4.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Employ a vocabulary of art specific terms and critical approaches to conduct a formal analysis of works of art.
- Identify different types of art based on the degree of representation or non-representation a work displays.
- Distinguish between variations of representational qualities within a work of art.
- Identify characteristics that relate an individual or group of works to a cultural style, stylistic movement or period, or an individual artist’s style.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Developing the ability to examine and understand works of art makes sense for many good reasons. For one, art is powerful. In subtle but real ways, we are influenced by the visual culture that surrounds us.

In Chapter Two: The Structure of Art—Form and Design, we identified, defined, and discussed the elements and principles of design. Now, we will focus on the analysis of art. Formal or critical analysis is an examination of the elements and principles of design present in an artwork and the process of deriving meaning from how those elements and principles are used by visual artists to communicate a concept, idea, or emotion.

How and what is communicated in a work of art is linked to the type or category in which it falls: representational or non-representational. Within the broad category of representation, that is, a visual reference to the experiential world, we can further characterize the work of art using terms such as naturalistic, idealized, or abstract. Art that does not attempt to present an aspect of the recognizable world is non-objective or non-representational. In such work meaning is communicated through shapes, colors, and textures.
Style can refer to the general appearance of a work or a group of works that were created in accordance with a specific set of principles about form or appearance. Style can refer to the art as a whole that was made during a particular era and within a certain culture. More specifically, we can consider whether the artwork belongs to a stylistic movement such as the Italian Renaissance, Realism, or Abstract Expressionism. Style can also refer to how elements and principles of design are employed by an individual artist: the visual characteristics of that artist’s work.

4.3 FORMAL OR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While restricting our attention only to a description of the formal elements of an artwork may at first seem limited or even tedious, a careful and methodical examination of the physical components of an artwork is an important first step in “decoding” its meaning. It is useful, therefore, to begin at the beginning. There are four aspects of a formal analysis: description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. In addition to defining these terms, we will look at examples.

4.3.1 Description

What can we notice at first glance about a work of art? Is it two-dimensional or three-dimensional? What is the medium? What kinds of actions were required in its production? How big is the work? What are the elements of design used within it?

Starting with line: is it soft or hard, jagged or straight, expressive or mechanical? How is line being used to describe space?

Considering shape: are the shapes large or small, hard-edged or soft? What is the relationship between shapes? Do they compete with one another for prominence? What shapes are in front? Which ones fade into the background?

Indicating mass and volume: if two-dimensional, what means if any are used to give the illusion that the presented forms have weight and occupy space? If three-dimensional, what space is occupied or filled by the work? What is the mass of the work?

Organizing space: does the artist use perspective? If so, what kind? If the work uses linear perspective, where are the horizon line and vanishing point(s) located?

On texture: how is texture being used? Is it actual or implied texture?

In terms of color: what kinds of colors are used? Is there a color scheme? Is the image overall light, medium, or dark?

4.3.2 Analysis

Once the elements of the artwork have been identified, next come questions of how these elements are related. How are the elements arranged? In other words, how have principles of design been employed?
What elements in the work were used to create unity and provide variety? How have the elements been used to do so?

What is the scale of the work? Is it larger or smaller than what it represents (if it does depict someone or something)? Are the elements within the work in proportion to one another?

Is the work symmetrically or asymmetrically balanced?

What is used within the artwork to create emphasis? Where are the areas of emphasis? How has movement been conveyed in the work, for example, through line or placement of figures?

Are there any elements within the work that create rhythm? Are any shapes or colors repeated?

4.3.3 Interpretation

Interpretation comes as much from the individual viewer as it does from the artwork. It derives from the intersection of what an object symbolizes to the artist and what it means to the viewer. It also often records how the meaning of objects has been changed by time and culture. Interpretation, then, is a process of unfolding. A work that may seem to mean one thing on first inspection may come to mean something more when studied further. Just as when re-reading a favorite book or re-watching a favorite movie, we often notice things not seen on the first viewing; interpretations of art objects can also reveal themselves slowly. Claims about meaning can be made but are better when they are backed up with supporting evidence. Interpretations can also change and some interpretations are better than others.

4.3.4 Evaluation

All this work of description, analysis, and interpretation, is done with one goal in mind: to make an evaluation about a work of art. Just as interpretations vary, so do evaluations. Your evaluation includes what you have discovered about the work during your examination as well as what you have learned, about the work, yourself, and others in the process. Your reaction to the artwork is an important component of your evaluation: what do you feel when you look at it? And, do you like the work? How and why do you find it visually pleasing, in some way disturbing, emotionally engaging?

Evaluating and judging contemporary works of art is more difficult than works that are hundreds or thousands of years old because the verdict of history has not yet been passed on them. Museums are full of paintings by contemporary artists who were considered the next Michelangelo but who have since faded from the cultural forefront.

The best art of a culture and period is that work which exemplifies the thought of the age from which it derives. What we think about our own culture is probably not what will be thought of it a century from now. The art that we believe best embodies our time may or may not last. As time moves on, our evaluations and judgments of our own time may not prove to be the most accurate ones. We live in a world full of art, and it is almost impossible to avoid making evaluations—possibly mistaken—about its value. Nonetheless, informed evaluations are still possible and useful even in the short term.
4.3.5 Examples of Formal Analysis

*Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth* by J. M. W. Turner

*Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth* by Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851, England) is a chaotic, atmospheric oil on canvas painting. (Figure 4.1) First, on the level of description, the dark structure of the foundering steamboat is hinted at in the center of the work, while heavy smoke from the vessel, pitching waves, and swirling snow surround it. The brown and gray curving lines are created with long strokes of heavily applied paint that expand to the edges of the composition. Second, on the level of analysis, we note that the paint application, heavy, with long strokes, adds dramatic movement to the image. We see that the design principle of scale and proportion is being used in the small size of the steamboat in relation to the overall canvas. Now
let us interpret these elements and their relation: The artist has emphasized the maelstrom of sea, snow, and wind. A glimpse of blue sky through the smoke and snow above the vessel is the only indication of space beyond this gripping scene of danger, and provides the only place for the viewer’s eyes to rest from the tumult. This scene is of humanity’s struggle for survival against powerful forces of nature. And finally, we are ready to evaluate this work. Is it powerfully effective in reminding us of the transitory nature of our own limited existence, a memento morii, perhaps? Or is it a wise caution of the limits of our human power to control our destiny? Does the work have sufficient power and value to be accepted by us as significant? The verdict of history tells us it is. J.M.W. Turner is considered a significant artist of his time, and this work is one that is thought to support that verdict. In the end, however, each of us can accept or reject this historical verdict for our own reasons. We may fear the sea. We may reject the use of technology as valiantly heroic. We may see the British colonial period as one of oppression and tyranny and this work as an illustration of the hubris of that time. Whatever we conclude, this work of art stands as a catalyst for this important dialogue.

Another example of formal analysis. Consider *Lady at the Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt.

*Lady at the Tea Table* by Mary Cassatt

![Figure 4.2 | Lady at the Tea Table](image)

- **Figure 4.2 | Lady at the Tea Table**
  - Artist: Mary Cassatt
  - Source: Met Museum
  - License: OASC
Mary Cassatt (1844-1925, USA, lived France) is best known for her paintings, drawings, and prints of mothers and children. In those works, she focused on the bond between them as well as the strength and dignity of women within the predominantly domestic and maternal roles they played in the nineteenth century.

*Lady at the Tea Table* is a depiction of a woman in a later period of her life, and captures the sense of calm power a matriarch held within the home. (Figure 4.2) First, a description of the elements being used in this work: The white of the wall behind the woman and the tablecloth before her provide a strong contrast to the black of her clothing and the blue of the tea set. The gold frame of the artwork on the wall, the gold rings on her fingers, and the gold bands on the china link those three main elements of the painting. Analysis shows the organizing principle of variety is employed in the rectangles behind the woman’s head and the multiple circles and arcs of the individual pieces of the tea set. The composition is a stable triangle formed by the woman’s head and body, and extending to the pieces of china that span the foreground from one edge of the composition to the other. Let us interpret these observations. There is little evidence of movement in the work other than the suggestion that the woman’s hand, resting on the handle of the teapot, may soon move. Her gaze, directed away from the viewer and out of the picture frame, implies she is in the midst of pouring tea, but her stillness suggests she is lost in thought. How to evaluate this work? The artist expresses a restrained but powerful strength of character in her treatment of this subject. Is the lack of obvious movement in the work a comment on the emergence of women’s roles in society, a hope or a demand for change? Or is it a monument to the quiet dignity of the domestic life of Victorian era Paris? The gold of the frame, the rings, and the china dishes appear to unify three disparate objects into one statement of value. Do they symbolize art, fidelity, and service? Is this a comment on the restrictions of French domestic society, or a claim to its strength? One indication of the quality of a work of art is its power to evoke multiple interpretations. This open and poetic richness is one reason why the work of Mary Cassatt is considered to be important. The above examples are only one of many ways in which we can interpret and evaluate works of art. We will examine a few more approaches to analysis and critique. The point of this exercise is to equip the interested student with tools to become more fully aware of the dynamics and content of works of art, not only in museums and textbooks, but in the world of images that continually surrounds us today.

### 4.4 TYPES OF ART

#### 4.4.1 Representation and Abstraction

The most basic point of style, perhaps, is type or category, whether a work is *representational* or *abstract*. In the broadest terms, if the work has visual reference to the phenomenal world, we consider it to be representational. That definition suffers from over generality, though, since any physical or visual expression that has some reference to the physical world includes some aspect that we see as reflecting the physical world. And, to some extent, all works are also
abstract, in that they might remind us of what we see in the phenomenal world by only reflecting some physical feature(s) rather than detailing the object, place, or person itself. Having said that, we can proceed to see art in terms of its relative representation or relative abstraction of the original form.

