richer, as home seems after a journey.

Sculpture and the Human Body

Sculptures generally are more or less a center—the place of most importance that organizes the places around it—of actual three-dimensional space: “more” in the case of sculpture in the round, “less” in the case of low relief. That is why sculpture

in the round is more typically sculpture than is the other species. Other things being equal, sculpture in the round, because of its three-

dimensional centeredness, brings out the voluminosity and density of things more certainly than does any other kind of sculpture. First, we can see and perhaps touch all sides. But, more important, our sense of density has something to do with our awareness of our bodies as three-dimensional centers thrusting out into our surrounding environment. Philosopher-critic Gaston Bachelard remarks that

immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being which life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of a motionless man.[2]

Lachaise's *Floating Figure* (Figure 5-7), with its ballooning buoyancy emerging with lonely but powerful internal animation from a graceful ellipse, expresses not only this feeling but also something of the instinctual longing we have to become one with the world about us. Sculpture in the round, even when it does not

FIGURE 5-7

Gaston Lachaise, *Floating Figure*. 1927. Bronze (cast in 1979–1980). 135 × 233 × 57 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Purchased 1978. This massive sculpture appears to be "floating" in a reflective pool. New York's Museum of Modern Art elevates it on a plinth in its sculpture garden. The National Gallery of Australia places its *Floating Figure* in a reflecting pool.

Courtesy of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra and the Lachaise Foundation

portray the human body, often gives us something of an objective image of our internal bodily awareness as related to its surrounding space. Furthermore, when the human body is portrayed in the round, we have the most vivid material image of our internal feelings.

PERCEPTION KEY Exercise in Drawing and Modeling

1. Take a pencil and paper. Close your eyes. Now draw the shape of a human being but leave off the arms.

2. Take some clay or putty elastic enough to mold easily. Close your eyes. Now model your material into the shape of a human being, again leaving off the arms.

3. Analyze your two efforts. Which was easier to do? Which produced the more realistic result? Was your drawing process guided by any factor other than your memory images of the human body? What about your modeling process? Did any significant factors other than your memory images come into play? Was the feel of the clay or putty important in your shaping? Did the awareness of your inner bodily sensations contribute to the shaping? Did you exaggerate any of the functional parts of the body where movement originates, such as the neck muscles, shoulder bones, knees, or ankles? Could these exaggerations, if they occurred, have been a consequence of your inner bodily sensations?

Sculpture in the Round and the Human Body

No object is more important to us than our bodies, which are always with us. Yet when something is continually present to us, we find great difficulty in focusing our attention upon it. Thus, we usually are only vaguely aware of our bodies except when we feel pain or pleasure. Nevertheless, our bodies are part of our most intimate selves—we are our bodies—and, since most of us are narcissists to some degree, most of us have a deep-down driving need to find a satisfactory

material counterpoint for the mental images of our bodies. If that is the case, we are likely to be lovers of sculpture in the round. All sculpture always evokes our outward sensations and sometimes our inner sensations. Sculpture in the round often evokes our inward sensations, for such sculpture often is anthropomorphic in some respect. And sculpture in the round that has the human body as its subject matter not only often evokes our inward sensations but also interprets them—as in Michelangelo's *David* (Figure 5-8) and Rodin's *Danaïde* (Figure 5-9).

FIGURE 5-8

Michelangelo Buonarroti, *David*. 1501–1504. Marble, 13 feet high. Accademia, Florence. The heroic-size *David* stood as Florence's warning to powers that might consider attacking the city-state. It represents Michelangelo's idealization of the human form and remains a Renaissance ideal.

©Lee A. Jacobus

PERCEPTION KEY *David* and *Danaïde*

1. Compare Michelangelo's *David* with Rodin's *Danaï?de*. How does each sculptor establish the gender of his figure? Does Rodin achieve more in terms of gender identity by leaving some of the original marble unfinished?

2. Research the source of each sculptor's narrative: the Bible for David, and the story of the Daughters of Danaos in Greek myth. How well do these works interpret their subject matter?

FIGURE 5-9

Auguste Rodin, *Danaïde*. 1885. Marble, approximately 14 × 28 × 22 inches. Musée Rodin, Paris. *Danaï?de* is from a Greek myth in which the fifty daughters of Danaos were ordered to kill their fifty husbands, sons of Argos, on their wedding night. The gods punished them by forcing them to fill

bottomless barrels with water. This Danaïde is shown exhausted and dispirited by the impossibility of her task.

©Bridgeman-Giraudon/Art Resource, NY

3. Apart from myth, how quickly, as a viewer, do you react to each sculpture? With which work do you most participate?

4. What is the content of each work? How do you interpret these sculptures once you understand their subject matter?

5. Compare what you feel is the respect Michelangelo and Rodin have for the human figure.

Rodin, one of the greatest sculptors of the human body, wrote that

instead of imagining the different parts of the body as surfaces more or less flat, I represented them as projections of interior volumes. I forced myself to express in each swelling of the torso or of the limbs the efflorescence of a muscle or a bone which lay beneath the skin. And so the truth of my figures, instead of being merely superficial, seems to blossom forth from within to the outside, like life itself.[3]

David and *Danaïde* present ***objective correlatives***—images that are objective in the sense that they are "out there" and yet correlate or are similar to subjective awareness. They clarify inner bodily sensations as well as outward appearance. These are large, highly speculative claims. You may disagree, of course, but we hope they will stimulate your thinking.

When we participate with sculpture such as the *David* and *Danaïde,* we find something of our bodily selves confronting us. If we demanded all of our bodily selves, we would be both disappointed and stupid. Art

of reality, never a duplication. Thus, the absence of the rest of *Danaïde*'s body does not shock us as it would if we were confronting a real woman. Its lack of finish does not ruin our perception of its beauty. The work was only a partial image of a female. But, even so, she is in that partiality exceptionally substantial. The *Danaïde* is substantial because the female shape, texture, grace, sensuality, sexuality, and beauty are interpreted by a form and thus clarified.

The human body is supremely beautiful. To begin with, there is its sensuous charm. There may be other things in the world as sensuously attractive—for example, the full glory of autumn leaves—but the human body also possesses a sexuality that greatly enhances its sensuousness. Moreover, in the human body, mind is incarnate. Feeling, thought, purposefulness—spirit—have taken shape with the *Danaïde*.

EXPERIENCING Sculpture and Physical Size

1. The sculptor Henry Moore claims that "sculpture is more affected by actual size considerations than painting. A painting is isolated by a frame from its surroundings (unless it serves just a decorative purpose) and so retains more easily its own imaginary scale." He makes the further claim that the actual physical size of sculpture has an emotional meaning. "We relate everything to our own size, and our emotional response to size is controlled by the fact that men on the average are between five and six feet high."[4] Now look at *Five Swords*, by Alexander Calder (Figure 5-10), and

compare it to *David* and the *Danaï?de*. Does the fact that *Five Swords* is much larger than *David*, which in turn is larger than the *Danaï?de*, make any significant difference with respect to your tactile sensations?

Size in sculpture can be significant for many reasons. Michelangelo intentionally made *David* large as a political statement in Florence. The great Renaissance sculptor Donatello had created an earlier *David* that was slightly smaller than a life-size boy, partly as a way of emphasizing the fact that the small warrior defeated the large warrior. But Michelangelo's heroic-size figure was a warning to other Italian city-states that Florence was not easy pickings at a time when regional wars were common.

FIGURE 5-10

Alexander Calder, *Five Swords*. 1976. Sheet metal, bolts, paint, 213 × 264 × 348 inches. Calder's sculpture implies by its form that the swords have been turned into plowshares, which may be seen as a monument to the end of the Vietnam War, one of America's longest wars.

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Rodin's *Danaï?de* is much smaller than *David*, but its expressiveness, as Rodin suggests, is considerable despite its size. This sculpture, unlike Calder's and Michelangelo's,

is not intended as an outdoor monument. Rather, it is an intimate piece designed to be close to the viewer, even close enough to tempt the viewer to touch and sense its tactile repertoire, from smooth to rough.

Five Swords is a gigantic structure, not in marble, but in steel panels painted a brilliant color. Calder's work needs to have space around it,

which is one reason it is located in a huge, parklike setting. We are arrested by the sensa of this piece, and its hugeness when we are near it is an important part of the sensa. Calder's ideas about size are naturally influenced by his own practice as a sculptor of monumental works, some of which dominate huge public spaces in major cities. Unfortunately, photographs in this book can only suggest the differences in size, but if you spend time with sculpture in its own setting, consider how much the size of the work affects your capacity to participate with it.

2. Find and photograph a sculpture whose size seems to contribute importantly to its impact. In your photograph, try to provide a visual clue that would help a viewer see whether the object is huge or tiny.

3. To what extent does your respect for size affect your response to the sculpture?

Contemporary Sculpture

Developments in sculpture are emerging and changing so rapidly that no attempt can be made here even to begin to classify them adequately. But adding to the traditional species (relief sculpture and sculpture in the round), at least five new species have taken hold: space, protest against technology, accommodation with technology, machine, and earth sculpture. In much contemporary sculpture, there is one fairly pervasive characteristic: ***truth to materials***, both in respecting materials and defying them. For some sculptors, for example, one purpose was to reveal the "stoneness" of the stone, or the "woodness" of the wood. But some sculptors, including Michelangelo and Rodin, are committed to defying the limits of, say,

marble when depicting the human figure. Some sculptors use nontraditional materials to explore the questions of space, volume, and density.

Truth to Materials

In the flamboyant eighteenth-century *Baroque* and in some of the *Romanticism* of the later nineteenth century, respect for materials tended to be ignored. Karl Knappe referred to a "crisis" in the early twentieth century that "concerns . . . the artistic media":

An image cannot be created without regard for the laws of nature, and each kind of material has natural laws of its own. Every block of stone, every piece of wood is subject to its own rules. Every medium has, so to speak, its own tempo; the tempo of a pencil or a piece of charcoal is quite different from the tempo of a woodcut. The habit of mind which creates, for instance, a pen drawing cannot simply be applied mechanically to the making of a woodcut; to do this would be to deny the validity of the spiritual as well as the technical tempo.[5]

FIGURE 5-11

Henry Moore, *Recumbent Figure*. 1938. Green Hornton stone, 54 inches long. Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain. *Recumbent Figure* is one of an enormous number of similar sculptures by Moore in both stone and bronze. This stone piece distorts the figure in ways reminiscent of Picasso's paintings of the same period.

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Henry Moore, sculptor of *Recumbent Figure* (Figure 5-11), has stated that "every material has its own individual qualities. It is only when the sculptor works direct, when there is an active relationship with his

material, that the material can take its part in the shaping of an idea. Stone, for example, is hard and concentrated and should not be falsified to look like soft flesh—it should not be forced beyond its constructive build to a point of weakness. It should keep its hard tense stoniness."[6]

Jeff Koons has made a career by pushing against the idea of truth to materials. His *Balloon Dog (Magenta)* (Figure 5-12) is a whimsical piece and amuses young and old alike. Much of his work seems to be an attempt to call the entire question, What is art? to the forefront. After looking at *Balloon Dog* in Versailles, will you see birthday-party balloon dogs differently?

At the behest of Creative Time Kara E. Walker has confected: A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant (Figure 5-13) was constructed in the now- defunct Diamond Sugar Factory in Williamsburg, New York. The setting is ironic, and the depiction of a "black Mammy" as a sphinx is a protest aimed at reminding us that the demand for sugar in the Americas was central to the increased demand for African slaves to work the sugar plantations in the West Indies. The sculpture was site-specific and stayed in place from mid-May to mid-July, slowly decaying.

FIGURE 5-12

Jeff Koons, *Balloon Dog (Magenta)*. 1994–2000. Mirror-polished stainless steel with transparent color coating. 121 × 143 × 45 inches. 307.3 × 363.2 × 114.3 cm. *Balloon Dog (Magenta)*, among Koons's most popular works, has been exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, the Chateau de Versailles, Venice,

and elsewhere. Several examples exist in blue, yellow, orange, and magenta. Koons often works against the principles of truth to materials.

©Jeff Koons Installation View: Chateau de Versailles, Jeff Koons Versailles, October 9, 2008 - April 1, 2009, Photo: Laurent Lecat

FIGURE 5-13

Kara Walker, *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, 2014. 35 feet high by 75 feet long.

Photo: Jason Wyche, Artwork ©Kara Walker, courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

FIGURE 5-14

Barbara Hepworth, ©Bowness, Hepworth Estate. *Pelagos*. 1946. Wood with color and strings, 16 inches in diameter. Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain. *Pelagos* was inspired by a bay on the coastline of St. Ives in Cornwall, where Barbara Hepworth lived. The strings, she said, represent the tension between "myself and the sea, the wind and hills."

©Bowness. Photo: ©Tate, London/Art Resource, NY

As technology has gained more and more ascendancy, reverence toward natural things has receded. In highly industrialized societies, people tend to revere artificial things, and the pollution of our environment is one result. Another result is the flooding of the commercial market with imitations of primitive sculpture, which are easily identified because of the lack of truth to the materials (test this for yourself). Even contemporary sculptors have lost some of their innocence toward things simply because they live in a technological age. Many sculptors still possess something of the natural way of feeling things, and so they find inspiration in primitive sculpture. Despite its abstract subject matter, Barbara Hepworth's *Pelagos* (Figure 5-14), with its reverence to wood, has a close spiritual affinity to the *Maternity Figure* (Figure 5-25). Truth to materials sculpture is an implicit protest against technological ascendancy.

PERCEPTION KEY Truth to Materials

1. Examine the examples of twentieth-century sculpture in the book. Assuming that these examples are fairly representative, do you find a pervasive tendency to truth to materials? Do you find exceptions, and, if so, how might these be explained?

2. Does *Recumbent Figure* illustrate Moore's point about staying true to materials? If so, point out specifically how this is done.

3. What is the result of the attitude toward truth to materials in the works of Jeff Koons and Kara Walker? Is their work more interesting for defying the traditional views, or does it matter at all? Which of these sculptures most rewards your participation? Which of these sculptures would you most want to own? Is their work more interesting for defying the traditional views, or does it matter at all? Which of these sculptures most rewards your participation? Which of these sculptures would you most want to own?

Protest Against Technology

Explicit social protest is part of the subject matter of the works we will discuss by Trova, Segal, and Giacometti, although perhaps only in Trova's *Study: Falling Man (Wheel Man)* (Figure 5-15) is that protest unequivocally directed at technology. Flaccid, faceless, and sexless, this anonymous robot has "grown" spoked wheels instead of arms. Attached below the hips, these mechanisms produce a sense of eerie instability, a feeling that this antiseptically cleansed automaton with

the slack, protruding abdomen may tip over from the slightest push. In this inhuman mechanical purity, no free will is left to resist. Human value, as articulated in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* has been reduced to human power, functions performed in the world of goods and services. Since another individual can also perform these functions, the given person has no special worth. His or her value is a unit that can easily be replaced by another.

FIGURE 5-15

Ernest Trova, Study: *Falling Man (Wheel Man)*. 1965. Bronze, 60 × 48 × 20 inches. Trova's sculpture portrays man as part of a machine, implying that in the machine age humans are becoming less and less human. Consider the unidealized human figure in comparison with the Greek ideal.

©Ernest Trova, *Study: Falling Man (Wheel Man)*, 1965. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Gift of the T.B. Walker Foundation, 1965.

FIGURE 5-16

Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Bronze Crowd*. 1990–1991. Bronze, 71 × 23 × 15½ inches. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas. Magdalena Abakanowicz witnessed the occupation of Poland, her native country, by both the Nazi Germans and the Soviet Russians. *Bronze Crowd* portrays the aloneness that is possible in modern society. Abakanowicz has said, "A crowd is the most cruel because it begins to act like a brainless organism."

Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas. Art ©Studio Magdalena Abakanowicz

The thirty-six larger-than-life figures in *Bronze Crowd* (Figure 5-16) seem to be the same until one examines them and sees small differences. The absence of their heads is a sign of their having been stripped of dignity and individuality. The space between the figures is sufficient so that a viewer can walk in and around the group and begin to experience what it might be like to be one of them.

In *Bronze Crowd*'s emaciated figures, the huge, solidly implanted feet

suggest nostalgia for the earth; the soaring upward of the elongated bodies suggests aspiration for the heavens. The surrounding environment has eaten away at the flesh, leaving lumpy, irregular surfaces with dark hollows. Each figure is without bodily or mental contact with anyone. They stand in an utterly alienated space, but, unlike *Falling Man,* they are headless and unaware. And whereas the habitat of *Falling Man* is the clean, air-conditioned factory or office of *Brave New World,* the figures in *Bronze Crowd* are exposed and organized in soldierly fashion.

Giacometti's people (Figure 5-17), even when in neat galleries, always seem to be in the grubby streets of our decaying cities. The cancer of the city has left only the armatures of bodies stained with pollution and scarred with sickness. There is no center in this city square or any particular exit, nor can we imagine any communication among these citizens. Their very grouping in the square gives them, paradoxically, an even greater feeling of isolation. Each Giacometti figure separates a spot of space from the common place. The disease and utter distress of these vulnerable creatures demand our respectful distance, as if they were lepers to whom help must come, if at all, from some public agency. To blame technology entirely for the dehumanization of society interpreted in these sculptures is an oversimplification, of course. But this kind of work does bring out something of the horror of technology when it is misused.

FIGURE 5-17

Alberto Giacometti, Swiss, 1901–1965, *City Square (La Place)*. 1948. Bronze, 8½ × 25⅜ × 17¼ inches (21.6 × 64.5 × 43.8 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. This is one of a series of sculptures that became emblematic of the alienation of modern life in the decade following the end of World War II.

Art ©2017 Alberto Giacometti Estate/Licensed by VAGA and ARS, New York, NY. Photo: ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

Accommodation with Technology

Many contemporary sculptors see in technology blessings for humankind. It is true that sculpture can be accomplished with the most primitive tools (that, incidentally, is one of the basic reasons sculpture in primitive cultures usually not only precedes painting but also usually dominates both qualitatively and quantitatively). Nevertheless, sculpture in our day, far more than painting, can take advantage of some of the most sophisticated advances of technology, surpassed in this respect only by architecture. Many sculptors today interpret the positive rather than the negative aspects of technology. This respect for technology is expressed by truth to its materials and the showing forth of its methodology.

Naum Gabo (Figure 5-18), one of the early adopters of current technology, used a number of modern materials, such as cardboard, acrylic plastic, and stainless steel,

FIGURE 5-18

Naum Gabo, *Constructed Head No. 2, 1916 (enlargement 1975)*. Stainless steel, 70 × 54¼ × 48 inches. Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas.

Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Art ©Tate, London 2017

FIGURE 5-19

David Smith, *Cubi X*. 1963. Stainless steel, 10 feet 1⅜ inches × 6 feet 6¾ inches × 2 feet (308.3 × 199.9 × 61 cm), including steel base 2⅞ × 25 × 23 inches (7.3 × 63.4 × 58.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Robert O. Lord Fund. *Cubi X* is Smith's cubistic experiment representing a human figure in planes of polished steel, akin to the cubistic paintings of Picasso and others. Smith produced a wide

collection of *Cubi* sculptures.

Art ©The Estate of David Smith/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Photo: ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY

for his constructivist sculptures. He was part of the modernist movement in Russia, and after World War II he moved to the United States, where he used modern engineering techniques for his work.

David Smith's *Cubi X* (Figure 5-19) illustrates truth to technological materials. The stainless steel cylinders of *Cubi X* support a juggling act of hollow rectangular and square cubes that barely touch one another as they cantilever out into space. Delicate buffing modulates the bright planes of steel, giving the illusion of several atmospheric depths and reflecting light like rippling water. Smith writes,

I like outdoor sculpture and the most practical thing for outdoor sculpture is stainless steel, and I make them and I polish them in such a way that on a dull day, they take on the dull blue, or the color of the sky in late afternoon sun, the glow, golden like the rays, the colors of nature. And in a particular sense, I have used atmosphere in a reflective way on the surfaces. They are colored by the sky and the surroundings, the green or blue of water. Some are down by the water and some are by the mountains. They reflect the colors. They are designed for outdoors.[7]

But Smith's steel is not just a mirror, for in the reflections the fluid surfaces and tensile strength of the steel emerge in a structure that, as Smith puts it, "can face the sun and hold its own."

Machine Sculpture

Jean Tinguely is dedicated to humanizing the machine. His *Homage to New York* (Figure 5-20), exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1960, was not only a machine sculpture but a onetime sculpture performance. Tinguely introduced a touch of humor into the world of sculpture as he explored the subject matter of technology in the arts. For those present it was unforgettable. The mechanical parts, collected from junk heaps and dismembered from their original machines, stood out sharply, and yet they were linked by their spatial locations, shapes, and

FIGURE 5-20

Jean Tinguely, *Homage to New York*. 1960. Mixed media. Exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Homage to New York* was exhibited in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where it operated for some twenty-seven minutes until it destroyed itself. This was a late Dadaist experiment.

©2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: David Gahr.

textures, and sometimes by nervelike wires. Only the old player piano was intact. As the piano played, it was accompanied by howls and other weird sounds in irregular patterns that seemed to be issuing from the wheels, gears, and rods, as if they were painfully communicating with one another in some form of mechanical speech. Some of the machinery that runs New York City was exposed as vulnerable, pathetic, and comic, but Tinguely humanized this machinery as he exposed it. Even death was suggested, for *Homage to New York* was self-destructing: The piano was electronically wired for burning, and, in turn, the whole structure collapsed.

Earth Sculpture

Another avant-garde sculpture—***earth sculpture***—goes so far as to make the earth itself the medium, the site, and the subject matter. The proper spatial selection becomes absolutely essential, for the earth usually must be taken where it is found. Structures are traced in plains, meadows, sand, snow, and the like, in order to help make us stop and perceive and enjoy the "form site"—the earth transformed to be more meaningful. Usually nature rapidly breaks up the form and returns the site to its less ordered state. Accordingly, many earth sculptors have a special need for the photographer to preserve their art.

Robert Smithson was a pioneer in earthwork sculpture. One of his best-known works is *Spiral Jetty* (Figure 5-21), a 1,500-foot-long coil 15 feet wide that spirals out from a spot on the Great Salt Lake. It is constructed of "mud, precipitated salt crystals, rocks, water," and colorful algae, all of which are now submerged in the lake. At times it reemerges when the water level is low. Because the sculpture is usually hidden, it exists for most viewers only in photographs. This mode of existence offers some interesting problems for those who question the authenticity of such works.

FIGURE 5-21

Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*. 1970. Great Salt Lake, Utah. Mud, salt crystals, rocks, water; length 1,500 feet long and 15 feet wide. Reaching 1,500 feet into the Great Salt Lake is one of the first and most influential of large earth sculptures. Utah officials stopped a recent move to drill for oil nearby.

Collection: DIA Center for the Arts, New York, Photo: Gianfranco Gorgoni, Courtesy of James Cohan Gallery, New York, Art ©Holt-Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

PERCEPTION KEY *Spiral Jetty*

1. Does the fact that the sculpture is usually submerged and

invisible disqualify it as a work of art? How important is it for such a work to be photographed artistically?

2. Would you like to see a work of this kind in a lake near you?
3. What would be the best vantage point to observe and participate with *Spiral Jetty*?
4. How does Smithson's use of the spiral connect this sculpture with its natural surroundings?

FOCUS ON African Sculpture

Sub-Saharan African sculpture has exerted an important influence on Western art since the late eighteenth century, but it was especially influential on nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists such as Paul Gauguin, Constantine Brancusi, Amedeo Modigliani, Henri Matisse, and especially Pablo Picasso, who developed a large personal collection of African sculpture. Picasso's experiments in Cubism owe their origin to the influence of African sculpture, which had become widely known in Europe in the late nineteenth century.

Because most African sculpture was carved from wood, much of the older artistic heritage has been lost to weathering, repeated use, and even termites. Very little sculpture was made from stone. In certain periods, cast metal sculpture was created for kings in important courts, especially in the Benin culture in Nigeria. Benin cast sculpture, such as *Head of an Oba* (Figure 5-22), was meant to celebrate a ruler. The head was displayed in a temple shrine to connect the next ruler to his predecessor as part of a dynasty, which, in this case, began in the fourteenth century. While some of these cast works are profoundly

realistic, in general realism is not the aim of African sculpture. Yet the power of the *Head of an Oba* is undeniable. The face has powerful eyes and lips, and a sense of bulk and density implied in the garment covering the neck as well as the woven hat and what appears to be hair or fiber held with beads. One senses an expression of power, respect, and authority in this work.

FIGURE 5-22

***Head of an Oba*, 16th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples. Brass. H. 9¼ × W. 8⅝ × D. 9 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979. Accession Number: 1979.206.86.** This work is an example of the Benin lost-wax metal sculpture technique. The original is modeled in bees wax. Casts are formed from clay applied to the original. The casts are dried in the sun. Then the casts are fired in a pit in intense heat that both fires the clay and melts the bees wax. The fired clay casts are then used to form the bronze sculpture.