It may help to start here by examining a number of works; each is based on the artist’s observations of cows but is distinctive in what the artist elected to convey in their artwork about cows on the continuum from representation to abstraction. The first of these works is by Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899, France), who depicted a variety of animals in great detail with regard to their anatomy and physiognomy, and took great care to render her illustrations with fidelity to the appearance to the actual animals she had observed. (Figure 4.3) Artistically gifted and thoroughly trained, she went on to deepen her own knowledge and to hone her skills by visiting farms, veterinarian dissections, and slaughterhouses in order to develop extensive knowledge of her preferred subject matter, with which she created imagery of animals and other features of rural farm life. Her cows would be correctly described as very naturalistic in appearance—their forms are quite similar in appearance to actual cows.

In comparison, if we examine the renditions by folk artist Edward Hicks (1780-1849, USA), we see cows that are much less rigorous in their resemblance, most likely the result of his not having had exacting training and practice in precise replication. (Figure 4.4) A Quaker minister,
Hicks treated his painting at first as a supplemental avocation, then as his primary means of supporting his family. He used it to express themes of spiritual and historical community events that interested him, generally in simplified landscape settings that emphasized narrative and symbolic messages rather than exact proportions and details.

In some works, though, the difference in correspondence to natural appearance can be due to the artist’s very different purpose for the work. *The Yellow Cow* by Franz Marc (1880-1916, Germany) clearly does not slavishly reproduce natural appearances but instead seeks to convey through abstraction a sense of light-hearted lyrical expression for the animal. (Figure 4.5) To achieve this end, Marc took great liberty in creating an image that went far beyond what he saw, to make an expression that carries messages of what he thought and felt about his subject. Marc created a great many images of animals in nature that were metaphorical reflections of his views of mankind and the human spirit. Such a movement towards abstraction often derives from the artist’s wish to express an emotional or intellectual commentary on the subject, or to use the subject as a starting place to diverge from visual appearances of the purely
Another artist bearing investigation in this regard is Theo van Doesburg (1883-1931, Netherlands), who used his own philosophical probing to frame a systematic path from naturalism in his renditions of the cow to an abstraction that is visually quite far removed from what most of us see in the phenomenal world. (Figure 4.6) Beginning with a series of exploratory sketches, he sought to reduce the linear forces of a cow’s form to the three he thought were essential components of the physical and metaphysical world, that is, vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, while reducing the three dimensions of the cow’s form to the painting’s two-dimensional surface. At the same time, he tried to simplify the forms and volumes, progressively creating a strongly abstracted picture that few of us would likely recognize as of a cow if we were not led through the process by which he developed the image. Indeed, we have evidence of the process and its result in Composition VIII (The Cow), a fully developed instruction that provides us with great insight into Van Doesburg’s train of thought and work, as well as his process of abstraction. (Figure 4.7)

Representation, then, shows us some broad vision of what we see in the original, be it a person, landscape, interior, event, or such, with some level of detail. To one degree or another, all art is abstract in order to create a statement of some other ideas.
abstract in that it is not the original form but instead the artist’s response to the original form rendered in artistic terms—although, clearly, not all of it is so strongly abstracted that we lose the plainer references to the physical world.

### 4.4.2 Idealization

Sometimes artists create an **idealized** version of a natural form rather than truly reflecting its actual appearance. This was the norm, for example, in depictions of royal figures in ancient Egypt. There was a **canon**, or set of principles and norms, for the representation of royals that was very specific about just how they must look, including norms for the proportions of the different parts of the body to one another, their stance, and other details. The canon also set standards for their garments, headgear, the false beard, the arm and fist positions, and other details. The canon was remarkably conservative and unchanging, altering very little over the many centuries that ancient Egypt existed.

The figures of the Pharaoh Menkaure (r. c. 2530-c. 2510 BCE) and his Queen Khamerernebty are shown as being well proportioned, physically fit, and in young adulthood. (Figure 4.8) Because the king was regularly assessed with regard to his favor with the gods and fitness to rule, he was required to be in top physical condition—or so he must appear in any official imagery. This necessity resulted in the idealization of the natural physical form. So, while it is a representational image of the royal body, the need to depict him as a fit and worthy ruler meant that he was generally shown as being in the prime of life, with a trim and perfectly proportioned physique, and with no apparent hint of weakness or vulnerability. By contrast, the image of an Egyptian state official, Ka-Aper, who was not of royal rank, was created with a different idea. (Statue of Ka’aper: [http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=27334](http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=27334)) As a commoner, he is shown with a very different physique—rather pudgy and more relaxed, certainly not governed by the rules for the royal imagery. It is more naturalistic, not idealized like the royal works.

To study idealization further, we will explore the evolution of nude male sculptural forms in ancient Greece. We know Greek sculptors began with ideas they gleaned from the Egyptian forms...
they knew but then altered them in some very significant ways that reflected their own distinctive culture. They presented the forms in the nude (only sculptures of males were nude at first, female sculpture remained clothed until the fourth century BCE) and, over time, they increasingly sought to capture more accurate physical details and the principles of movement in the body, rather than the static sense of permanence the Egyptians had favored.

From early on, Greek artists had the opportunity to observe the Olympic contests, athletic competitions that were held every four years in honor of Zeus, the ruler of their gods. The Olympics featured nude male athletes in a great many physical activities and diverse exercises, games, and sports. Over time, Greek artists developed a keen understanding of human physiognomy, how various movements and feats were achieved, and how bones, muscles, and tendons coordinated and functioned. They increasingly rendered the human form with great anatomical accuracy. When we look at the sculptures in Figure 4.9, we can see the evolution of depiction from the two figures dating to the Archaic period (800-480 BCE), when kinship with Egyptian work is apparent, to the Early Classical (c. 480-450 BCE), and then the High Classical period (c. 450-400 BCE), considered to be the epitome of naturalism in artistic depiction of the male physique.
The turning point in this evolution—the moment when the achievement of naturalism was pronounced—was with the creation of the *Kritios Boy*, c. 480 BCE. (Figure 4.9c) At that point, the beginning of the Classical period in Greece, sculptors captured the potential for naturalistic movement and the *contrapposto* or weight shift of the knees and hips that occurs when standing with one leg at ease or walking. This soon gave way, however, to a canon of art for the refined form. So, again, true naturalism gave way to a notion of the “perfect” or idealized form.

### 4.4.3 Non-Representational or Non-Objective

One further note is needed in consideration of the relationship of type to response to the phenomenal world. Recurrent strains of abstraction appear throughout the history of art, when artists elected to streamline, suppress, or de-emphasize reference to the phenomenal world. In the twentieth century, though, this approach took on different character in some instances, with a stated rejection of the art as related to the natural world and concerned instead with the art itself, to the processes by which it was made, and with the product as referring to these processes and artistic qualities rather than to some outside phenomenon: the observed world.

Still, the art is never completely independent of some reference: the viewer might respond to the color, painterly effect, line quality, or some other aspect that is not necessarily associated with recognition of a particular physical object or “thing” but that relates to the qualities of the art in some way, that is, to some recognition of reference—although this recognition may be ephemeral and may be nameless. The response might be quite visceral or intellectual, nonetheless. The development of this idea was perhaps an inevitable phase of the abstraction and explorations of the formal means that had been conducted by various movements that evolved in nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Stories abound about the era in art and the push from abstraction to non-representation, with several artists claiming to have led the breakthrough. The first artist to use the term *non-objective art*, however, seems to have been Aleksandr Rodchenko (1890-1956, Russia), (*Spatial Construction* no. 12, Aleksandr Rodchenko: [http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/spatial_construct_jpg.html](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/spatial_construct_jpg.html); *Assembling for a Demonstration*,
Aleksandr Rodchenko: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/45090?locale=en and its most active early theorist and writer was probably Vasily Kandinsky (1866-1944, Russia, lived Germany and France). (Figures 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12)

The artistic climate fostered widespread experimentation, and the synergistic atmosphere was a seedbed for new ideas and modes of working. Rodchenko sought to affirm the independence of artistic process and the “constructive” approach to creating artworks that were self-referential, and he explored the possibilities in painting, drawing, photography, sculpture and graphic arts. Kandinsky, also Russian but working in Germany, wrote an important treatise entitled Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1912) that was widely popular and soon translated from the original German into many languages. He explored color theory in relationship to music, logic, human emotion, and the spiritual underpinnings of the abstractions that for centuries had been viewed and absorbed through religious icons and popular folk prints in his native Russia.

4.5 STYLES OF ART

In addition to looking at where along the spectrum from representation to non-representation a work of art may fall, we can examine the style of the work. Style can encompass the principles about form and appearance shared within a certain culture or era. Style can refer to a movement or group of artists and their work, where the commonalities can range from employing like elements and principles of design, to using certain materials or processes, to following a set of religious, political, or ideological beliefs. Style also indicates the visual characteristics of an individual artist’s work. We conduct a stylistic analysis by examining the artistic elements and considering how they have used, and how they relate to other works by that artist, group of artists, or in a certain time frame, culture, or region.
In general, artistic styles tend to fall into three broad categories: Period, Regional, and Formal styles. Period styles are groups of art in which the works derive their characteristic structure from the culture prevalent during a particular time period. A good example of a period style would be Gothic Art or Ming dynasty Art. Regional styles are groups of art in which the works derive their structure from the culture prevalent in a particular place. A good example of a regional style would be Dutch Art or Latin American Art. Formal styles are groups of art in which the works derive their structure from principles that are not characteristic of either one place or one time. A good example of a Formal style would be Surrealism, Impressionism, or Modernism. Formal styles tend to be the “isms.”

From the earliest times, we can see that some artists sought to make their depictions conform closely to what they saw in the world around them, but that for various reasons they often chose to emphasize certain aspects at the expense of great naturalism. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the degree of naturalism that you see in the artwork is necessarily and primarily related to the skill level of the artist.

Artistic and stylistic change is generally a matter of evolution, and often rather reactionary. The artistic choices about style (and other matters) made at any particular point are influenced by what other works of art look like at that moment. So the artist will likely try to create an expression that goes further in one direction, or changes directions in some way. Thus, art might become more naturalistic, as we have seen, or it might become less so, because the artist thinks the art might express the idea better by using a slightly different style or a radically different idea. The divergence is related to current “thinking” within the culture and other more specific circumstances.

4.5.1 Cultural Style

There are artistic choices with regard to style in every work. While these choices are generally made at the discretion of the individual artist today, for much of history style has been a reflection of the broader cultural currents that influence so much of life in any time and place. These cultural factors have often led to the general approaches to representation that art historians call “conventions of representation.” To acquaint ourselves with these conventions and how they pertain to a cultural style, we will look at a few examples.

4.5.1.1 Ancient Near East

These conventions are evident to us when we examine a broad selection of works from those created in the ancient Near Eastern cultures during several centuries. Look at the way figures are depicted in a detail from the Standard of Ur (c. 2600-2400 BCE) from ancient Mesopotamia, today Iraq, a wooden box with scenes of war and peace made from inlaid pieces of iridescent shell, red limestone, and blue lapus lazuli. (Figure 4.13) We see the figures have sufficient naturalism to allow us to easily recognize the human body. But we also see that they include a range of naturalistic detail.

The figures appear static, even when they are shown to be moving through space. They are shown in a composite view, that is, with portions of the body shown in profile and others in frontal view.
so the artist can provide details that would not be visible in a strict profile. They turn the body in space so that the viewer sees the hips and shoulders, along with a twisted torso, turned slightly towards the viewer. For warriors and leaders, this is a heroic stance, showing power and command. The composite view is completed by giving a frontal view of the eye on the profile of the face and head shown.

This approach to figural forms continues in additional ancient Near Eastern works. The Stele of Music (c. 2120 BCE), depicting Gudea with attendants in one register and musicians below, shows the king ceremonially preparing to lay out a temple in the city of Girsu while accompanied by music and chanting. (Figure 4.14) In the relief of Sargon II, an Assyrian king who ruled 722-705 BCE, created approximately 1,400 years later, we see the use of these devices again, along with more variations of costume and headgear. (Figure 4.15)

These instances drawn from across many centuries but from the same geographical region that is today Iraq, show the persistence of a set of conventions of representation shared by the related cultural groups. We can also observe here that, when there is more emphasis on naturalism of the
human body, it is at the service of conveying a sense of power, usually to give more detail to musculature—especially in the chest and shoulders. This slight abstraction or deviation from absolute naturalism is also used to create a sense of greater physical stature and presence, a manipulation of actual sizes known as **hierarchical proportion**, meant to show the figures’ relative importance. These conventions of representation serve to convey dignity and significance within the broad cultural style shared by these associated groups.

As noted, **abstraction** is not a modern method of art, but has been used purposefully in many eras. Abstraction, simplification of naturalistic forms, appears in the conventions of representation in the ancient Near East; unlike most later instances of abstraction, however, these conventions did not follow upon and show a reactionary counter-movement to a naturalistic approach, nor were they a stage that further amplified certain features for purposes of expression or emotional exaggeration.

### 4.5.1.2 Ancient Greece and Rome

We earlier discussed the progression of cultural style in ancient Greece from the Archaic period to the High Classical period. The latter was also the era when the Parthenon temple and the other structures on the Acropolis in Athens were rebuilt or renovated as a statement of the power of that city-state. (Figure 4.16) The work of this era of artistic pinnacle is called **classical**.

By extension, the ancient Roman work that was created to emulate the Greek Classical style is sometimes defined, as well, as classical art. Careful distinctions, though, need to be made amongst the strictly classical, the imitative, and the revival of classical form in later eras. Examining these styles further, let us first look at what happened after the Greek High Classical era. Art in Greece,
in what are called the Late Classical (400-323 BCE) and Hellenistic (323-31 BCE) periods, shows changes that move away from the High Classical norms in becoming variously more dynamic, more expressive, more emotional, more dramatic. (Figures 4.17 and 4.18) That is, they are exaggerated in some way from the calm composure of the Classical style that had expressed the cultural value of complete balance achieved by “a sound mind in a sound body,” a rather sober and self-contained ideal.

In later Greek culture, we can see changes in an expansive political spirit, the influx of foreign cultural forces, the development of drama in theater, increasing materialism, and other factors that change the artistic and aesthetic spirit, consequently requiring different modes of artistic expression. The Romans, although deeply admiring the classical Greek art, held different cultural ideas and ideals, so Roman art, unless directly copying the Greek, would express their different views of life and the world. These included especially Roman worldliness, their boundless interest in expansion (which brought in a great variety of additional influences), their great ingenuity and inventiveness in such areas as engineering and architecture, and their stress on individualism.

The Roman Republican period (509-27 BCE) overlaps the Greek late Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods. During the Republican period, Romans favored an anti-idealized approach to portrayal of people that went beyond simple naturalism to a very frank and unvarnished study of individuals, with a measure of veneration for the more mature citizens as models of an accomplished life. (Figure 4.19) The Romans honored their ancestors and kept their venerable images as portrait heads, which they carried in funeral processions and kept in their homes; they valued the accomplishments of old age, so their views on aging and the aged were often expressed through veristic or truthful renditions of their likenesses.
However, the use of these unidealized depictions varied from one phase to another throughout ancient Roman history. It is especially noted that in the Early Imperial era (27 BCE-197 CE), with the rise of Augustus to Emperor, the practice of idealization in portraiture was again favored for the imperial likenesses, often seen clearly as part of the political propaganda used to promote the positive perception of the emperor and the promotion of his political goals and programs. The portrayal of the man Augustus, regardless of his age at the time of the creation of a portrait, was made to be the image of a powerful young man, heroic in stature, fit and fine. (Figure 4.20) Ensuing emperors varied their choices in this regard, some opting for a return to the age prior to the Imperial Age and notions of Republican virtue and the value of age and experience, others using the idealizing and propagandistic approach, to some degree.

In the late Roman Empire (284-476 CE), though, we see suppression and streamlining of natural detail in art that followed and was a reaction to that long period of naturalistic representations of the human figure. Scholars interpret this abstraction as a means of stressing other-than-natural features that are ideological, spiritual, or philosophical in character. For example, in the Portrait of the Four Tetrarchs from c. 300 CE, we see that the idea of the tetrarchs, or four co-ruling emperors, working together to rule the four divisions of the vast Roman Empire is more important than the representation of likeness of any one of these co-rulers as an individual. (Figure 4.21)

Naturalism has given way to uniformity, with nearly identical figures of men in the same costume, crown, armor, and stance, as they embrace one another to show their joint office and efforts in the service of the Roman citizenry. Even though there is considerable detail in their clothing that links their joint rule to Roman traditions of military rulers and leaders, the suppression of distinctive, individual physical characteristics is used to convey the concept of how they will function as one.

A few years later, when the Roman Empire briefly returned to a singular rule under Constantine the Great, the...
new Emperor opted for an even more abstracted and simplified portrait representation. (Figure 4.22) He thus removed himself even further from the tradition of imperial portraits that had each varied in its extent of naturalism and idealization—even though the head emulates some in being clean-shaven, with a fringed cap of hair, and having an air of imperial hauteur. But it is far less personal and less intimate in its address to the viewer, both in large part to its marked suppression of detail, than depictions of earlier rulers. Further, Constantine appears to be focused on the heavens above, towards which his gaze is directed. The portrayal has been read as being more spiritual, linking him to the emerging Christian faith. Thus, the portrait is associated with a societal and cultural turn from worldly to spiritual matters, and that is likely reflected in this change in artistic interpretation.

4.5.1.3 Indian Subcontinent

Strictly speaking, Greece and Rome were the classical civilizations of antiquity in the West, and some would even limit the use of the term “classical” in art to the High Classical period in Greece. The same principles and conventions of representation, however, include numerous works from other times and places. The revival of characteristics associated with the cultural styles associated with ancient Greece and Rome recur repeatedly throughout history in the West, and also appear sometimes in non-Western cultures. Becoming familiar with a few examples will make more apparent the variations of a naturalistic style, whether subtle or quite pronounced, that can be further investigated with regard for the cultural and individual values that are influential at the moment of the work’s creation and use.

In India, naturalism was not usually as restrained as those of the classical ideal we have been exploring. The Emperor Ashoka (r. 268-232 BCE), who reigned over most of the Indian subcontinent, oversaw the construction of 84,000 stupas, dome-shaped shrines, to house Buddhist relics. In this Yakshi, or female nature figure, guarding one of the fours gate at the Great Stupa at Sanchi, the emphasis is on fleshy form, voluptuous and prosperous, indicating a robust healthy physique with connotations of earthly blessing and prosperity. (Figure 4.23)

During Ashoka’s reign and in the succeeding centuries, influenced by increasing contact with Western cultures and artistic styles that came with both friendly trade and aggressive military incursions by Greeks and Romans, many changes occurred in Indian art. A notable example is the Buddhist sculpture of Maitreya from Gandhara (today Pakistan), dating to the third or fourth
century CE. (Figure 4.24) Maitreya, derived from the Sanskrit word for “friend,” is a **bodhisattva**—a person who is able to reach nirvana but compassionately chooses to help others out of their human suffering. Maitreya, a successor to the current Buddha, will appear in the future.

The influence of Greek and Roman art can be seen in the treatment of drapery and the physical form. Although the figure is somewhat fleshier than Western counterparts, retaining the Indian penchant for more full-bodied physique, it is somewhat less substantial and certainly more concealed by the envelopment of abundant cloth than what had earlier been the norm for figural interpretation in India.