Source: The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The figural distortions common in African sculpture were what most interested Picasso and other Western artists in the early twentieth century. The artists' response to those distortions freed them in important ways, permitting them to emphasize portions of a face or figure to intensify its strength and significance. It also helped Picasso and others create a sense of freedom from being tied to a realistic representation. It gave them a new way to conceive of proportion, shape, and beauty. But the purpose of distortion in African sculpture is less an artistic value than it is an effort to respect the life forces these artists perceived in the enlarged

FIGURE 5-23

***Luba Helmet Mask*. Luba people, southeastern Congo. Circa 1880. 25½ inches high. Royal Museum**

for African Art, Tervuren, Belgium. This is a strongly modeled mask of what may be an important person. The ram's horns and the bird carved on the rear of the mask may imply supernatural powers. Many African sculptures refer to magical powers and the supernatural.

EO.0.0.23470, Collection RMCA Tervuren; Photo: R. Asselberghs, MRAC Tervuren

eyes, the oversize head, the abdomen, the prominent genitalia, all of which were sources of power for their culture. For a contemporary Western art lover the cultural values are usually unknown, but the effect of the distortions is perceived as being emotionally expressive and visually intensifying.

The *Luba Helmet Mask* (Figure 5-23) is considered one of the most important holdings of the Royal Museum for African Art in Belgium. The modeling and finish of the wood are remarkable, a testament to truth to materials. The powerful nose and deep sculpted eyes dominate, but the bull horns may suggest that the Luba chief, on whom this mask may be based, has supernatural powers. Invisible from the front is a bird carved in the back, also perhaps symbolizing special powers. Originally the lower part of the mask was covered by about ten inches of grass, making it possible to wear the mask in a ceremony. Like the *Head of an Oba* face, this mask exudes extreme dignity, implying that the individual is of high station and great value.

FIGURE 5-24

***Queen Mother Pendant Mask*: Iyoba, 16th century. Nigeria, Court of Benin. Ivory, iron, copper. H. 9⅜ × W. 5 × D. 3¼ inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1972. Accession Number: 1978.412.323.** Such portrait masks of women were rare. This was made for Esigie, the king of Benin, to honor his mother, Idiaby. It is an idealized representation, but it was a great honor. There is only one other like this mask, in the British Museum.

©Peter Horree/Alamy

One of the most unusual pieces is *Queen Mother Pendant Mask* (Figure 5-24). It is remarkable first because female masks of royalty

are quite rare. It is carved from ivory and then decorated with iron and possibly copper details. It dates to the sixteenth century and was designed as a commemorative mask for the king (Oba) to memorialize his mother, the queen. The use of white ivory connected the image to the ocean because the idea of whiteness implied the purity of the god of the sea, Olokun. Only one other figure of this type is known, a female sculpture in the British Museum.

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The *Maternity Figure* (Figure 5-25) celebrates the life force in woman, with a child held proudly. This work may be viewed from several positions because it is an example of sculpture in the round. Its powerful parallel lines are expressed in stylized breasts, large arms, and oversized feet, implying stability and security. Maternity groups are common in African sculpture and some may have been influenced by Western images of the Madonna and child, but the African versions tend to be more dynamic, as in the case of this sculpture from Congo.

FIGURE 5-25

***Maternity Figure* (*Bwanga bwa Cibola*) 19th-early 20th century. Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luluwa peoples. Wood, metal ring, H. 9¾ × W. 3 × D. 2½ inches. (24.8 × 7.6 × 6.4 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Accession number: 1979.206.282.** African spiritual pieces such as this inspired modern European painters in the early twentieth century.

©The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY

The *Veranda Post: Equestrian Figure and Female Caryatid* (Figure 5-26) is remarkable for its brilliance in carving and the modeling of the figures in a highly complex relationship. But it is even more remarkable for the fact that we know who the artist was, Olowe of Ise, who may have carved this functional sculpture in the late nineteenth or early

twentieth century. Like the female in *Maternity Figure*, the woman below has an elongated neck, prominent breasts, careful scarification, and strong angular lines. She represents ideals of Yoruba female beauty. Supporting both the horse and its rider, she is a symbol of power and influence. Other works by Olowe are often a tribute to the power and freedom of the women in the community. This piece was one of several commissioned by a king for a structure in a Yoruba palace courtyard. Olowe is considered the greatest of Yoruba scultors.

FIGURE 5-26

Olowe of Ise, *The Veranda Post: Equestrian Figure and Female Caryatid*, Early 20th century. Wood. 71 × 11¼ × 11 inches.

Source: Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 1996/The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Olowe of Ise was a master carver whose work has been identified because of his distinctive style. The figures portrayed in the piece represent ideals of Yoruba dignity, strength, and beauty. The Dallas Museum of Art purchased a sculpture by Olowe in 2004 for more than $530,000.

PERCEPTION KEY African Sculpture

1. Which of the paintings in Chapter 2 seem most influenced by the African sculpture discussed here?

2. To what extent do these African sculptures seem to reveal the psychology of the figures?

3. Distortion is a powerful device in African sculpture, but it is also powerful in Western art. Comment on the distorted necks of the woman in *Veranda Post*, the mother in *Maternity Figure*, and Parmigianino's *The Madonna with the Long Neck* (Figure 4-4).

How does the use of distortion affect your ability to participate with these works?

4. Examine these five African sculptures for their use of space, simplification of form, and sense of dynamics. Which are most stable? Which are most dynamic?

5. How important is the concept of truth to materials for these sculptors?

Sculpture in Public Places

Sculpture has traditionally shared its location with major buildings, sometimes acting as decoration on the building, as in many churches, or acting as a center point of interest, as in the original placement of Michelangelo's *David,* which was positioned carefully in front of the Palazzo Vecchio, the central building of the Florentine government. It stood as a warning not to underestimate the Florentines. Many small towns throughout the world have public sculpture that commemorates wars or other important events.

One of the most popularly successful of contemporary public sculptures has been Maya Ying Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Figure 5-27) in Washington, D.C. Because the Vietnam War was both terribly unpopular and a major defeat, there were fears that any memorial might stir public antagonism. However, the result has been quite the opposite. The piece is a sloping black granite wall, V-shaped, which descends ten feet below grade. On the wall are engraved the names of more than 58,000 dead Americans. Visitors walk along its

length, absorbing the seemingly endless list of names. The impact of the memorial grows in part because the list of names grows with each step down the slope. Visitors respond to the memorial by touching the names, sometimes taking rubbings away with them, sometimes simply weeping.

Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* was a controversial public sculpture when it was first unveiled but has become a most popular attraction both in its place in Washington, D.C., and as a replica tours around the country. Judy Chicago's *The*

FIGURE 5-27

Maya Ying Lin, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. 1982. Black granite, V-shaped, 493 feet long, 10 feet high at center. Washington, D.C. Lin designed the memorial when she was an undergraduate. One angle of the wall points to the Washington Monument, the other to the Lincoln Memorial. Its V shape below the ground was intended to suggest a wound in the earth. Incised on it are the names of 58,256 fallen American warriors.

©David Noble

FIGURE 5-28

Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*. 1979. Mixed media, each side 48 feet. Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum. *The Dinner Party* consists of thirty-nine place settings for important women of myth and history. The work was produced under the direction of Judy Chicago by a collective of women sewing, embroidering, and weaving to complement the elaborately designed plates.

©2017 Judy Chicago/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo courtesy of Judy Chicago/Art Resource, NY

Dinner Party (Figure 5-28), in the midst of a powerful wave of feminist activity in the late 1970s, was celebrated by feminists and denounced by opponents of the movement. Although it is not public sculpture in the sense that it is on view outdoors, it once toured the country and attracted huge crowds. It is now in the permanent collection of the

Brooklyn Museum of Art. The sculpture includes place settings for thirty-nine mythic and historical women such as Ishtar, Hatshepsut, Sacagawea, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf. Each place setting has embroidery, napkins, place settings, and a plate with a butterfly design that alludes to female genitalia—one reason for protest against the work. Judy Chicago oversaw the project, but it is the work of many women working in crafts traditionally associated with women, such as sewing and embroidery.

Study (with imagination) Serra's *Sequence* (Figure 5-29), four huge torqued Cor-Ten steel plates installed in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art in summer 2007. We are—as never before—immersed in sculptural space. At both ends we have the chance of entering through one of two openings—one leads into a containment center of settled space; the other pulls us into a seemingly endless curvilinear corridor between two brutal, looming steel walls. Yet strangely, if we wait, we see on the steel intriguing textures and beautiful orange-rust patterns sculpted by time. Still we may feel compressed, confused, perhaps even a touch fearful. To go back is not necessarily an appealing option, for the spaces are narrow, and where are we, anyhow? Normal spatial perception is undermined. The walls appear to close both behind and over us. They seem to sway, and so does the floor. At last we come to the center, overcome with wonder.

FIGURE 5-29

Richard Serra, *Sequence*. 2006. Cor-Ten steel, 12 feet 9 inches × 40 feet 8⅜ inches × 65 feet 2 inches. People walk around and in this gigantic work, in which the walls are torqued in such a way as to lean toward the viewer. Critic Ronald Paulson calls Serra the greatest modern sculptor, perhaps the greatest sculptor.

©2017 Richard Serra/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo ©Frederick Charles

PERCEPTION KEY Public Sculpture

1. Public sculpture such as that by Maya Lin, Judy Chicago, and Richard Serra usually produces tremendous controversy when it is not representative, such as a conventional statue of a man on a horse, a hero holding a rifle and flag, or a person of local fame. What do you think causes these more abstract works to attract controversy? Do you react negatively or positively to any of these three works?

2. Should artists who plan public sculpture meant to be viewed by a wide-ranging audience aim at pleasing that audience? Should that be their primary mission, or should they simply make the best work they are capable of?

3. Which of the three, *Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Sequence,* or *The Dinner Party,* seems least like a work of art to you? Try to convince someone who disagrees with you that it is not a work of art.

4. Choose a public sculpture that is in your community, photograph it, and establish its credentials, as best you can, for making a claim to being an important work of art.

5. If we label Chicago's *The Dinner Party* a feminist work, is it then to be treated as political sculpture? Do you think Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* is a less political or more political sculpture than Chicago's work? Could Serra's *Sequence* be considered a political work? Would labeling these works as political render them any less important as works of art?

Summary

Sculpture is perceived differently from painting, engaging more acutely our sense of touch and the feeling of our bodies. Whereas painting is more about the visual appearance of things, sculpture is more about things as three-dimensional masses. Whereas painting only represents voluminosity and density, sculpture presents these qualities. Sculpture in the round, especially, brings out the three-dimensionality of objects. No object is more important to us than our bodies, and their "strange thickness" is always with us. When the human body is the subject matter, sculpture more than any other art reveals a material counterpoint for our mental images of our bodies. Traditional sculpture is made by either modeling or carving. Many contemporary sculptures, however, are made by assembling preformed pieces of material. New sculptural techniques and materials have opened developments in avant-garde sculpture that defy classification. Nonetheless, contemporary sculptors, generally, have emphasized truth to materials, respect for the medium that is organized by their forms. Space, protest against technology, accommodation with technology, machine, and earth sculpture are five of the most important new species. Public sculpture is flourishing.

[1]Source: Henry Moore, "Notes on Sculpture," in *Sculpture and Drawings 1921–1948*, 4th rev. ed., David Sylvester ed. (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), p. xxxiii ff.

[2]Source: Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Translation 1964, Orion Press.

[3]Source: Auguste Rodin, *Art*, trans. Romilly Fedden (Boston: Small, 1912), p. 65.

[4]Moore, "Notes on Sculpture," p. xxxiv.

[5]Source: Karl Knappe, quoted in Kurt Herberts, *The Complete Book of Artists—Techniques* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), p. 16. Published in the United States by Frederick A. Praeger.

[6]Quoted by Herbert Read, *Henry Moore, Sculptor* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1934), p. 29.

[7]Source: David Smith in Cleve Gray, ed., *David Smith* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 123.

Bookshelf Ambassadored: Humanities through the Arts

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Chapter 6

ARCHITECTURE

We can close the novel, shut off the music, refuse to go to a play or dance, sleep through a movie, shut our eyes to a painting or a sculpture. But we cannot escape from buildings for very long. Fortunately, however, sometimes buildings are works of art—that is, architecture. They draw us to them rather than push us away or make us ignore them. They make our living space more livable. Architecture is the shaping of buildings and space.

Centered Space

Painters do not command real three-dimensional space: They feign it. Sculptors can mold out into space, but generally they do not enfold an enclosed or inner space for our movement. Our passage through the inner spaces of architecture is one of the conditions under which its solids and voids have their effect. In a sense, architecture is a great hollowed-out sculpture that we perceive by moving about both outside and inside. Space is the material of the architect, the primeval cutter,* who carves apart an inner space from an outer space in such a way that both spaces become more fully perceptible and interesting.

Inner and outer space come together on the earth to form a centered and illuminated context or clearing. ***Centered space*** is the arrangement of things around some paramount thing—the place at which the other things seem to converge. Sometimes

FIGURE 6-1

Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Valley of the Kings, Egypt, 15th century BCE. The temple was designed by Senmut, an architect and Hatshepsut's visier and, according to legend, her lover. Hatshepsut (1508–1458 BCE) was the most successful of Egypt's female pharaohs. This is one of the greatest examples of symmetry in early architecture.