### 4.5.1.4 Romanesque and Gothic Eras in Europe

Returning to Europe, Romanesque art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is noteworthy with regard to the idea of expressing a prevalent preoccupation among Christians about the ends of their lives and the end of time. For spiritual purposes, they often made a choice for greater abstraction and distortion, rather than the emphasis on a naturalistic depiction of the human form as seen in ancient Greek and Roman art. Their forms are not only simplified with suppression of naturalistic features in some ways, but are also twisted and turned in space, while their garments have a lot of linear detail that does not correspond well to the physical forms of the bodies they adorn. The effect is to remove their meaning from a focus on worldly phenomena, redirecting it to a sense of spiritual agitation.
Many of the depicted scenes relate to the Christian expectations of the event of the Last Judgment, reflecting warnings to the devout that their lives and deeds now will be assessed at that point in the future. At Autun Cathedral (1120-1132) in France, we see a graphic array of elongated figures in the Last Judgment within the tympanum, the space above the portals, or doors. (Figure 4.25) The scene and surrounding decorative reliefs, created by the sculptor Gislebertus (active c. 1115-c. 1135, France) between 1130 and 1135, are centered on the flattened figure of the judging Christ. He presides over the resurrection of the dead and the ensuing assignment to a heavenly welcome or a grotesque greeting by the denizens of Hell. Despite the lack of naturalism, the messages are clear in reference to human experience and prevalent beliefs of the era.

Following the Romanesque style in Europe was the Gothic era, which spanned the twelfth to fourteenth centuries in Italy and continued into the sixteenth century in northern Europe. The Gothic style included a return to greater naturalism, as focus shifted back to the natural world in many ways. (Figure 4.26) Figural forms began to reflect the observation of physical facts, and a phase of artistic evolution began that would eventually culminate in the intense naturalism of the Renaissance, especially in Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

Along the way, however, conventions of representation in Italy and in northern Europe diverged, producing increasing different cultural styles. For example, the “Court Style” was prevalent in the royal works of the Late Gothic era (late fourteenth to sixteenth centuries), particularly in France, and lingered into the early Renaissance of the late fifteenth century in northern Europe. The approach reflected the prominence of aristocratic tastes and the
exaltation of earthly rulers and the conception of God and the saints (especially the Virgin Mary) as the court in Heaven. (*The Virgin of Paris*, Notre-Dame, Paris: [https://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/Images/arth212images/gothic/notre_dame_madonna_child.jpg](https://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/farberas/arth/Images/arth212images/gothic/notre_dame_madonna_child.jpg))

While there is a clear change from the Romanesque style, the figures are not yet really naturalistic, with an emphasis on elegance and aristocratic attitude dominating the figural imaginings. As seen here, there is often abundant drapery falling in rich and graceful folds, so exaggerated that one cannot discern the space for a full figure beneath. The hips and knees, rather than showing the classical contrapposto positioning that the ancient Greeks developed, are gracefully swayed into an S-curve, connoting sophistication and refinement.

### 4.5.2 Stylistic Periods or Movements

In addition to examining style as a broad expression and embodiment of cultural beliefs and values, we can focus more finely upon stylistic groups and artistic movements as artists and works grouped together due to similarities in subject matter, formal approach, spiritual or political beliefs, or other commonalities. A stylistic movement can be based upon a pointed and conscientious revival of visual and philosophical traits of an earlier style. An artistic movement can also reflect the cyclical and recurrent evolution of style, with phases of moving gradually towards greater naturalism, and then rebounding towards some stylistic aberration that is less reflective of physical nature and instead expresses some other interest of human life and artistic attention.

#### 4.5.2.1 Italian Renaissance

The first artistic era in the modern West that we can speak of as possessing more specific traits and commonalities than a more broadly defined cultural style is the period known as the Renaissance, which is French for “rebirth.” Originating in Italy in the fourteenth century, the Renaissance was a period of conscious and purposeful revival of the ideas and ideals of the classical past. Within a shared cultural interest in humanism, the philosophical belief in the value of humans and their endeavors, artists of the Italian Renaissance sought ways to express themselves as individuals in their art. Through study of ancient art and close observation of the world around them, Renaissance artists as a group—but each characterized by singular traits—realized another pinnacle of naturalism in the human form. Italian artists of the fifteenth century would also invent linear perspective, so that all lines parallel to the viewer’s eye recede to a vanishing point on the horizon line.

A good example of linear perspective is the fresco *The Holy Trinity* by Masaccio (1401-1428, Italy), the first painting in which the technique was systematically employed. (Figure 4.27) The work depicts the crucifixion of Christ, with God the Father behind and above him supporting the cross, and Mary and St. John the Baptist standing to either side. When we extend the orthogonal lines from the ceiling vault above the holy figures, we find they converge at a point on the floor where the images of the patrons kneel, below and outside the vaulted area. This line divides the fresco into two zones: the zone above that, which for Christians symbolized eternal life, and the skeleton beneath the line which symbolizes the waiting grave. The vanishing point—and the attention of the viewer—is on the line between them where the patrons kneel in prayer. It
thus subtly but elegantly uses linear perspective to impart a message. The patrons and the viewer are “on the line between life and death” and have a religious decision to make.

During the preceding Romanesque and Gothic eras, philosophical thought was shifting from a focus on achieving everlasting life through devotion and considering humans and their feats to be weak and insignificant; however, the power of religion and religious beliefs had not diminished. Humanism of the Italian Renaissance both celebrated human intellectual and creative accomplishments—as can be seen in use of linear perspective in The Holy Trinity—and embraced the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that emphasized the humanity of Christ.

As a result, there was a shift away from distinct physical and emotional separation of holy figures within works of art to depictions that emphasized their spiritual presence among the faithful. For example, in the Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints by Raphael (1498-1520, Italy), a hierarchy of Mary as the Queen of Heaven seated high on her throne with a ceremonial canopy and hanging cloth emphasizing her majesty is maintained. (Figure 4.28) The steps before her, however, are open for the viewer to symbolically ascend through devotion, and the serene landscape behind her is clearly on this earth and not a vision of a celestial heaven.

Subjects such as the Madonna and Child, which allowed the artist to accentuate human qualities such as the love, mercy, and tenderness which these holy figures had in common with the worshipper, were favored during the Italian Renaissance. Not only did the choice of subject matter reflect the new value placed on human empathy and agency, the myriad approaches to such subjects indicate the new freedom artists felt to abandon a broad cultural style as seen in earlier eras. Instead, they adopted stylistic traits that embodied a collective desire to “rebirth” the forms and philosophy of art as practiced in Classical Greece and Rome. This resulted in artists accentuating the individual in their art making within the agreed upon stylistic standards and ideals of the period.

As an example, compare Raphael’s Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints to Madonna and Child painted approximately six years later by Titian (c. 1488-1576, Italy). (Figure 4.29) Both artists stress the tender connection between mother and child. Looking closely at the faces of all three women in Raphael’s work, however, we can see their features and the tilt of their heads are nearly identical, suggesting the artist chose to depict them in a similarly idealized manner. The Madonna in Titian’s work, on the other hand, has more individualized facial features. Titian places a greater emphasis on the naturalistic folds and flow of drapery than Raphael does, highlighting
the transparency of cloth across Mary’s lap, for example. Last, Titian brings the detailed landscape behind the figures closer to the picture plane, situating the figures in nature; Raphael focuses upon the grouping of figures in the foreground with a distant view of the land. In this way through their art, we have a front row seat to a changing cultural view about the proper relation of religious figures to the everyday physical world during the Italian Renaissance.

4.5.2.2 Realism

We have already discussed naturalism as an approach to depicting objects that exist in the physical world in representational art. Now let us examine the terms naturalistic and realistic. These terms are often (incorrectly) used interchangeably, but their meanings and implications in art differ. Works that are naturalistic are those in which the appearance corresponds to nature, that is, to how the subject of the work looks in the natural, phenomenal world, such as the cows of Rosa Bonheur. In distinction, those that are correctly called realistic relay information or opinions about the underlying social or philosophical reality of the subject matter: they go beyond the natural appearance to express additional ideas.

Works created with a view to such realism may also be naturalistic in appearance, but they go beyond the naturalistic appearance to include social commentary in the pictorial message. Examples include works such as those by Gustave Courbet (1819-1877, France, Switzerland) that were created to express the realities of the rural poor in mid-nineteenth-century France and that were partly artistic statements of rebellion.
against the prevailing norms of academically acceptable art. The École des Beaux-Arts was the nationally institutionalized body in control of training and exhibition of art in France, and its conservative tendencies went against such frank treatment of mundane subject matter. Rather, they promoted lofty subject matter, refined treatments, and their most highly prized works dealt with topics like history, religion, heroic narratives, and the like. Here, in the Burial at Ornans, Courbet presented not a grand ceremonial event, but an ordinary country funeral. (Figure 4.30) The scene includes a disparate group of common folk standing awkwardly in disarray—even though the grand size was associated with a more elevated subject and treatment.

The academic norms would have dictated that such a ritual event be presented with a greater sense of formality and pomp, emphasizing the coordination of activities in an uplifting and reverential manner. Since Courbet had trained and achieved mastery in the official French system, the painting was shown in the annual Salon, the official venue of the École des Beaux-Arts; nevertheless, it was widely criticized as lacking decorum and having too much realism.

Another of Courbet’s works, The Stone Breakers, also shown at the Salon in 1851, garnered its share of the same sort of criticism, for it presented the hard labor of rural peasants as though it were a heroic activity. (Figure 4.31) Courbet again used realism to make a strong visual statement of the nobility of people and tasks that lay far outside the refined academic definitions of art. By doing so, he condemned not only the Academy but also the societal standards that supported such judgment and ranking of art and human activity. Thus, the art movement known as Realism was begun. Many works created in this vein were condemned and refused for exhibition in the official Salons, resulting in an anti-Academic movement among artists and the quest of many for independence from the state-con-
trolled system for training and exhibition.