©Lee A. Jacobus

this center is a natural site, such as a great mountain, river, canyon, or forest. Sometimes the center is a natural site enhanced by a human-made structure.

Centered space is centripetal, insisting upon drawing us in. There is an in-rush that is difficult to escape, that overwhelms and makes us acquiescent. We perceive space not as a receptacle containing things but rather as a context energized by the positioned interrelationships of things. Centered space has a pulling power that, even in our most harassed moments, we cannot escape feeling. In the Valley of the Kings in Egypt (Figure 6-1), we approach the mortuary temple of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut with a sense of awe. It is, rightly, called the most beautiful of all the temples in the valley, perhaps in all of early Egypt. We find ourselves in the presence of a power beyond our control. We feel the sublimity of space, but, at the same time, the centeredness beckons and welcomes us.

Space and Architecture

Architects are the shepherds of space. In turn, the paths around their shelters lead us away from our ordinary preoccupations demanding the use of space. We come to rest. Instead of our using up space, space takes possession of us with a ten-fingered grasp. We have a place to dwell.

Architecture—as opposed to mere engineering—is the creative conservation of space. Architects perceive the centers of space in nature and build to preserve these centers and make them more vital. Architects are confronted by centered spaces that desire to be made, through them, into works. These spaces of nature are not offspring of architects alone but appearances that step up to them, so to speak, and demand protection. If an architect succeeds in carrying through these appeals, the power of the natural space streams forth and the work rises.

The architect typically shelters inner space from outer space in such a way that we can use the inner space for practical purposes at the same time we perceive both spaces and their relationships as more interesting, thus evoking participation. The partitioning of space renders invisible air visible. Inside the building, space is filled with stresses and pressures. Outside the building, space becomes organized and focused. Inner space is anchored to the earth. Outer space converges upon inner space.

Architecture generally creates a strengthened hierarchy in the positioned interrelationships of earth and sky and what is in between. Architecture enhances the centered clearings of nature, accentuating a context in which all our senses can be in harmony with their surroundings. And even when architecture is not present, our memories

of architecture, especially of great buildings, teach us how to order the sensations of our natural environment. Aristotle said, "Art completes nature." Every natural environment, unless it has been ruined by humans, lends itself to centering and ordering, even if no architecture is there. The architectural model teaches us how to be more sensitive to the potential centering and ordering of nature. As a result of such intensified sensitivity, we have a context—a special place—within which the sounds, smells, temperatures, breezes, volumes, masses, colors, lines, textures, and constant changes of nature can be ordered into something more than a blooming, buzzing confusion. That special place might be sublimely open, as with the spectacle of an ocean, or cozily closed, as with a bordered brook. In either case, nature is consecrated, and we belong and dwell.

Chartres

On a hot summer day many years ago, following the path of Henry Adams, who wrote *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres,* one of the authors was attempting to drive from Mont-Saint-Michel to Chartres in time to catch the setting sun through the western rose window of Chartres Cathedral (Figures 6-2 and 6-3). The following is an account of this experience:

In my rushing anxiety—I had to be in Paris the following day and I had never been to Chartres before—I became oblivious of space except as providing landmarks for my time-clocked progress. Thus I have no significant memories of the towns and countrysides I hurried through. Late that afternoon the two spires of Chartres, like two strangely woven strands of rope let down from the heavens, gradually came into

focus. The blue dome of the sky also became visible for the first time, centering as I approached more and more firmly around

FIGURE 6-2

Chartres Cathedral, Chartres. The cathedral, built starting in 1140 and continuing into the fifteenth century, dominates the cityscape. Chartres is considered the greatest of the Gothic cathedrals.

©Alinari Archives/Corbis/Getty Images

FIGURE 6-3

Chartres Cathedral. The great western rose window. The window casts a powerful light within the cathedral in the later afternoon. Rose windows were designed to cast a "dim, religious light," as the poet John Milton said.

©Lee A. Jacobus

the axis of those spires. "In lovely blueness blooms the steeple with metal roof " (Hölderlin). The surrounding fields and then the town, coming out now in all their specificity, grew into tighter unity with the church and sky. I recalled a passage from Aeschylus: "The pure sky desires to penetrate the earth, and the earth is filled with love so that she longs for blissful unity with the sky. The rain falling from the sky impregnates the earth, so that she gives birth to plants and grain for beasts and men." No one rushed in or out or around the church. The space around seemed alive and dense with slow currents all ultimately being pulled to and through the central portal.* Inside, the space, although spacious far beyond the scale of practical human needs, seemed strangely compressed, full of forces thrusting and counterthrusting in dynamic interrelations. Slowly, in the cool silence inlaid with stone,

I was drawn down the long nave, following the stately rhythms of the bays and piers. But my eyes also followed the vast vertical stretches far up into the shifting shadows of the vaultings. It was as if I were being borne aloft. Yet I continued down the narrowing tunnel of the nave, but more and more slowly as the pull of the space above held back the pull of the space below. At the crossing of the *transept,* the flaming colors, especially the reds, of the northern and southern roses transfixed my slowing pace, and then I turned back at last to the western rose and the three lancets beneath—a delirium of color, dominantly blue, was pouring through. Earthbound on the crossing, the blaze of the Without was merging with the Within. Radiant space took complete possession of my senses. In the protective grace of this sheltering space, even the outer space which I had dismissed in the traffic of my driving seemed to converge around the center of this crossing. Instead of being alongside things—the church, the town, the fields, the sky, the sun—I was with them, at one with them. This housing of holiness made me feel at home in this strange land.

PERCEPTION KEY Chartres Cathedral

1. Form and function usually work together in classic architecture. What visible exterior architectural details indicate that Chartres Cathedral functions as a church? Are there any visible details that conflict with its function as a church?

2. The two spires of the church were built at different times. Should they have been made symmetrical? What might be some reasons for their not being symmetrical?

3. What seem to be the primary values revealed by the rose window of Chartres?

4. How did the builders satisfy the fourth requirement of architecture: that the building be revelatory? What values does the exterior of the building reveal?

5. What is implied by the fact that the cathedral dwarfs all the buildings near it?

Living Space

Living space is the feeling of the comfortable positioning of things in the environment, promoting both liberty of movement and paths as directives. Taking possession of space is our first gesture as infants, and sensitivity to the position of other things is a prerequisite of life. Space infiltrates through all our senses, and our sensations of everything influence our perception of space. A breeze broadens the spaciousness of a room that opens on a garden. A sound tells us something about the surfaces and shape of that room. A cozy temperature brings the furniture and walls into intimate relationships. The smell of books gives that space a personality. With living space, since all the senses are involved, the whole body is a center. Furthermore, when we relate to a place of special value, such as the home, a "configurational center" is formed, a place that is a gathering point around which a field of interest is structured.

PERCEPTION KEY Buildings

1. Select a house in your community that strikes you as ugly. Why?

2. Select a house in your community that strikes you as beautiful. Why?

3. Comment on your own home. Is the space warm, inviting, well situated in its site? Is your home architecture or engineering?

4. Comment on an apartment house, a school building, an office building, a gas station, a supermarket—how well do they use space? Is the space inviting?

5. Do you have any buildings that provide a centered space?

6. What are your configurational centers? Which are beautiful? Which are not?

A building that lacks artistic qualities, even if it encloses a convenient void, encourages us to ignore it. Normally we will be blind to such a building and its space as long as it serves its practical purposes. If the roof leaks or a wall breaks down, however, we will only see the building as a damaged instrument. A well-designed building, on the other hand, brings us into living space by centering space. We become aware of the power and embrace of space. Such a building strikes a bargain between what it lets us do and what it makes us do.

Four Necessities of Architecture

Architecture is a peculiarly public art because buildings generally have a social function, and many buildings require public funds. More than other artists, architects must consider the public. If they do not, few of their plans are likely to materialize. Thus, architects must be psychologists, sociologists, economists, businesspeople, politicians, and courtiers. They must also be engineers, for they must be able to design structurally stable buildings. And then they need luck.

Architects have to take into account four basic and closely interrelated necessities: technical requirements, function, spatial relationships, and revelatory requirements. To succeed, their structures must adjust to these necessities. As for what time will do to their creations, they can only hope and prepare with foresight. Ultimately every building is susceptible to economic demands and the whims of future taste.

Technical Requirements of Architecture

Of the four necessities, the technical requirements of a building are the most obvious. Buildings must stand and withstand. Architects must know the materials and their potentialities, how to put the materials together, and how the materials will work on a particular site. But they are something more as well—artists. In solving their technical problems, they must also make their forms revelatory. Their buildings must illuminate something significant that we would otherwise fail to perceive.

Consider, for example, the relationship between the engineering requirements and artistic qualities of the Parthenon, 447–432 BCE (Figure 6-4). The engineering was superb, but unfortunately the building was almost destroyed in 1687, when it was being used as an ammunition dump by the Turks and was hit by a shell from a Venetian gun. Basically the technique used was ***post-and-lintel*** (or post-and-beam) construction. Set on a base, or stylobate, columns (verticals: the posts) support the entablature (horizontals: the lintel), which, in turn, supports the ***pediment*** (the triangular structure) and roof.

FIGURE 6-4

The Parthenon, Athens. 447–432 BCE. The Parthenon was dedicated to Athena, the patron of Athens. To give its proportions a sense of perfection, a number of imperfections were built into the columns to accommodate the way people must look up to the building.

©Lee A. Jacobus

PERCEPTION KEY The Parthenon and Chartres Cathedral

1. Compare the dominant vertical elements of the Parthenon—the Doric columns and the pediment—with the dominant vertical elements of Chartres Cathedral—the spires, the strong vertical buttresses, and the round window. Each building is dedicated to God or gods. What revelatory function do the strong verticals seem to serve? What might they reveal to those who first saw these buildings?

2. Which building is more dominated by straight lines? What does the emphasis on straight or rounded lines in these buildings imply in terms of revealing religious values?

3. Both buildings are temples. Which seems to you more holy? Which seems to put more trust in God? Compare your views with those of your peers.

4. Examine the elements of the Doric order in Figure 6-5. What values are revealed by the attention to detail in the stylobate, the shaft, and the segments of the capital, the necking, echinus, and abacus? Are these details simply decoration, or are they also functional and revelatory?

Functional Requirements of Architecture

Traditionally architects made their buildings stand in such a way that

they revealed their function or use. No one is likely to mistake Chartres Cathedral for an office building. We have seen the conventional structures of too many churches and office buildings to be mistaken about this. Nor are we likely to mistake the Seagram Building (Figure 6-6) for a church. We recognize the functions of these buildings because they are in the conventional shapes that such buildings so often possess.

FIGURE 6-5
Elements of the Doric order, the simplest of the Greek orders and thus considered most appropriate for temples.

PERCEPTION KEY Form, Function, Content, and Space

Study Figure 6-2 (Chartres Cathedral) and the Seagram Building Figure 6-6 below.

1. What is the basic function of each of these buildings?

2. How have the respective forms revealed the functions of their buildings? We would argue that both works are architecture because the form of the building is revelatory of the subject matter—of the tension, anguish, striving, and ultimate concern of religious faith—whereas the form of the Seagram Building is revelatory of the stripped-down, uniform efficiency of an American business corporation. Consider every possible relevant argument against this view.

Study one of Frank Lloyd Wright's last and most famous works, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City (Figures 6-7 and

6-8), constructed in 1957–1959 but designed in 1943. Wright wrote,

Here for the first time architecture appears plastic, one floor flowing into another (more like sculpture) instead of the usual superimposition of stratified layers cutting and butting into each other by way of post-and-beam construction. The whole building, cast in concrete, is more like an egg shell—in form a great simplicity—rather than like a crisscross structure. The light concrete flesh is rendered strong enough everywhere to do its work

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FIGURE 6-6

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, architects, the Seagram Building, New York City. 1954–1958. An example of the International style popular in midcentury, the building was designed so that the structure of the building would be visible. Without decoration, and with replication of floor upon floor, this building reveals a clear function for "doing business."

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FIGURE 6-7

Frank Lloyd Wright, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City. 1957–1959. This was the last great commission for Wright, whose cast concrete design was instantly controversial.

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FIGURE 6-8

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum interior. The floor spirals continuously upward with art hung on the walls. A large transparent skylight is shaped similarly to cathedral rose windows.

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by embedded filaments of steel either separate or in mesh. The structural calculations are thus those of cantilever and continuity

rather than the post and beam. The net result of such construction is a greater repose, the atmosphere of the quiet unbroken wave: no meeting of the eye with abrupt changes of form.[1]

The term ***cantilever*** refers to a structural principle in architecture in which one end of a horizontal form is fixed—usually in a wall—while the other end juts out over space. Steel beam construction makes such forms possible; many modern buildings, like the Guggenheim Museum, have forms extending fluidly into space.