Such subject matter and approach to making art appeared in many different places throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Such artwork invariably was associated with other signs of social change and upheaval, frequently reflecting the lives and interests of the peasantry—both rural and urban—and highlighting the oppressive conditions of their lives. In Russia, among other places, the movement included a spirit of probing and of artists expressing the distinctive cultural characteristics and specific social issues of their countrymen. Ilya Repin (1844-1930, Russia), in *Barge Haulers on the Volga*, pre-

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**Figure 4.31 | The Stone Breakers**  
Artist: Gustave Courbet  
Author: The Yorck Project  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

**Figure 4.32 | Barge Haulers on the Volga**  
Artist: Ilya Repin  
Author: User “Thebrid”  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain
presented a realistic view of the arduous labor of men bringing the river barges to shore for unloading; the artist took great care to present each of them as an individual to be respected. (Figure 4.32) He also defined them in terms of age, physique, stature, and ethnicity, conveying the group as a sort of cross-section of Russian peasantry of the day.

In Germany, the influence of Courbet’s Realism, coupled with study of portraits by Old Masters (European painters of renown c. 1200-1800), appears in a study by Wilhelm Leibl (1844-1900, Germany) called *Three Women in the Church*. (Figure 4.33) In this painting, the detail of the individual women is remarkable, delineating as it does their rustic costumes, their strongly individual characters, their large work-worn hands, and their other physical features. Leibl had rendered these peasants with realistic attention to the effects of their hard life at their different ages, while conveying a great sense of respect for their traditions of family and faith. He sought to counter the legacy of glorified German history and myth with unflinching views of the ordinary people he knew.

Stylistic components of and ideas behind Realism were also used by American artists, notably in the early decades of the twentieth century, when the crowded urban centers fostered harsh living conditions for the poor working class citizens. One important group within that stylistic movement, known as the Ashcan School, included painters such George Bellows (1882-1925, USA), whose *Cliff Dwellers* shows the crowding and chaos in a Lower East Side New York City neighborhood on a hot summer day. (Figure 4.34)

These artists were often making commentary on the undesirable effects felt by newly arrived immigrants and the rural poor who had been lured into large metropolitan areas in hopes of better prosperity and lifestyle, especially as many remained on the lower rungs of the industrialized and commerce-oriented society. Again, the overall definition of form may be seen as naturalistic, but his efforts for realism led Bellows to a rather painterly, brushy approach that does not have definitively naturalistic detail throughout.

One further particular point needs to be made about the idea of realism in art. It is a mistaken notion to believe that photographic works are inherently or necessarily more realistic than any other work because they record some actuality. The artist who uses photography has as many opportunities for choice as one who works in any other medium and can make choices that
alter that actuality or its appearance. The photographer selects the subject matter and then can choose viewpoint, lighting, compositional field, a variety of photo processes and materials, and exposure time. The process of development and printing offers further options for manipulating the imagery, and sometimes changes are made after the printing process is complete. There is not necessarily any more “truth” or “realism” in a photo than in any other type of art.

For example, in the works of some photographers such as Edward Steichen (1879-1973, Luxembourg, lived USA) and Lucas Samaras (b. 1936, Greece, lives USA) we see that the artists have manipulated the photographs to alter their appearances. Steichen used layers of gum bichromate to add color and to create a sense of hazy atmosphere for a mysterious nocturnal landscape. (Figure 4.35) Samaras, on the other hand, created a type of photography he called Photo-Transformation by using his fingers and a stylus to move and smear the dyes of a Polaroid print while still wet. (Photo-Transformation, Lucas Samaras: http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/265049) Leaving the protruding hand untouched, Samaras altered the spatial relationships in his photograph by blurring the surrounding imagery, including his own face, which became quite indistinct in the process. The stages of creating photographs
offer innumerable opportunities for altering the imagery from its “natural” appearances, while still often retaining the sense of “authenticity” of the photograph itself.

4.5.2.3 Expression(ism)

As we have seen, choices made to move away from naturalism can reflect both the culture at large and the issues with which artists concern themselves as they seek to express ideas and/or feelings of the moment. Expression has been sought for many purposes related to thought, belief, emotional impetus, and any human concern that might prompt the creation of artistic articulation, in its various forms and media. Often, though, the idea of expressionism in art is more narrowly used to define the idea of foregoing a measure of naturalism in favor of the emotional content, emphasizing how the culture and the artist felt about the subject matter. This may be used in the West or East.

Examples are numerous in the illustrations of narratives, such as the Indian mythological story of the Hindu Goddess Durga, who dramatically slays the Buffalo Demon, using weapons borrowed from the male gods. (Figure 4.36) Such a story lends itself well to a dynamically expressive interpretation in art, as does the sort of devotional idea presented in the German works called andachtsbilder, devotional images used to aid prayer, as seen in Figure 4.37. These works were created on both small and large scale to provoke contemplation of the sufferings of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ as prompted by the stories of the Passion of Christ. Such works were further inspired by the relation of the holy figures’ sufferings to the physical effects of the Black Plague, rampant from Asia to Europe during the fourteenth century.

A more specific movement of Expressionism in Germany arose in the early twentieth century to give artistic form to the emotional and societal reactions to unrest caused by political and cultural upheavals. Reflecting the desire for social reform that was part of Realism as well as the long history of expressiveness in German art, the group was named the New Objectivity (Neue

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*Figure 4.36 | The Great Goddess Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon*

Author: User “DcoetzeeBot”
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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In the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918), these artists presented harsh and piercing glimpses of the effects of the war’s devastation on German society in the 1920s and of the ensuing societal unrest accompanying the emergence of the Nazis and the Third Reich in the 1930s. Artists such as Max Beckmann (1884-1950, Germany, Netherlands, USA) and George Grosz (1893-1959, Germany) used their craft to level harsh and cynical criticism against what they saw in the society around them, at home and across Europe.

In *Paris Society*, Beckmann showed a group of businessmen, aristocrats, and intellectuals (many of whom emigrated to Paris to flee conditions at home) gathered for what ought to be an evening of social pleasantries, but was instead one clearly pervaded by a sense of foreboding and gloom. ([*Paris Society*, Max Breckmann:](http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/artwork/503) The realism here shows the lack of connection among the partygoers, even to the extent that they apparently avoid or ignore one another, crowded as they are into an uncomfortable space. Beckmann himself, once a celebrated artist in Germany, became an object of censure and ridicule by the time of the Nazi regime, and his artwork is often full of a sense of the malaise of the age.

Grosz, also despised by the Nazis, tended to make much more specific use of his critical realism, delineating especially harsh condemnations of the military and governmental establishments. For example, in *The Hero*, Grosz used graphic realism to convey his view of the anti-heroic treatment of individuals—especially World War I veterans—that he saw all around him. ([*The Hero*, George Grosz:](http://www.moma.org/collection_ge/object.php?object_id=72585) In the work of these two artists, we can note that the realistic approach sometimes moves away from strong naturalism. The artists seem to have deliberately chosen to make their renditions somewhat abstracted and unrefined—even crude—for the sake of expressive emphasis.

### 4.5.2.4 Abstract Expressionism

We examined differences between representational and abstract art when we explored Van Doesburg’s exploration of cows and the work of other artists who manipulated form by reducing its...
visual components or altering its appearance so that the form did not conform to the ways it might appear in nature. These artists chose to limit the degree to which they would carry the investigation of abstraction, opting to avoid losing references that were more or less clearly recognizable.

In the middle of the twentieth century, based in New York City, a movement called Abstract Expressionism included works of drawing, painting, print, and sculpture that were focused on the physical properties of the medium used as opposed to pictorial narrative, although not all of them were without reference to the figure or the phenomenal world altogether. In the work Untitled of 1957 by Clyfford Still (1901-1980, USA), we see how the imagery can remind us of a jagged crevice in a mountain landscape, but without definitive representation, and the artist himself denied that there was such a subject there. (PH-971, Clyfford Still: https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/75.35)

Other artists associated with Abstract Expressionism used less sense of representation in their work. Included in the category were Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko (1903-1970, Latvia, lived USA). (The Deep, Jackson Pollock: http://www.wikiart.org/en/jackson-pollock/the-deep-1953; No. 61 (Rust and Blue), Mark Rothko: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:No_61_Mark_Rothko.jpg) Abstract Expressionist artists were more concerned with artistic process and formal means than with the creation of narrative pictures. In examining a small cross section of work by the Abstract Expressionist artists, we can see that it may not be appropriate, after all, to call this a stylistic category, as there is not really a stream of visual similarities among them; rather, they are characterized as much by their freedom from the constraints of stylistic rules and their lack of unifying visual features.

### 4.5.3 Individual Style

Johannes (or Jan) Vermeer lived in the seventeenth century, a time of artistic flowering often referred to as the Golden Age of Dutch art. During his lifetime, Vermeer was a painter of some renown in his hometown of Delft whose work was purchased by a small number of collectors. After his death in 1675 at the age of forty-three, however, he and his work were largely forgotten, in part because the few works he painted were in private collections and rarely seen. For example, Vermeer’s painting The Geographer was in the hands of more than two-dozen private owners before it was sold to the Städel Museum (Städelisches Kunstinstitut) in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1885. (Figure 4.38) And, Vermeer himself was not
“re-discovered” until 1860, when museum director Gustav Waagen recognized a work attributed to another artist as a painting by Vermeer. Working with Waagen, art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger published a catalogue raisonné, a detailed, comprehensive list of the artist’s work, in 1866, launching Vermeer toward the fame he and his thirty-four known paintings enjoy to this day.

After such a long period of obscurity, it is all the more interesting that Vermeer is considered today to have such a distinctive style. As in The Geographer, the great majority of his works are set in a domestic interior, strongly lit by a multi-paned window to the left. Sunlight washes across the table at the window and the figure standing there, to the floor and the wall behind. The objects in the room are both those commonly found in a Dutch household of the day and specific to the occupation of a geographer, namely, the celestial globe, charts, and compass the man holds. Vermeer achieved the luminosity of the scene, with small details warmly highlighted to a fine glow, by applying multiple layers of translucent glazes of paint. The palette of earth tones interspersed with the vivid blue of ground lapis lazuli and brilliant vermilion of powdered cinnabar provide a richness, clarity, and stillness that are distinctively Vermeer’s, as well.

The life and work of Vincent van Gogh also provides us with a good example to talk about the individual style of an artist. In addition to what can be learned about the artist through his drawings and paintings, the more than 800 letters Van Gogh wrote to his brother, Theo, other family members, and friends, provide valuable information about his artistic intentions and thoughts about his art and life. After a childhood the artist described as troubled and lonely, he found happiness in 1869 at the age of sixteen when he took a position with the art dealer Goupil & Cie, first in the Dutch city of The Hague and then in London, England. After leaving the firm in 1876, however, he spent the next seven years in a series of vocational and romantic pursuits that left Van Gogh disillusioned and adrift. In 1883, he began to pursue drawing and painting, for which he had shown promise as a child. The two years he spent in Paris, 1886-1888, provided him with seemingly endless opportunities to study and grow as an artist. Overwhelmed by the pace of life there, however, in 1888 he settled in Arles, a small town in the south of France, where he spent the last two years of his life.
Largely based on the prolific artistic output during and biographical details about those last two years, Van Gogh is well known as an emotionally troubled artist who struggled artistically, financially, and socially. His work from that period does not look like that of any of his contemporaries, so we feel confident that his choice of subject and technique reveals something personal and intimate rather than polished, distant, and conventional. (Figure 4.39) His swirling brush strokes and vivid colors seem to indicate the chaotic and emotionally turbulent life he was experiencing. His choice of cypress trees as symbols of eternity reveal a concern with the spiritual that is well documented in his letters of the time. His passion, dedication to painting, and perhaps even a kind of desperation all seem to drive Van Gogh’s individual stylistic approach.

4.6 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

Visual art can be usefully interpreted using a variety of approaches to discovering meaning in the elements, principles, and relationships present in works of art. A structured approach using description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation is presented and exemplified as one mode for understanding how works of art can carry meaning.

Other modes of interpretation recognize many approaches to art-making. Works of art may be idealized, representational, non-objective, or abstract. Issues of historical and personal style also become important in understanding what artists hoped to communicate with their artwork.

Types of art revolve primarily around representation, abstraction, idealization, and non-objective art, which is a rejection of representation.

The historical progression of artistic style simultaneously relies on and is limited by technology, socio-cultural, and religious constraints. Examples of cultural or Regional style are drawn from the ancient Near East, Ancient Greece and Rome, and the Indian sub-continent. Examples of period styles exemplified include the Romanesque and Gothic periods of Europe and the Italian Renaissance. Examples of formal styles, i.e., the “isms,” include nineteenth century realism, expressionism of Weimar Germany, and the Abstract Expressionism of the New York School.

Test Yourself

1. Discuss the difference between the categories of representational art, abstract art, and non-representational art.

2. Cite and briefly describe the four phases of critical analysis presented in this chapter.

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3. Cite one example of an idealized work of art and discuss potential reasons for and goals of this idealization, especially as relates to the work’s culture of origin.

4. Restate the three types of art historical style mentioned in this chapter, citing one example of each, and illustrate this example with a specific work of art

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4.7 KEY TERMS

**Abstract:** in art, the property of representing selected essential features of a particular subject instead of relying on objective appearance alone.

**Andachtsbilder:** a German term to denote devotional images used to aid prayer.

**Bodhisattva:** in Buddhism, an enlightened person who remains in the world in order to help others attain enlightenment.

**Catalogue Raisonné:** a published collection of all the works of a given artist or art exhibition.

**Composite view:** the construction of a human figure from both profile and frontal views, for example, as in ancient Egyptian art.

**Contrapposto:** an asymmetrical arrangement of the human figure in which the line of the arms and shoulders contrasts with and balances the line of the hips and legs.

**École des Beaux-Arts:** an influential art school in France.

**Expressionism:** one of several art movements of the twentieth century that were concerned with conveying emotional and mental responses through art (German Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Expressionism).

**Gum Bichromate:** a photographic print process which uses gum Arabic and bichromate.

**Hierarchical proportion:** the condition in which the size of figures is determined by social importance rather than observation.
**Humanism:** the belief that people are naturally good and that problems can be solved using reason instead of religion.

**Idealized:** an image that is represented as being ideal or perfected.

**Linear perspective:** a geometric system for representing the illusion of receding space.

**Naturalistic:** of or pertaining to the appearance of nature, without idealization.

**Non-objective:** unrelated to or exclusive of perceptions of objective external reality.

**Non-representational:** artwork which intentionally avoids the strategy of representation, instead selecting only novel and original experience as subject matter.

**Orthogonal lines:** in linear perspective, diagonal lines that recede into fictive space.

**Photo-transformation:** a type of photography created by Lucas Samaras which uses fingers and a stylus to move and smear the dyes of a Polaroid print while still wet.

**Portals:** in Gothic architecture, doorways, traditionally embellished with sculptural decoration.

**Representation:** in art, the use of signs or images which stand in for or take the place of something else.

**Stupas:** in Buddhist religious architecture, rounded mounds which contain religious relics, mark sacred places, or are used as sites of meditation.

**Tetrarch:** in Roman political history, the term for one of four co-emperors of the Roman Empire installed by Diocletian in 293 CE.

**Tympanum:** in Gothic Architecture, the semi-circular area above the Portal, traditionally embellished with sculptural decoration.

**Vanishing point:** in linear perspective, the point on the horizon to which orthogonal lines converge.

**Yakshi:** in Hindu and Buddhist mythologies, female counterparts to male Yaksha, who are both mythical beings that guard treasure hidden in the Earth.
5.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

• Place works of art in historical, social, personal, political, or scientific contexts.
• Define and distinguish between symbolism and iconography.
• Identify changes in symbols and iconographic motifs over time and in different cultures.
• Relate iconography to visual literacy.
• Describe connections between symbolism, iconography, and storytelling.
• Recognize metaphorical meanings in art.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

The process we go through when we look at a work of art to determine if we recognize and can make sense of its content is not just a visual one. It is a mental process as well, largely based on the elements within and about the work we can identify and categorize. As we look and think, we may be given clues about what the work means by where it is, when it was made, what culture it came from, who created it, or why it was made. Any information we can gather helps us understand the work’s context, that is, for what historical, social, personal, political, or scientific reasons the work of art was made. And then, using all the contextual information we have gathered, we interpret the work of art’s content to discover what it means or symbolizes.

5.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXTS

5.3.1 Historical Context

We can learn about the historical context to help us interpret the content and understand the meaning of two seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. Willem Claesz. Heda (1594-1680, Nether-
lands) created *Still Life with a Gilt Cup* in 1635, and Jan Davidsz. de Heem painted *Still Life with Flowers* around 1660. (Figures 5.1 and 5.2) Heda lived in his native Haarlem his entire life; de Heem was born in Utrecht but traveled in the Netherlands and then lived in Antwerp for the majority of his career, c. 1635 to 1667. He briefly returned to Utrecht but settled back in Antwerp in the 1670s where he remained until his death.

Although depicting different types of things, each of these paintings is a *still life*, an arrangement of objects both made by humans and found in nature, such as flowers, fruit, insects, sea creatures, and animals from the hunt. A still life falls into a subject category known as *genre* subjects or scenes of everyday life. Both Heda and de Heem specialized in painting still lifes that were beautifully arranged and stunningly lifelike. Each was well known for his ability to depict a variety of textures and surfaces often displayed side-by-side, as we can see here, to create a dazzling and sumptuous visual array.

There are a number of things going on in the Netherlands in the 1600s—known as the Dutch Golden Age—that can help explain why Heda and de Heem included some of the objects in their paintings. What is today the Netherlands (or Holland) and Belgium were together ruled first by the Dukes of Burgundy, the Burgundians, beginning in 1433 and then by Charles V of the Habsburg family in 1506. Charles V left the Netherlands in 1515, however, to become King of Spain. Tension created by family members who remained in place to rule led to friction with the Dutch and eventually to revolt beginning in 1566. At the same time,
the Protestant Reformation that originated in Wittenberg, Germany, under Martin Luther in 1517 had spread through much of northern Europe, including parts of the Netherlands. Followers of the new Protestant faith were at first tolerated by the Catholic Spanish rulers, but they were soon treated as heretics, and their faith was seen as a rebellion to be crushed. William I, Prince of Orange, a Dutch nobleman, turned away from his position in the court of the Habsburg rulers to lead his country into the Dutch War for Independence from Spain, more commonly known as the Eighty Years War (1568-1648). In 1581, the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands were declared independent, forming what we still know as Holland today. The southern area that remained under Catholic Spanish rule was known as Flanders and is modern Belgium. Fighting continued on and off between the Dutch and Spanish until 1618 when they both became embroiled in a larger European War known as the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). With the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Spanish crown officially acknowledged the republic of Holland.

In the midst of this ongoing turmoil over politics and religion, as well as decades of disruption and destruction caused by war, the Netherlands also experienced a time of tremendous economic growth, revolutionary scientific exploration, dominance in worldwide trade, and flourishing of the arts. The rise of the merchant class (equivalent to today’s middle class) led to the spread of education and wealth among new segments of society. Their knowledge of and appreciation for art, along with their discretionary income, in turn led to increased patronage. Patrons of art were not looking to purchase sculptures and paintings for churches, however, as Protestants do not embellish their houses of worship; they do not adorn the word of God as found in the Bible. This led to interest in new subjects in painting, such as genre and still life painting, as well as landscapes, city views, portraits, and religious subjects in works meant to hang in the home.

The subject of Heda’s painting, *Still Life with a Gilt Cup*, is ostensibly the remains of a meal of oysters and bread, but it is even more about all the objects accompanying the food. (Figure 5.1) The tin plates and open-lidded pewter pitcher are relatively simply fashioned and could have been made by local craftsmen. But the remaining items, including a spiral ribbed clear glass cruets for oil or vinegar behind the tin bowl of oysters, the green glass wine römer, or goblet, decorated with prunts (applied blobs of molten glass, here drawn into points), and the tall, heavily ornamented, and gilded vessel topped by a lid with a figure of a warrior, are all luxury goods. They indicate wealth and good taste, and they allude to Holland’s importance as a nation of traders who import beautiful objects from around the world.