PERCEPTION KEY Guggenheim Museum

1. How well does the exterior of the building harmonize with the interior?

2. Does the exterior form reveal the building as an art museum?

3. The museum stands near much larger rectangular buildings. What would be the point of such a sharp contrast with boxlike "post-and-beam" structures? What would such a contrast reveal about the nature of art?

4. The Guggenheim Museum faces Fifth Avenue in New York City. Originally it was to have been located in Central Park. How much difference would that have made to the revelatory qualities of the building?

Spatial Requirements of Architecture

Wright solved his technical problems (such as cantilevering) and his

functional problems (efficient and commodious exhibition of works of art) with considerable success. Moreover, the building reveals itself as a museum. What else could it be? In the 1950s Wright's design was revolutionary. We think of it now as a museum, but when it was built it contrasted so sharply with the rectangular boxlike structures near it that people were shocked. Indeed, this building stands as a work of art partly because its singular design occupies space as a sculpture would. The Guggenheim Museum in New York began an architectural era in which the relationship of form and function began to be called into question.

Revelatory Requirements of Architecture

The function or use of a building is an essential part of the subject matter of that building, what the architect interprets or gives insight into by means of its form. The function of the Seagram Building is to house offices. The form of that building reveals that function. But does this function exhaust the subject matter of this building? Is only function revealed? Would we, perhaps, be closer to the truth by claiming that involved with this office function are values closely associated with, but nevertheless distinguishable from, this function? That somehow other values, besides functional ones, are interpreted in architecture?

We are claiming that the essential values of contemporary society are a part of all artists' subject matter, part of what they must interpret in their work, and this—because of the public character of architecture—is especially so with architects. Architects (and artists generally) are influenced by the values of their society. In the Middle Ages, religion in the West was supreme and the great buildings of that period were

churches and cathedrals. Soon after, the great buildings were palaces and fortresses. Each of these structures reveals the values of the times and the places—in short, of the societies in which they were built. The church, the royal court, and the military protection of the communities were dependent on the services of architects. In the 1950s, when the Seagram Building was constructed, the rise of corporate capitalism was interpreted clearly and efficiently. That is one reason the Guggenheim Museum was so shocking.

Every stone of the Parthenon, in the way it was cut and fitted, reveals something about the values of the Age of Pericles, the fifth century BCE—for example, the emphasis on moderation and harmony, the importance of mathematical measurement and yet its subordination to the eminence of humans and their rationality, as well as the immanence rather than the transcendence of the sacred.

Chartres Cathedral reveals three principal value areas of that medieval region: the special importance of Mary, to whom the cathedral is dedicated; the doctrines of the cathedral school, one of the most important centers of learning in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; and the value preferences of the main patrons—the royal family, the lesser nobility, and the local guilds. The windows of the 175 surviving panels and the sculpture, including more than 2,000 carved figures, were a bible in glass and stone for the illiterate, but they were also a visual encyclopedia for the literate. From these structures the iconographer—the decipherer of the meaning of icons or symbols—can trace almost every fundamental value of the society that

created Chartres Cathedral: the conception of human history from

Adam and Eve to the Last Judgment; church history; ancient lore and contemporary history; the latest scientific knowledge; the curriculum of the cathedral school as divided into the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music); the hierarchy of the nobility and the guilds; the code of chivalry and manners; and the hopes and fears of the time.

PERCEPTION KEY Values and Architecture

1. Enumerate other values in addition to the functional that may be interpreted by the form of the Seagram Building.

2. Choose another piece of architecture in this chapter and comment on the values reflected in its structure.

3. Is there any building that you know of that does not reflect some values of its place and time?

Earth-Rooted Architecture

The earth is the securing agency that grounds the place of our existence, our center. In many primitive cultures, it is believed that people are born from the earth. And in many languages, people are the "Earth-born." In countless myths, Mother Earth is the bearer of humans from birth to death. Of all things, the expansive earth, with its mineral resources and vegetative fecundity, most suggests or is symbolic of security. Moreover, since the solidity of the earth encloses its depth in darkness, the earth is also suggestive of mystery and death.

The Earth Mother has a mysterious, nocturnal, even funerary aspect—

she is also often a goddess of death. But, as the theologian Mircea Eliade points out, "even in respect of these negative aspects, one thing that must never be lost sight of, is that when the Earth becomes a goddess of Death, it is simply because she is felt to be the universal womb, the inexhaustible source of all creation."[2] Nothing in nature is more suggestive or symbolic of security and mystery than the earth. ***Earth-rooted architecture*** accentuates this natural symbolism more than any other art.

Site

Architecture that is earth-rooted discloses the earth by drawing our attention to the site of the building, its submission to gravity, its raw materials, and its centrality in outer and inner space. Sites whose surrounding environment can be seen from great distances are especially favorable for helping a building to bring out the earth. The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut (Figure 6-1) is profoundly earth-rooted. It appears to be cut out of the stone mountain that cradles it. The site is large and inviting, and the interior is mysterious and extensive. Few buildings in the world are more clearly earth-bound. Even the extraordinary symmetry of its parts, with the repeats of vertical

supports and open spaces leading within, reinforces the sense that this building is in place and will never be elsewhere. The deepest section of the temple, the Chapel of Amun, is cut from the rock itself and leads deep into the mountain.

Gravity

The Parthenon (Figure 6-4), because it is on the Acropolis, the highest point in Athens, seems an unlikely candidate for an earth-rooted structure, but as we see it now in ruin we perceive a remarkable tendency for it to appear profoundly weighty. The stones that surround the building give us a clue immediately to the density of its stone columns, and the stones of the support of the original roof imply an inevitable yielding to gravity. The horizontal rectangularity of the entablature follows evenly along the plain of the Acropolis with the steady beat of its supporting columns and quiets their upward thrust. Gravity is accepted and accentuated in this serene stability—the hold of the earth is secure.

James Gibbs's Radcliffe Camera (Figure 6-9) cannot be seen from great distances, although it benefits from a grassy surround that permits us to view it in its entirety.

FIGURE 6-9

James Gibbs, Radcliffe Camera, Oxford University, Oxfordshire, UK. 1737–1748. A library for Oxford University, the building does not have a long vista. It sits amid the many colleges of the university. It was inspired by a sixteenth-century tempietto (little temple) by Donato Bramante. Like the Radcliffe Camera, it was enclosed by other buildings.

©Nikreates/Alamy

It appears to be a temple, but in this case a temple to learning. The classical columns add a sense of weight that roots the building firmly in place. Standing and accounting for its site and its thrust upward, one feels as if it is only the top of a much larger structure that is somehow invisible in the ground below. It is almost impossible to avoid participating with its dramatic form. Our first sense is that the building is the top of a temple and that there is more to come. Yet the

dimension—one hundred feet in diameter—impresses us with a sense of both wonder and satisfaction. When we consider its classical columns, its renaissance dome, and the perfection of its circular structure, we begin to understand Gibbs's revelatory purposes. The building reveals the significance of learning, resting on the shoulders of Greece, Rome, and Italian renaissance. It is a symbol of the preservation of civilization through the art of architecture.

The pueblo buildings (Figure 6-10), the Betakin Cliff Dwellings, in the National Navajo Monument are also built out of and into the earth. The habitations are communal, protected by their setting, high into the cliffs. The American Southwest is notable for its adobe structures, adhering tightly to the earth, simple and arrestingly beautiful in their sites. The Pueblo settlements survive even now in partial ruin, striking because of their sense of rootedness in their setting.

Raw Materials

When the medium of architecture is made up totally or in large part of unfinished materials furnished by nature, especially when they are from the site, as in the Betakini Cliff Dwellings, these materials tend to stand forth and help reveal the earthiness of the earth. In this respect, stone, wood, and clay in a raw or

FIGURE 6-10
Betakin Cliff Dwellings. Ancestral (Anasazi) Pueblo buildings. Ruins at the National Navajo Monument in Arizona.

©Witold Skrypczak/Getty Images

FIGURE 6-11

Frank Lloyd Wright, Edgar J. Kaufmann House, known as Fallingwater. 1937–1939. Fifty miles southeast of Pittsburgh, it was described by *Time* magazine as Wright's "most beautiful job."

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relatively raw state are much more effective than steel, concrete, and glass. If the Parthenon had been made in concrete rather than in native Pentelic marble—the quarries can still be seen in the distance—the building would not grow out of the soil so organically, and some of the feeling of the earth would be dissipated. Also, if the paint that originally covered much of the Parthenon had remained, the effect would be considerably less earthy than at present. Note, however, that the dominant colors were terra-cotta reds, colors of the earth.
Wright's Kaufmann house (Figure 6-11) is an excellent example of the combined use of manufactured and raw materials that helps set forth the earth. The concrete and glass bring out by contrast the textures of stone and wood taken from the site, while the lacelike flow of the falling water is made even more graceful by its reflection in the smooth clear flow of concrete and glass. Like a wide-spreading plant, drawing the sunlight and rain to its good earth, this home seems to breathe within its homeland. The Kaufmann house is an excellent example of the combined use of manufactured and raw materials that helps set forth the earth. The concrete and glass bring out by contrast the textures of stone and wood taken from the site, while the lacelike flow of the falling water is made even more graceful by its reflection in the smooth clear flow of concrete and glass. Like a wide-spreading plant, drawing the sunlight and rain to its good earth, this home seems to breathe within its homeland.

PERCEPTION KEY Architecture and Materials

In his *In Praise of Architecture,* the Italian architect Giò Ponti writes, "Beautiful materials do not exist. Only the right material exists. . . . Rough plaster in the right place is the beautiful material for that place. . . . To replace it with a noble material would be vulgar."[3]

1. Do you agree with Ponti?
2. If you agree, refer to examples that corroborate Ponti's point.
3. If you disagree, refer to examples that do not corroborate.

Centrality

A building that is strongly centered, in both its outer and inner space, helps disclose the earth. Perhaps no building is more centered in its site than the Parthenon, but the weak centering of its inner space slackens somewhat the significance of the earth. Unlike Chartres, there is no strong pull into the Parthenon and, when we get inside, the inner space, as we reconstruct it, is divided in such a way that no certain center can be felt. There is no place to come to an unequivocal standstill as at Chartres. Even Versailles (Figure 6-12), despite its seemingly never-ending partitions of inner space, brings us eventually to somewhat of a center at the bed in Louis XIV's bedroom. Yet this centering is made possible primarily by the view from the room that focuses both the pivotal position of the room in the building and the placement of the room on a straight-line axis to Paris in the far distance. Conversely, the inner space of Chartres, most of which from the crossing can be taken in with a sweep of the eyes, achieves centrality without this kind of dependence upon outside orientation.

Buildings such as the Parthenon and Versailles, which divide the inner

FIGURE 6-12

Louis le Vau and Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Palace of Versailles, France. 1661–1687. France was governed from this palace from 1682 until the French Revolution of 1789. Its immensity was designed to house the entire Royal Court in a place several miles from Paris, the official capital of France.

©Ingram Publishing/SuperStock RF

FIGURE 6-13

Giovanni Paolo Panini, Interior of the Pantheon, Rome. Circa 1734. Oil on canvas, 50½ × 39 inches. The Pantheon dates from the second century. It is notable for being one of the only Roman buildings still in use and still intact as it originally was. The interior space is overwhelming in part because it contrasts dramatically with a very plain exterior.

Source: Samuel H. Kress Collection/National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

space with solid partitions, are weaker in inner centrality than buildings without such divisions. The endless boxes within boxes of the Seagram Building (Figure 6-6) negate any possibility of significant inner centering, adding to the unearthiness of this cage of steel and glass.

Buildings in the round, other things being equal, are the most internally centered of all. In the Pantheon (Figure 6-13), almost all the inner space can be seen with a turn of the head, and the grand and clear ***symmetry*** of the enclosing shell draws

FIGURE 6-14

The Pantheon, Rome, exterior. 117–125 CE. The Greek facade, eight Egyptian marble Corinthian pillars, hides the drumlike structure of the building, which was used as a Christian church starting in the seventh century.

©Canali Photobank, Italy

us to the center of the circle, the privileged position, beneath the eye of the dome opening to a bit of the sky. Few buildings root us more firmly in the earth. The massive dome with its stony bluntness seems to be drawn down by the funneled and dimly spreading light falling through the eye. This is a dome of destiny pressing tightly down. We are driven earthward in this crushing ambience. Even on the outside, the Pantheon seems to be forcing down (Figure 6-14). In the circular interior of Wright's Guggenheim Museum (Figure 6-8), not all of the inner space can be seen from the privileged position, but the smoothly curving ramp that comes down like a whirlpool makes us feel the earth beneath as our only support. Whereas in buildings such as Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres, mass seems to be overcome, the weight lightened, and the downward motion thwarted, in buildings such as the Pantheon and the Guggenheim Museum, mass comes out heavily and down.