We are not meant to look at this feast for the eyes and simply congratulate ourselves on our success and prosperity, though. The fact is the feast is over, and all we have here are the remains of what has too quickly passed. The richly decorated silver berkemeier, a wide-mouthed drinking vessel with a slender stem, is overturned. The oysters are a delicacy that retain their freshness and appeal only briefly, and the lemon, while beautiful, is actually bitter and will soon dry out. These are reminders that life is fleeting. No matter what material riches and comforts one accumulates on earth, it is more important to prepare one’s soul for life everlasting.

In a similar fashion, in *Still Life with Flowers* de Heem sets before us, teeming with life and in abundant disarray, the beauty and bounty of nature. (Figure 5.2) But he also shows the swift passing of the seasons by depicting flowers, fruits, and vegetables that bloom and ripen throughout the
year. The tulips—from highly prized and costly bulbs imported by the Dutch from the Ottoman Empire (modern Turkey)—honeysuckle, roses, carnations, peas, grapes, and corn—introduced to Europe from the Americas—are among the profusion of colors and forms that de Heem unrealistically depicts as all in season at the same time. The viewer would instead know that long before the orange carnation blossomed in the fall, the blood-red striped tulip would have withered in the spring. De Heem is reminding us in this vanitas (Latin: vanity) still life of our own mortality and the transience of life in the face of certain death.

Both paintings' messages reflect the importance in the Protestant faith, as practiced in Holland at the time, of the believer’s direct connection to God without the need for intercessors. The faithful do not need the word of God to be interpreted for them, and the messages of God are everywhere. Both paintings are celebrations of riches and pleasures of life, but they are also reminders of its brevity and the unimportance of earthly possessions and human achievements in the face of eternity. So, while the works demonstrate the Dutch viewers’ pride in themselves and their young nation’s accomplishments in the face of tremendous obstacles, they also carry a word of caution and a reminder to be vigilant.

5.3.2 Social Context

Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1902, USA) painted Conversation Piece around 1851-1852. (Figure 5.3) A genre painting, it depicts an everyday scene of a mother holding her infant in her lap while the father stands beside them playfully dangling some cherries above the baby’s eager grasp. It is a quiet scene of family life, a moment of contentment and peace, with the dining table not yet cleared after a meal adding an even greater sense of intimacy and informality. Spencer was the only prominent female painter at that time in the United States, and the majority of her works are narrative genre pieces such as this one. They are scenes of domestic life, often suggesting a story told through the setting, the arrangement and gesture of the figures, and their facial expressions.

Elements in Spencer’s work often seem to reflect her personal life. The artist depicted herself and her husband
in *Conversation Piece*, as she did in many of her paintings. Not only was it unusual that she was a successful professional painter, when she married Benjamin Rush Spencer, he took on the household duties and aided his wife in pursuing her career. Over the course of their long (and what is believed to be happy) marriage, while also bearing thirteen children and raising seven to adulthood, Spencer remained the breadwinner of the family.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of changes had been introduced into American industry and commerce that had far-reaching effects on the roles women, men, and children played in the home and in the labor force. The advent of new machinery and production methods in the textile industry, for example, generated a need for mill workers that in turn fostered the growth and spread of urban centers. At the same time, both those who owned and managed the mill factories as well as those who worked in them became part of a wage-based economy, and the demand for goods and services to support them rose accordingly. In New England, the majority of the mill workers were young women who had been recruited from rural areas; the wages they earned were often saved in anticipation of marriage or to supplement their family’s income. But critics feared the economic and social independence these young women gained would turn them against the often hard and isolated farm lives they left behind, and indeed many chose not to return. The greatest apprehension, however, was these women would turn away from their rightful place in the private sphere of home.

The growing industrialism of American society impacted men and their roles within and outside the home, as well. Men primarily worked in the public sphere, that is, outside the home in areas such as manufacturing, business, or commerce. Their roles were in sharp contrast to the domestic duties and roles of wife and mother played by women. This separation of obligations and expectations led to rigid gender roles in which both women and men were contained. The roles confined the woman to the protective environment of home, while the man sheltered her as he faced the harsh demands outside.

In Spencer’s painting, the woman represents the feminine ideal of a nurturing and content mother. But rather than showing a father who holds himself apart from the womanly, domestic sphere—as was far more common at the time—Spencer depicts the man in an equally caring and warm role. An oval is formed by the mother’s bent head and arm which extends from her hand supporting the baby’s head through the baby’s upraised arm to the father’s bent arm, his bowed head, and his left arm resting on the back of the mother’s chair. At odds with many at the time who believed men and women existed in separate spheres, Spencer draws the family into one circle.

American industrialism worked hand-in-hand with American ingenuity. Steamboat routes on the Mississippi River and its tributaries substantially contributing to the growth of settlements and cities from New Orleans to Pittsburgh began in 1811. The first steamboat to make that run was the *New Orleans* designed by Robert Fulton and Robert Livingston, both key figures in the development of steamboat design and travel. As would be the case with the thousands of steamboats that would traverse the Mississippi over the next century, it was made of wood and propelled by a paddlewheel that was powered by a steam engine; the steam was made by heating water in boilers which had to be watched to avoid pressure building to the point of explosion, a very real and constant danger. In attempts to better travel time between landings or by engaging in races with
other steamboats, however, it was not uncommon for the engineer to stoke the fires while keeping
the boilers’ safety valves closed, allowing steam pressure to build past safe levels.

Although 230 boats were destroyed due to boiler explosions between 1816 and 1848 with the
loss of nearly 1,800 lives, one of the great attractions of steamboat travel remained its speed.¹
The excitement and the danger of a steamboat race are captured in a print published by Currier
& Ives in 1866, *The Champions of the Mississippi: A Race for the Buckhorns*. (Figure 5.4) Na-
thaniel Currier (1813-1888, USA) and his brother-in-law James Merritt Ives (1824-1895, USA)
formed the company Currier & Ives in 1857. They published black-and-white and hand-colored
lithographs on numerous subjects meant to appeal to a broad spectrum of the American public,
including landscapes, genre scenes, portraits, depictions of politics and current events, and the
latest innovations in science, industry, and the arts.

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The firm of Currier & Ives hired well-known artists of the day to create the drawings from which their lithographic prints were made. The artist who drew the *Champions of the Mississippi* was Frances Flora Bond Palmer (1812-1876, USA). Palmer, like Lilly Martin Spencer, supported her family as a full-time artist. Palmer produced hundreds of original drawings in the seventeen years she worked for Currier & Ives, more than any other artist they employed. She printed and hand-colored many of her own works, as well, parts of the lithographic process generally reserved for artists in the firm with less training and expertise. For example, the prints were usually painted in an assembly line, with one artisan applying a single color and passing the work on to the next for another color. That Palmer took part in all phases of creating the prints was an indication of her great skill and versatility.

As was the case with the majority of scenes Palmer created, she did not witness the race between the steamboats *Queen of the West* and *Morning Star* or the cheering crowd on the shore. She depicted numerous such scenes, however, as competitions such as this were commonplace and prints commemorating them were popular and sold well. The races and the steamboats were a source of pride and a celebration of American ingenuity, competitiveness, and success. For those who owned a print such as *The Champions of the Mississippi*, the vast majority of whom had never seen the river or a steamboat competition, it represented the open possibilities of America’s greatest waterway and indomitable spirit. As described by Mark Twain, who grew up in a town on the river’s shore and spent four years as a riverboat pilot (1857-1861), there was a nearly magical quality to the allure and excitement of life on the river, especially when a steamboat race was coming. He related in his memoir *Life on the Mississippi* (1883):

> In the “flush times” of steamboating, a race between two notoriously fleet steamers was an event of vast importance. The date was set for it several weeks in advance, and from that time forward, the whole Mississippi Valley was in a state of consuming excitement. Politics and the weather were dropped, and people talked only of the coming race.

> The chosen date being come, and all things in readiness, the two great steamers back into the stream, and lie there jockeying a moment, and apparently watching each other’s slightest movement, like sentient creatures; flags drooping, the pent steam shrieking through safety-valves, the black smoke rolling and tumbling from the chimneys and darkening all the air. People, people everywhere; the shores, the house-tops, the steamboats, the ships, are packed with them, and you know that the borders of the broad Mississippi are going to be fringed with humanity thence northward twelve hundred miles, to welcome these racers.²

### 5.3.3 Personal or Creative Narrative Context

Charles Demuth (1883-1935, USA) painted *The Figure 5 in Gold* in 1928. (Figure 5.5) Demuth met poet and physician William Carlos Williams at the boarding house where they both lived in Philadelphia while studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Demuth’s painting is one in a series of portraits of friends, paying homage to Williams and his 1916 poem “The Great Figure”:

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

Williams described the inspiration for his poem as an encounter with a fire truck as it noisily sped along the streets of New York, abruptly shaking him from his inner thoughts to a jarring awareness of what was going on around him. Demuth chose to paint his portrait of Williams not as a likeness but with references to his friend, the poet. The dark, shadowed diagonal lines radiating from the center of his painting, punctuated by bright white circles, capture the jolt of the charging truck accompanied by the clamor of its bells. The accelerating beat of the figure 5 echoes the pounding of Williams’s heart as he was startled. It was the sight of the number in gold that Williams was first aware of at the scene, and Demuth uses the pulsing 5 to symbolically portray his friend, surrounded by the rush of red as bright as blood with his name, Bill, above as if flashing in red neon.