Sky-Oriented Architecture

Architecture that is ***sky-oriented*** suggests or is symbolic of a world as the generating agency that enables us to project our possibilities and realize some of them. A horizon, always a necessary part of a world, is symbolic of the limitations placed upon our possibilities and realizations. The light and heat of the sun are more symbolic than anything else in nature of generative power. Dante declared, "There is no visible thing in the world more worthy to serve as symbol of God than the Sun; which

illuminates with visible life itself first and then all the celestial and mundane bodies." Total darkness, at least until we can envision a world, is terrifying. That is why, as the Preacher of Ecclesiastes proclaims, "The light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Architecture organizes a world, usually more tightly than nature, by centering that world on the earth by means of a building. By accentuating the natural symbolism of sunlight, sky, and horizon, sky-oriented architecture opens up a world that is symbolic of our projections into the future.

Such architecture discloses a world by drawing our attention to the sky bounded by a horizon. It accomplishes this by means of making a building appear high and centered within the sky, defying gravity, and tightly integrating the light of outer with inner space. Negatively, architecture that accents a world de-emphasizes the features that accent the earth. Thus, the manufactured materials, such as the steel and glass of the Seagram Building (Figure 6-6), help separate this building from the earth. Positively, architects can accent a world by turning their structures toward the sky in such a way that the horizon of the sky forms a spacious context. Architecture is an art of bounding as well as opening.

PERCEPTION KEY Sky-Oriented Architecture

1. Identify the most sky-oriented building in your local community. Photograph that building from an angle or angles that support your choice.

Stained glass, usually framed within a wall, is activated by penetrating light. Outside, the great western rose window of Chartres (Figure 6-3) is only of sculptural interest. Inside, on a sunny day, the cascade of

flashing colors, especially blues, is overwhelming. No photograph can capture the sublimity. There is a "strangeness." Our sight is wired to see light falling on objects rather than shining through them.

1. Try to find in your local community any buildings with powerful stained glass. Do you think stained glass is generally sky-oriented?

2. Do you think stained glass should be classified as an independent art distinct from painting?

Barcelona's Antonio Gaudí created one of the most striking modern buildings in his Sagrada Família (Figures 6-15 to 6-17). Gaudí never lived to see the erection of the four towers that dominate the facade. The interior space is not yet covered with a roof, and this emphasizes the sky-orientation of the building. One's eye is lifted upward by almost every part of the building. Under construction for over a hundred years, it may be at least another hundred years before the church is completed. Work proceeds slowly, guided more or less by Gaudí's general designs. Gaudí developed details and structures based on organic forms of nature through irregular sweeping lines, shapes, and volumes. Geometric designs are subordinated. Textures vary greatly, often with strong contrasts between smooth and rough; and sometimes, especially in the towers, brilliantly colored pieces of glass and ceramics are embedded, sparkling in the sunlight. The effect is both sculptural—dense volumes activating the surrounding space—and organic, as if a forest of plants were stretching into the sky, searching for sunlight. The earth, despite its necessity, is superseded. This is a building for heaven.

FIGURE 6-15

Antonio Gaudí, Sagrada Família (Church of the Holy Family, interior), Barcelona. 1883–present. Gaudí famously relied on organic forms to create an idiosyncratic style.

©Vanni/Art Resource, NY

FIGURE 6-16

Sagrada Família, interior detail. Gaudí merged traditional cathedral details with flowing modern forms.

©Lee A. Jacobus

FIGURE 6-17

Sagrada Família, exterior detail. Organic forms are clearly visible on the exterior along with figures typically found on the exteriors of Gothic churches.

©Lee A. Jacobus

PERCEPTION KEY Sagrada Família

1. Compare Sagrada Família with Chartres (Figure 6-2). How do their sky-orientations differ? How are they similar? Compare Sagrada Família with any church well known to you. What are the differences?

2. Chartres, Sagrada Família, and Notre Dame-du-Haut (Figure 3-4) are all Catholic churches. Do they each reveal different expressions of religious values?

Axis Mundi

Early civilizations often express a need for a world by centering themselves in relation to the sky by means of an **axis mundi**. Mircea Eliade cites many instances, for example, among the nomadic Australians, whose economy is based on gathering food and hunting

small game:

According to the traditions of an Arunta tribe, the Achipla, in mythical times the divine being Numbakula cosmicized their future territory, created their Ancestor, and established their institutions. From the trunk of a gum tree Numbakula fashioned the sacred pole *(kauwa-auwa)* and, after anointing it with blood, climbed it and disappeared into the sky. This pole (the *axis mundi*) represents a cosmic axis, for it is around the sacred pole that territory becomes habitable, hence is transformed into a world. The sacred pole consequently plays an important role ritually. During their wanderings the Achipla always carry it with them and choose the direction they are to take by the direction toward which it bends. This allows them, while being continually on the move, to be always in "their world" and, at the same time, in communication with the sky into which Numbakula

vanished. For the pole to be broken denotes catastrophe; it is like "the end of the world," reversion to chaos. Spencer and Gillen report that once, when the pole was broken, "the entire clan were in consternation; they wandered about aimlessly for a time, and finally lay down on the ground together and waited for death to overtake them."[4]

Buildings that stretch up far above the land and nearby structures, such as Chartres and Sagrada Família, not only direct our eyes to the sky but also act as a center that orders the sunlight in such a way that a world with a horizon comes into view. The sky both opens up and takes on limits. Such buildings reach up like an *axis mundi,* and the sky reaches down to meet them in mutual embrace. And we are blessed with an orienting center, our motion being given direction and limits.

Defiance of Gravity

The stony logic of the press of the ***flying buttresses*** of Chartres and the arched roof, towers, and spires that carry on their upward thrust seem to overcome the binding of the earth, just as the stone birds on the walls seem about to break their bonds and fly out into the world. The reach up is full of vital force and finally comes to rest comfortably and securely in the bosom of the heavens. Mont-Saint-Michel is even more impressive in this respect, mainly because of the advantages of its site.

Perhaps Brunelleschi's dome of the Cathedral of Florence (Figure 6-18) is the most powerful structure ever built in seeming to defy gravity and achieving height in relation to its site. The eight outside ribs spring up to the cupola with tremendous energy, in part because they repeat the spring of the mountains that encircle

FIGURE 6-18

Filippo Brunelleschi, dome of the Cathedral of Florence. 1420–1436. One of the great architectural achievements of the Renaissance, the cathedral still dominates the landscape of modern Florence.

©Douglas Pearson/Getty Images

Florence. The dome, visible from almost everywhere in and around Florence, appears to be precisely centered in the Arno Valley, precisely as high as it should be in order to organize its sky. The world of Florence begins and ends at the still point of this dome of aspiration.

Integration of Light

When the light of outer space suffuses the light of inner space,

especially when the light from the outside seems to dominate or draw the light from the inside, a world is accented. Inside Chartres, the light through the stained glass is so majestic that we cannot fail to imagine the light outside that is generating the transfiguration inside. For a medieval man like Abbot Suger, the effect was mystical, separating the earth from heaven:

When the house of God, many colored as the radiance of precious jewels, called me from the cares of the world, then holy meditation led my mind to thoughts of piety, exalting my soul from the material to the immaterial, and I seemed to find myself, as it were, in

FIGURE 6-19

Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom of God), Istanbul. 532–537; restored 558, 975. Isadore and Anthemius were nonprofessional architects who used light materials to create a huge well-lighted interior.

©David Pearson/Alamy

some strange part of the universe which was neither wholly of the baseness of the earth, nor wholly of the serenity of heaven, but by the grace of God I seemed lifted in a mystic manner from this lower toward the upper sphere.

For a contemporary person, the stained glass is likely to be felt more as integrating rather than as separating us from a world. Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Figure 6-19) has no stained glass, and its glass areas are completely dominated by the walls and dome. Yet the subtle placement of the relatively small windows, especially around the perimeter of the dome, seems to draw the light of the inner space up and out. Unlike the Pantheon, the great masses of Hagia Sophia seem to rise. The dome floats gently, despite its diameter of 107 feet, and

the great enfolded space beneath is absorbed into the even greater open space outside. We imagine a world.

Sky-oriented architecture reveals the generative activity of a world. The energy of the sun is the ultimate source of all life. The light of the sun enables us to see the physical environment and guides our steps accordingly. "Arise, shine, for thy light is come" (Isaiah 60:1). The sky with its horizon provides a spacious context for our progress. The world of nature vaguely suggests the potentialities of the future. Architecture, however, tightly centers a world on the earth by means of its structures. This unification gives us orientation and security.

Earth-Resting Architecture

Most architecture accents neither earth nor sky but rests on the earth, using the earth like a platform with the sky as background. *Earth-resting* buildings relate more or less harmoniously to the earth. Mies van der Rohe's residence for Edith Farnsworth (Figure 6-20) in Plano, Illinois, is an example of a very harmonious

FIGURE 6-20

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth Residence, Plano, Illinois. 1950. Mies insisted on building with the interior structure visible from all angles.

©Jon Miller/Hedrich Blessing, Chicago

relationship. Unlike sky-oriented architecture, the earth-resting type does not strongly organize the sky around itself, as with Chartres (Figure 6-2) or the Cathedral of Florence (Figure 6-18). The sky is involved with earth-resting architecture, of course, but more as backdrop.

With earth-resting architecture—unlike earth-rooted architecture—the earth does not appear as an organic part of the building, as in Wright's Kaufmann house (Figure 6-11). Rather, the earth appears as a stage. Earth-resting buildings, moreover, are usually cubes that avoid cantilevering structures, as in the Kaufmann house, as well as curving lines, as in the Sagrada Família (Figure 6-15). Earth-rooted architecture seems to "hug to" the earth, as with the Pantheon (Figure 6-14), or to grow out of the earth, as with the Kaufmann house. Earth-resting architecture, on the other hand, seems to "sit on" the earth. Thus, because it does not relate to its environment quite as strongly as earth-rooted and sky-oriented architecture, this kind of architecture usually tends to draw to itself more isolated attention with reference to its shape, articulation of the elements of its walls, lighting, and so on.

Earth-resting architecture is usually more appropriate than earth-rooted architecture when the site is severely bounded by other buildings. Perhaps this is a basic deficiency of Wright's Guggenheim Museum (Figure 6-7). In any case, it is obvious that if buildings were constructed close to the Kaufmann house—especially earth-resting or sky-oriented buildings—they would destroy much of the glory of Wright's creation.

Earth-Dominating Architecture

Unlike an earth-resting building, an ***earth-dominating*** building does not sit on but "rules over" the earth. There is a sense of power and aggression. And unlike earth-rooted buildings, such as the Pantheon (Figure 6-14) or the Kaufmann house (Figure 6-11), there is no feeling of an organic relationship between the building and the earth.

Earth-dominating buildings generally are easily identified. Any work of

architecture *solicits* attention. But earth-dominating buildings *demand* attention. Usually earth-dominating buildings are large and massive, but those features do not necessarily express earth-dominance. For example, Versailles is huge and heavy, but its vast horizontal spread has, we think, the effect of earth-resting. The earth as a platform holds its own with the palace. You can sense this much better from the ground than from an aerial photograph (Figure 6-12). Study the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art (Figure 6-21). Do you think the building is earth-resting or earth-dominating? As you think about this, compare it to Sagrada Família (Figure 6-15). In Spain, Sagrada Familia is one of the best examples of earth-dominating architecture.

You may find it difficult to locate earth-dominating buildings in your community. Palaces are rare, except in very wealthy communities. Few churches exert anything close to the power of Chartres. Public buildings such as courthouses tend to avoid aggressive appearance. They are expected to be traditional and democratic. And buildings of commerce—from banks to malls—are meant to invite.

FIGURE 6-21

I. M. Pei, East Wing of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1974–1978. The East Wing contains modern and contemporary art. Pei's design features powerful geometric forms.

©Randy Duchaine/Alamy

Combinations of Types

PERCEPTION KEY The National Gallery and the Long Island Federal Courthouse

1. Compare I. M. Pei's East Wing addition to the National Gallery with Richard Meier's Courthouse. Which of these better respects the concept of form following function?

2. Which of these buildings is more earth-resting? Which is more earth-rooted?

3. I. M. Pei relies heavily on the geometric form of the triangle. How do the many triangles visible in I. M. Pei's East Wing (Figure 6-21) and the National Gallery of Art interior (Figure 6-22) express a source of power in the building? In terms of social values, why are these forms revelatory?

4. Which geometric forms dominate Meier's Courthouse (Figure 6-23)? In what way are those forms revelatory of the function of the building? In what way are they revelatory of social values?

It seems to us that the Courthouse might best be described as a combination of the earth-resting and the earth-rooted. The earth-resting features, such as the sky as a backdrop and the platform character of the earth, are fairly obvious. The earth-rootedness is also there, however, because of the powerful effect of the huge rotunda that rises at the entrance like a giant tree anchoring the building into the earth. The Courthouse does not just use the earth but seems to belong to it. Some critics have described the rotunda as a huge ugly nose that defaces a handsome face. What do you think? Meier, incidentally, is the architect of the famous Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

FIGURE 6-22

National Gallery of Art interior. The interior space of the walkway connecting the two wings of the museum is lighted by the triangular skylights visible from the exterior.

©B. O'Kane/Alamy

FIGURE 6-23

Richard Meier, Long Island Federal Courthouse, Central Islip, New York. 2000. A stark white building, it is one of the largest courthouses in the nation. It is designed to accommodate public gatherings as well as numerous individual courts.

©Robert Polidori

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao and The Taj Mahal

Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, 1991–1997 (Figures 6-24 to 6-26), was the culminating architectural sensation of the twentieth century, surpassing in interest even Wright's Guggenheim of 1959. Gehry, like many contemporary architects, often uses the computer to scan models and flesh out the possibilities

FIGURE 6-24

Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain. 1991–1997. View from across the river. Gehry's titanium-clad free-flowing forms have been made possible by the computer and have become his signature style.

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FIGURE 6-25

Aerial view of Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. The view from the air reveals powerful interrelationships of geometric forms with the almost floral organic forms that flow from rectilinear "stems."

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of his designs. The titanium-swathed structure changes drastically and yet harmoniously from every view: For example, from across the Nervion River that cuts through Bilbao the Guggenheim looks something like a whale. The locals say that from the bridge it looks like

a colossal artichoke, from the south a bulging, blooming flower. The billowing volumes, mainly cylindrical, spiral upward, as if blown by gently sweeping winds.

Inside, smooth curves dominate perpendiculars and right angles, propelling visitors leisurely from each gallery or room to another with constantly changing perspectives, orderly without conventional order.

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FIGURE 6-26

Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, interior. The sculpture is by Richard Serra.

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PERCEPTION KEY Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

1. Is the Guggenheim earth-rooted, earth-resting, earth-dominating, or sky-oriented? Could it be a combination? It would be helpful if you could examine more photographs (see, for instance, *Frank O. Gehry: The Complete Works*, by Francesco Dal Co and Kurt W. Forster [New York: Monacelli Press, 1998]).

2. Identify a building in your community that is an example of a combination of types. Photograph that building from the angle or angles that support your choice.

EXPERIENCING The Taj Mahal

1. Would you recognize the function of the building if you did not know its name?

2. Which type does this building fulfill, earth-resting, earth-rooted,

or sky-oriented?

3. Compare The Taj Mahal with the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut *(*Figure 6-1*)*. Both are mortuary monuments to women. Which seems more gender-linked? Which is most earth-centered?

4. The Taj Mahal *(*Figure 6-27*)* has been described as a monument to the love of Shah Jehan for his wife Mumtaz Mahal. What formal qualities suggest that this building is revelatory of Shah Jehan's love? Of what else might the form of The Taj Mahal be considered revelatory?

5. Because the Pyramid of Cheops (Figure 5-6), the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, and The Taj Mahal are all mausoleums, is it possible to think of these buildings as revelatory of memorials to the dead? Which is more instantly recognizable as functioning as a tomb? What might they reveal about attitudes toward death?

The Taj Mahal is one of the most famous buildings in the world. It was built as a monument to Shah Jehan's third wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631. When you look at the building, its form is dazzling and compelling, but what is its function? What are the first thoughts that come to mind? For one thing, the minarets at the corner of the site were designed to be used for the call to prayer, so it is reasonable to think of the building as a mosque. There is a separate mosque on the grounds of The Taj Mahal, but The Taj Mahal itself is a mausoleum, a tomb that houses Shah Jehan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal, finished in 1648. The main level holds two sarcophagi (marble burial vaults) that are richly decorated with Arabic religious scripts, but because Islamic

law prohibits elaborate decorations on the actual coffins, both Shah Jehan and Mumtaz Mahal are buried in simpler sarcophagi on a lower level, with their faces turned toward Mecca.

Shah Jehan constructed many buildings during his reign over the Mughal Empire in India. The Mughals, descendants of Mongols living in Turkestan, became Muslims in the fifteenth century. Notable for their arts, architecture, and respect for religious freedom, they dominated India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their influences were Persian, as illustrated in the "onion" dome of the building, Islamic as illustrated by the copious script acting as decorative features throughout, and Indian as illustrated by the arched doors and windows. The majority population, Hindu citizens, were treated fairly, but the undoing of the great Mughal Empire came with the rise of Shah Jehan's son Aurangzeb, who imposed strict Sharia law on the entire populace and thus doomed the Mughals, whose empire was weakened by revolts and internal decay lasting another century and a half.

FIGURE 6-27

The Taj Mahal, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India. 1653. Shah Jehan, the Mughal emperor, built The Taj in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631. One of the most visited buildings in the world, it is in some danger because of the subsidence of a nearby river. Its architect, Ustad Ahmad Lahauri, was one of thousands of craftsmen and designers who finished the primary building in a little more than fifteen years.

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High-Rises and Skyscrapers

Some of the most dramatic examples of the combination of types occur when traditional architecture is fused with contemporary architecture, as happens quite often in China and Malaysia. With a population of over 8 million and rapidly growing, closely crowded around a huge and superb port, Kuala Lumpur had Argentine architect

Cesar Pelli design the Petronas Towers (Figure 6-28), which was the tallest building in the world in 1996 and is still the tallest twin towers in the world.

From outside, the buildings of Hong Kong as a conglomerate appear overwhelmingly sky-oriented. Most of the skyscrapers appear to penetrate the heavens, aided in their thrust by the uplift of the background mountains. Photographs cannot do justice to this effect. The earthly tops of the Shanghai high-rise type are rare, and the Hong Kong buildings generally are considerably higher than those of Shanghai. "Skyscraper" more than "high-rise" more accurately describes these Hong Kong buildings. Sometimes verticality stretches so powerfully that even the diagonal struts of I. M. Pei's Bank of China Tower (Figure 6-29)—one of the tallest buildings in Hong Kong—may appear to stretch imaginatively beyond the top of the roof into vertical straight lines.

FIGURE 6-28

Petronas Twin Towers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Cesar Pelli, 1993–1996. The tallest twin towers in the world, these buildings are influenced by the traditional Buddhist temples that were common in Southeast Asia. The influence links temples of spiritual contemplation with temples of business.

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From inside the city, the architectural impressions of Hong Kong are generally another story (Figure 6-30). The skyscrapers usually abut, crowd, mirror, and slant into each other, often from odd angles, blocking a full view, closing and overwhelming the spaces between. Unlike New York City, where the grid of broad straight avenues provides breathing room for the skyscraper, the narrow crooked streets that dominate Hong Kong rarely allow for more than truncated

views of the buildings. Except on the waterfront, only small patches of the sky are usually visible. The skyscrapers press down. Gravity is overbearing. Sometimes the atmosphere is

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FIGURE 6-29

I. M. Pei, Bank of China Tower, Hong Kong. 1982–1990. At seventy-two stories high, this is Hong Kong's tallest building. One of Pei's challenges was to satisfy the needs of feng shui, the proper positioning of the building and its angles.

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FIGURE 6-30

Cityscape in Hong Kong. The crowding of buildings is typical in this small city.

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claustrophobic. Inside Hong Kong the skyscrapers are usually more earth-dominating than sky-oriented. In New York City there are a few areas of this kind, but even there, Park Avenue provides an extensive clearing.

PERCEPTION KEY High-Rises in Asia

1. Examine the top structures of the high-rises in Hong Kong. Are these tops horizontally oriented as with the Seagram Building (Figure 6-6), or are they more vertically oriented as with The Taj Mahal?

2. Are these top structures suggestive of structures normally built on and belonging to the earth, such as temples, pagodas, restaurants, and porches?

3. The Chinese usually use the term “high-rise” rather than “skyscraper.” Is this significant? If so, in what way?

4. A Chinese architect in Shanghai commented to one of the authors, “In our big cities we build high for practical purposes, just as in the West. But the culture of China is much more traditional than the culture of the West, especially in its arts. With painting, for example, it often takes an expert to identify a twentieth- or twenty-first-century work from earlier centuries. The painter begins by imitating a style and then evolves a style that never loses its roots. Likewise, the Chinese architect tends to be very sensitive to the styles of the past, and that past is more reverent to the earth than to the sky.” Is this comment relevant to the toppings of many of the Asian high-rises?

The high-rise in Malmö, Sweden (Figure 6-31)—often described as the “Turning Torso”—by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, provides splendid views for most of the 147 apartments. At the core of the building, stairs and elevators provide internal communication. The service rooms—kitchen, bath, and utilities—are grouped around that core, freeing the living-room spaces for the outside world. The tallest building in Scandinavia, the Turning Torso is bound by struts forming triangles, reducing the use of steel by about 20 percent compared to the conventional box structure such as the Seagram Building.

FIGURE 6-31

Santiago Calatrava, “Turning Torso,” high-rise, Malmö, Sweden. 1999–2000. The twisting design derived from one of Calatrava’s own sculptures.

©Johan Furusjo/Alamy

PERCEPTION KEY The Turning Torso

1. Is the building sky-oriented?
2. Is it earth-oriented?
3. Is it a combination?

It seems to the authors that the Turning Torso is a combination of sky- and earth- orientation. The horizontal gaps that divide the building disect powerful sweeping vertical edges. The top of the building, unlike the Kuala Lumpur example, has no earthlike structures. Surely this building, especially with its spatial isolation, is sky-oriented. And yet the aptly named Turning Torso seems to be twisting fantastically on the earth as one walks around it. Or from the perspective of our photograph, the building seems to be striding toward the right. Whatever the view, the Turning Torso is horizontally kinetic, totally unlike the static Seagram Building. The Turning Torso is an extraordinary example, we think, of a combination of sky-orientation and earth-domination, unlike the Hong Kong examples, which are sky-oriented and earth-resting.

Study the photograph of Norman Foster's Hearst Tower at Eighth Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street, New York City (Figure 6-32) . Check the Internet for different

FIGURE 6-32

Norman Foster, Hearst Tower, New York City. 2006. The project was to build on top of a seventy-eight-year-old limestone building whose interior was essentially gutted to accommodate the tower, which rises sharply and suddenly above the conventional lower section.

©Chuck Choi/Arcaid/Getty Images

views. Don't miss this building if you are in New York City, viewing it

from different angles. The six lower floors of the original building were gutted except for the four facades. Thus, the tower seems to rise from the top of the facades, which strangely appear to provide a platform.

PERCEPTION KEY Hearst Tower

1. Does the tower strike you as more or less interesting than the two adjoining skyscrapers? Why?

2. Would you describe the building as earth-rooted, earth-dominating, sky-oriented, or some combination? As you think about this, notice how the great triangular panels of glass reflect the sky (at night, of course, there is the reflection of lights).

3. Compare the Hearst Tower with the two buildings near it. What is revelatory about the Hearst Tower that is not revelatory about the other buildings?

We suggest that the tower is most accurately described as sky-oriented. The platform's earth-resting effect is overwhelmed by the great soaring beautiful volumes of

triangular glass. The tower overwhelms the earth. Its flat topping doesn't penetrate the sky, like the two fellow skyscrapers, but,with its reflecting glass mirrors, it merges with the sky. The tower would seem to be most accurately described as sky-oriented.

FOCUS ON The Alhambra

The Alhambra (Figure 6-33) is one of the world's most dazzling works

of architecture. Its beginnings in the Middle Ages were modest, a fortress on a hilly flatland above Granada built by Arab invaders—Moors—who controlled much of Spain. In time, the fortress was added to, and by the fourteenth century the Nasrid dynasty demanded a sumptuous palace and King Yusuf I (1333–1352) began construction. After his death it was continued by his son Muhammad V (1353–1391).

FIGURE 6-33

The Alhambra, Granada, Spain. Circa 1370–1380. "Alhambra" may be translated as red, possibly a reference to the color of the bricks of its outer walls. It sits on high ground above the town.

©Daniel Viñé Garcia/Getty Images RF

While the needs of a fortress were still evident, including the plain massive exterior walls, the Nasrids wanted the interior to be luxurious, magnificent, and beautiful. The Alhambra is one of the world's most astounding examples of beautifully decorated architecture. The builders created a structure that was different from any that had been built in Islam. But at the same time, they depended on many historical traditions for interior decoration, such as the Seljuk, Mughal, and Fatimid styles. Because Islam forbade the reproduction in art of the human form, we see representations of flowers, plants, vines, and other natural objects in the midst of elaborate designs, including Arabic script.

The aerial view (Figure 6-34) reveals the siting of the Alhambra rising above trees surrounding it. The large square structure was added much later by Charles V, after the Nasrid dynasty collapsed and the Moors were driven from Spain.

The Alhambra was a fortress, a palace, and a residence for supportive staff, and it included a harem and a mosque. The structure of three

inner courts was connected to functional complexes, such as a court of justice and a hall of welcoming for ambassadors, the largest interior room. The Court of the Myrtles is a large central space with a pool fed with water through ingenious management of a nearby river. The Court of the Lions (Figure 6-35) is the large reception hall, with doors leading to family tombs, the mosque, and other rooms. The fountain is surrounded by twelve lions, and a different lion spewed water each hour of the day and night.

FIGURE 6-34

Aerial view of the Alhambra complex. The large square structure was added much later and destroyed part of the original complex. The exterior of the Alhambra is modest and typical of some early fortitifications.

©Manuel Hurtado/Shutterstock RF

The delicacy of the slender upright posts supporting Arabic arches is supplemented by the details of the muqarna—layers of stalagtite-like decorative tiles (Figure 6-36). The reflecting light illuminates the spaces above the head of the visitor. One of the authors, standing in the court, felt the sublimity of the colors and the lighting in the open spaces but also evident beneath the overhang leading to the outer rooms. His sense of participation yielded a revelation of the spiritual connection to the beautiful.

One of the unexpected delights of visiting the Alhambra is seeing how the architects took advantage of the very intense spring and summer sunshine in Grenada. The light bathes every surface, and because almost every surface is decorated with tile or with carvings, one

FIGURE 6-35

The Court of the Lions, the Alhambra. One of the largest open courts in the Alhambra, the space was for large receptions. The fountain was fed through a hydraulic system, with the lions spewing the fountain's water. Today all twelve lions spew water, but originally each lion took a turn each hour.

©Shaun Egan/Getty Images RF

sees every design with clarity. The incised carvings on the capitals of each pillar hold a stylized phrase, such as the Nasrid motto, but the carvings yield to the light in surprising ways, changing and enriching the vista through the hours of the day. Today the Alhambra is lighted electrically, but when it was built we must imagine a rich firelight designed to warm the king and his harem. Moreover, the problem of intense summer heat is solved by the open spaces and fenestration (Figure 6-37) angled to the advantage of the prevailing breezes on the high ground.

After many generations of struggle, the Christian Spaniards drove the Moors out of Spain in 1492. Almost immediately, the Alhambra was desecrated and Charles V destroyed part of it to build a large castle with a circular interior space. People destroyed many of the things the Moors left behind, and in time the complex was abandoned to squatters. In the early 1800s English travelers—during the Romantic period—rediscovered the Alhambra and reconstruction and restoration began in earnest. What we see today is the result of more than 200 hundred years of careful uncovering and reclaiming the beauty of the original. Today it is one of the most visited places in Europe.

FIGURE 6-36

Detail of decorations in the columnar supports in the Alhambra. The script is the motto of the Nasrid dynasty: "There is no victor but Allah." The motto of the Nasrid dynasty is repeated hundreds of times carved in stone. But recent examination of decorations in the lower half of the walls has revealed that some of the script is poetry, suggesting that inscriptions high on the ceiling—toward heaven—are drawn from the Qu'ran, while those below are humane.

©Paolo Gallo/Shutterstock RF

FIGURE 6-37

The Queen's Window, the Alhambra. One of the most outstanding vistas in the Alhambra, this window is sumptuous in its beauty in part because of the way the Grenadian light seems to wash every surface. The arch high above both openings is constructed of repeated muqarnas layered one receding row upon another. The intensely colored tile decorations on the lower half of the walls are typical of the Islamic effort to use natural forms for enriching the surfaces of almost every room.

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PERCEPTION KEY The Alhambra

1. Comment on the relation of the setting of the Alhambra to the earth below and the sky above. If it is described as earth-resting on the outside, how might one describe it on the inside?

2. The Alhambra was a fortress, a palace, and a residence. What does your observation about the form of the structure—as far as you can observe it—tell you about its function? How significant is the question of form fitting function to helping you respond to the building?

3. The Islamic architects and builders lavished attention on detail throughout the Alhambra. What does such attention to luxury and beauty reveal about the people who ruled and lived in the Alhambra? What social values can you divine from what you have seen of the building?

4. Modern architects have resisted decorating their buildings. In the early decades of the twentieth century, decoration was almost flamboyant, as in the Art-Deco Chrysler Building. The Greeks decorated their buildings, as did the Egyptians. What values may

be revealed about a society that favors heavily decorated buildings?

5. Compare your response to The Taj Mahal to your response to the Alhambra. Which of these buildings would you most like to visit? Which seems the most exotic in architectural terms? Which is more spiritual in its expression? Which is more worldly? What do you base your judgment on?

Urban Planning

Nowhere has the use of space become more critical in our time than in the city. In conclusion, therefore, the issues we have been discussing about space and architecture take on special relevance with respect to city planning.

The conglomerate architecture visible in Figure 6-38, surrounding a large church on Park Avenue, New York, makes us aware that the setting of many interesting

FIGURE 6-38

St. Bartholomew's Church on Park Avenue, New York City. 1902. Once a dominant building, it now seems dwarfed by nearby office buildings. Bertram Goodhue was the architect, with the portico done by McKim, Meade, and White.

©Lee A. Jacobus

buildings so completely overwhelms them that we hardly know how to respond. An urban planner might decide to unify styles of buildings or to separate buildings so as to permit us to participate with them more individually. The scene suggests that there has been little or no

planning. Of course, some people might argue that such an accidental conglomeration is part of the charm of urban centers. One might feel, for example, that part of the pleasure of looking at a church is responding to its contrast with its surroundings. For some people, a special energy is achieved in such a grouping. A consensus is unlikely. Other people are likely to find the union of old and new styles—without first arranging some kind of happy marriage—a travesty. The dome of a church capped by a skyscraper! The church completely subdued by business! What do you think? These are the kinds of problems, along with political and social complications, that city planners must address.

Consider the view along a canal in Amsterdam (Figure 6-39). The regularity of the buildings implies a form of planning that limits the height and size of each structure.The scale of the city is measured in terms of an individual person—the city is a friendly place, small enough to be comprehended, large enough to provide all the services of a civilized center. In the streets of New York, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, one feels almost swallowed by the looming towers on all sides. In Amsterdam, with its bicycles and picturesque canals, one feels a sense of intimacy and welcoming. Because of the canals, the spaces between rows of buildings are open. Light streams in, even on overcast days.

Figure 6-40 shows the early development of Greenwich Village, New York City. Simplicity, economy, and symmetry determined the shape of buildings that were originally held to four- or five-story walk-ups. The buildings were frequently mixed use, with businesses on the first floor. Obviously the fire escapes, which dominate such buildings, were an afterthought.

FIGURE 6-39

Amsterdam street scene. Some of these buildings date back to the eighteenth century. Five stories seem to be the limit in this neighborhood. These are residential and businesses along the canal.

©Lee A. Jacobus

FIGURE 6-40

A typical facade on an anonymous building in Greenwich Village, New York City. The design is rudimentary and the buildings rarely more than four stories high. This is an earth-centered, humble structure.

©Lee A. Jacobus

PERCEPTION KEY Urban Views

1. Would you prefer to live in a humble building in Greenwich Village or in one of the buildings on a canal in Amsterdam?

2. Suppose St. Bartholomew's Church was no longer being used for religious purposes. As a city planner, would you preserve or destroy it?

3. Do you find the scene around the church visually attractive? Compare this scene with the main avenue of Dubai (Figure 6-41), a city audaciously built on the Persian Gulf in a few recent decades. Dubai's growth was planned and controlled; New York's growth was largely unplanned and little controlled. Would you prefer, other things being more or less equal, to live in a city with architecture like New York or architecture like Dubai?

Suppose spacious parking lots were located around the fringes of the city, rapid public transportation were readily available from those lots into the city, and in the city only public and emergency transportation

—most of it underground—were permitted. In place of poisonous fumes, screeching noises, and jammed streets, there could be fresh air, fountains, flowers, sculpture, music, wide-open spaces to walk and talk in and enjoy, benches, and open theaters. Without the danger of being run over, all the diversified characters of a city—theaters, opera, concert halls, museums, shops, offices, restaurants, parks, squares—could take on some spatial unity. Furthermore, we could get to those various places without nervous prostration and the risk of life and limb.

One of the threats to cities around the world is the rising level of the oceans, a result of climate change. The Inuit people living near the North Pole are already

FIGURE 6-41

Main road, Dubai. This nation has been building high-rises and other structures in a pristine environment, making urban planning an absolute necessity.

©Simeone Huber/Getty Images

experiencing the subsidence of their old settlements near the edge of ice that has been secure for ages. People are leaving to move to more southerly areas to avoid calamity. The threats to island nations in the South Pacific have people worried about their future. The disappearance of island nations such as Micronesia—more than 600 islands spanning a million square miles of the Pacific—is already happening. The Seasteading project (Figure 6-42) hopes to provide floating islands for parts of French Polynesia, which is said to be threatened with destruction in less than half a century.

CONCEPTION KEY City Planning

1. Do you think the city ought to be saved? Why not just spread out, without the centralized functions of a city? What advantages does the city alone have? What still gives glamour to such cities as Florence, Venice, Rome, Paris, Vienna, and London?

2. Suppose you are a city planner for New York City, and assume that funds are available to implement your plans. What would you propose? How would you preserve or develop local neighborhoods? Would you start over or build on what exists?

3. Would you allow factories within the city limits? How would you handle transportation to and within the city? For instance, would you allow expressways to slice through the city, as in Detroit and Los Angeles? If you banned private cars from the city, what would you do with the streets? What transportation system would you favor?

4. If floating islands represent a solution to the rising of the oceans, what must they provide in terms of culture to make them livable? Cities are not just a matter of buildings. How can a floating island replicate the culture that it would save?

5. If floating islands are required to save a culture as different and widespread as Micronesia or French Polynesia, who should pay for building the islands? Should the nations who most contributed to the change in climate pay? Should they be responsible for designing and constructing the islands?

FIGURE 6-42

Seastead floating cities. A non-profit institute is planning floating cities for French Polynesia. The

illustration shows a plan for bio-growing bubbles to supply food in the ocean.

Courtesy of the Seasteading Institute

Summary

Architecture is the creative conservation of centralized space—the power of the positioned interrelationships of things. The spatial centers of nature organize things around them, and architecture enhances these centers. Architects carve apart an inner space from an outer space in such a way that both spaces become more fully perceptible, and especially the inner space can be used for practical purposes. A work of architecture is a configurational center, a place of special value, a place to dwell. Architects must account for four basic and closely interrelated necessities: technical requirements, function, spatial relationships, and content. To succeed, their forms must adjust to these necessities. Because of the public character of architecture, moreover, the common or shared values of contemporary society usually are in a direct way a part of architects' subject matter. Architecture can be classified into four main types. Earth-rooted architecture brings out with special force the earth and its symbolisms. Such architecture appears organically related to the site, its materials, and gravity. Sky-oriented architecture brings out with special force the sky and its symbolisms. Such architecture discloses a world by drawing our attention to the sky bounded by a horizon. It accomplishes this positively by means of making a building high and centered within the sky, defying gravity, and tightly integrating the light of outer and inner space. Negatively, this kind of architecture de-emphasizes the features that accent the earth. Earth-resting architecture accents neither earth nor sky but rests on the earth, using the earth as a platform with the sky as backdrop. Earth-dominating

architecture rules over the earth. There is a

sense of aggression, and such buildings seem to say that humanity is the measure of all things. In recent years, more and more combinations of these four types have been built.

If we have been near the truth, architects are the shepherds of space. And if we are sensitively aware of their buildings and their relationships, we help, in our humble way, to preserve their work. Architects can make space a welcoming place. Such places, like a home, give us a center from which we can orient ourselves to the other places around us. And then in a way we can feel at home anywhere.

*This meaning is suggested by the Greek *architectón*.

*Chartres, like most Gothic churches, is shaped roughly like a recumbent Latin cross: The front—with its large circular window shaped like a rose and the three vertical windows, or lancets, beneath—faces west. The apse, or eastern end, of the building contains the high altar. The nave is the central and largest aisle leading from the central portal to the high altar. But before the altar is reached, the transept crosses the nave. Both the northern and southern facades of the transept of Chartres contain, like the western facade, glorious rose windows. (Drawing after R. Sturgis)

[1]Source: *The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, 1960, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Horizon Press, New York, p. 16ff.

[2]Source: Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, trans. Philip

Mairet (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 188.

[3]Gio Ponte, *In Praise of Architecture*. New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, 1960.

[4]Source: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), p. 32ff.