For Demuth, that connection between his friend and his poetry told us far more about who Williams was than his physical appearance. A traditional portrait would show us what Williams looked like, but Demuth wanted to share with the viewer the experience of the poem the artist closely identified with his friend so that we would have an inner, deeper understanding of the poet. Demuth gave us his personal interpretation of Williams through the story, the narrative, that he tells us with the aid of “The Great Figure.”

Georgia O’Keeffe gives us a portrait of the American landscape in a similar way in her painting Cow’s Skull: Red, White, and Blue from 1931. (Cow’s Skull: Red, White, and Blue, Georgia O’Keeffe: http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/488694) Throughout the
nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century, the majority of artists depicted the American land through its mountains and forests, farmlands and prairies, rivers and waterfalls: the vast stretches, immense heights, bounty, variety, and majesty of the seemingly endless continent. In this painting, however, O’Keeffe chose to portray the beauty of the United States not through its fertile grasslands or rocky peaks but in the austerity and simplicity of the desert of the American Southwest that she had come to appreciate, as symbolized by the sharp lines of a bleached cow’s skull set against patriotic red and blue.

O’Keeffe was born in 1887 near Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. After studying art and working as an art teacher in several areas of the United States, including Chicago, Illinois, Amarillo, Texas, and Columbia, South Carolina, O’Keeffe moved to New York City in 1918.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946, USA), a photographer, publisher, and art gallery owner who was instrumental in introducing audiences to and helping them appreciate European and American modernist art in this country in the first decades of the twentieth century, had exhibited O’Keeffe’s drawings in his gallery 291 in 1917. The following year she accepted his offer of support so that she could devote herself to painting full-time. After more than ten years in New York, depicting streets and buildings of the city and at the Stieglitz family home on Lake George in upstate New York, O’Keeffe decided to spend the summer of 1929 with friends in Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico.

Painted after that trip, *Cow’s Skull: Red, White, and Blue* shows the artist providing a contrast to traditional and popular landscape views. She is inviting the viewer to contemplate how nature can be daunting and uninviting and to remember the flinty strength of the pioneers who moved across and settled in the demanding climate and terrain of the Southwest. The harshness of that life can be seen in the jagged lines of splintered bone in the skull, a reminder of inevitable death—similar to a seventeenth-century Dutch *vanitas* piece such as de Heem’s *Vase of Flowers*. But, the skull was also an object representing life to O’Keeffe:

To me they are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around...The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even tho’ it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.\(^3\)

**5.3.4 Political Context**

As was the case with the painting *Pear Blossoms* by Qian Xuan (Figure 1.10), *Bamboo and Rocks* by Li Kan (1245-1320, China) was painted during the Yuan Dynasty when the Mongols ruled China. (Figure 5.6) There are similarities but also important differences between the works. *Pear Blossoms* was painted in 1280, shortly after the Mongols took power, and *Bamboo and Rocks* was painted nearly forty years later in 1318. During that period, the Mongolian leaders made substantial changes in the government, thrusting out those in imperial power and scholar officials, including painters. Those who had been at the top of the social and political hierarchy were now turned away from government positions and looked upon with distrust and distaste.

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Although the Mongols appreciated Chinese painting and artists were commissioned to make (or appointed to produce) works for those in power, many were unwilling to paint for the foreign leaders. Kan’s painting is interpreted as a reflection on China, its people, and its traditions under Mongolian rule. *Bamboo and Rocks* is a pair of scrolls painted with ink and color on silk meant to be hung side-by-side. Unlike *Pear Blossoms*, which is a scroll meant to be unrolled in approximately twelve-inch segments on a table then rolled again to reveal the next segment and finally stored away between viewings, *Bamboo and Rocks* would remain in view hanging on a wall. Both are ink paintings capturing the simplicity of beauty in nature. But the objects depicted also have symbolic meaning going back to ancient Chinese culture. Bamboo symbolizes virtue, grace, and resilience, while rocks symbolize strength and power to endure. In Kan’s painting, their contrasting forms, low and curvilinear against upright and angular, balance each other. The artist is indicating that during the Yuan Dynasty, under the rule of the Mongol, the Chinese people would be like bamboo; they would bow but not break in the uncertain climate of the rocky landscape of occupation.

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828, Spain) was court painter to King Charles IV from the beginning of his reign in 1789 until Napoleon ousted Charles from his throne in 1808 during the French invasion of Spain. Goya was hired the same year to make a visual record of the bravery of the Spanish people against the onslaught of the French invaders. The impact of...
what Goya saw, however, changed the direction and tone of the series of prints he made from the unflinching courage of his fellow citizens to despair over the barbarous atrocities committed and merciless suffering endured by all who are trampled in the path of war. He created the series of eighty-two etchings, *The Disasters of War*, between 1810 and 1823. *Y no hai Remedio (And There’s Nothing to Be Done)* is the nineteenth print in the series; it reflects the hopelessness of war. (Figure 5.7) There is no escape, nor is there justice. Both civilians and soldiers become de-humanized and numb in the endless slaughter, here in the form of a firing squad.

The print series was not published until 1863, thirty-five years after Goya’s death. There are theories why: the artist was fearful of political repercussions, the scenes were too graphic, or the wounds were too painful for public release in the immediate decades after the war. The artist himself gave no explanation. By the time *The Disasters of War* series was printed, the French and Spanish governments that had participated in and ruled immediately after the Peninsular War (1808-1814), as it came to be known, had both been superseded. Goya’s documentation of and cry against human self-destruction had no impact at the time of the disasters themselves, but they are still among the most powerful images of political protest ever made.

5.3.5 Scientific Context

Art and science are inextricably linked. The words “technique” and “technology” both originate from the ancient Greek word *tekhne*, which means art. For the Greeks, both art and science were the study, analysis, and classification of objects and ideas. Through the study of math and art, they arrived at the golden ratio: when dividing a line in two parts, the longer part divided by the smaller part is also equal to the whole length divided by the longer part. Expressed algebraically, that can be written as \( \frac{a}{b} = \frac{ab}{a} \). The visual representation of the golden ratio, the Greeks determined, results in the most visually pleasing proportions within and of an object or figure. (Figure 5.8)

Leonardo da Vinci was fascinated by how things work. The mechanics of nature, machinery, and the human body were all worlds to be explored deeply in order to be understood at their most essential, truthful levels. Although he was interested in human anatomy throughout his career, he spent the last twelve years of his life systematically studying and documenting his findings. He began in the winter of 1507-08 with a series of pen-and-ink drawings that he made of a dissection he carried out on an old man. In the winter of 1510-11, he completed additional dissections,
probably working with anatomy professor Marcantonio della Torre at the University of Pavia. (Figure 5.9)

Leonardo intended to include his more than 240 drawings in a treatise on anatomy, but following Marcantonio’s death from the plague in 1512 and political upheaval in the city of Milan where Leonardo lived, his focus shifted and he never completed and published his book. When he died in 1519, his drawings and notes on human anatomy along with approximately 6,500 pages from his other notebooks were dispersed and effectively lost to the world for 400 years. Leonardo’s insights into such areas as the functioning of the heart and growth of a fetus, all completely accurate, had to be laboriously re-discovered by other artists and scientists in the succeeding centuries.

Questions that had long intrigued artists and scientists but could not be answered by observation with the naked eye, such as details about a planetary body in space, a specimen under a microscope, or an animal in motion, were finally being answered in the nineteenth century with the invention of photography. Leland Stanford, head of the Union Pacific Railroad, former governor of California, and racehorse owner, in 1872 accepted the challenge to prove whether all four feet of a horse left the ground when galloping. He hired photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904, England, lived USA) to conduct a study of the sequence of movement that is too rapid to be captured by the human eye. Muybridge experimented with setting up cameras along a track to photograph the horse and rider at evenly spaced intervals. He was soon able to prove that indeed all four hooves are in the air when the horse’s legs are under its body—not when the legs are fully extended to the front and rear as many had thought. (Figure 5.10)

While the first set of photographs Muybridge took for Stanford were lost, the industrialist (who with his wife Jane would found Stanford University in 1885) encouraged the photographer to continue his studies. Muybridge published his findings on the galloping horse in *Scientific American* in 1878. In the aftermath, Muybridge spoke frequently throughout the United States. He was invited to continue his studies at the University of Pennsylvania where his work was valued for the information it would provide in the areas of technology, science, and art. He conducted his photographic experiments there from 1884 to 1887, and the following year he published his
book *Animal Locomotion*, which contained 781 photographic plates of a wide variety of motion studies including men, women, children, horses, lions, bison, ostriches, cranes, and cats.

### 5.4 Symbolism and Iconography

**Symbolism** refers to the use of specific figural or naturalistic images, or abstracted graphic signs that hold shared meaning within a group. A symbol is an image or sign that is understood by a group to stand for something. The symbol, however, does not have to have a direct connection to its meaning. For example, the letters of the alphabet, which are abstract graphic signs, are understood by those who use them to have individual sounds and meanings. The users have assigned meaning to them, as letters have no meaning in and of themselves. An example of a naturalistic image is a rose, which in most Western civilizations symbolizes love. When one person gives a rose to another, it is a symbol of the love the person feels.

**Iconography** is the broader study and interpretation of subject matter and pictorial themes in a work of art. This includes implied meanings and symbolism that are used to convey the group’s shared experience and history—its familiar myths and stories. Iconography refers to the symbols...
used within a work of art and what they mean, or symbolize. For example, in different cultures a snake may stand for evil, temptation, wisdom, rebirth, or the circle of life. A depiction of a snake in a scene with Adam and Eve has specific meanings for those of the Christian faith or others who understand the snake stands for temptation within the context of that subject or story. In Chinese culture, however, a snake represents the power of nature and is said to bring good fortune to those who practice the snake’s restraint and elegance of movement.

5.4.1 Changes in Meaning of Symbols and Iconography

While a symbol might have a common meaning for a certain group, it might be used with variations by or hold a different significance for other groups. Let us use the example of a cross. At its core, a cross is a simple intersection of vertical and horizontal lines that could refer to the meeting of celestial and terrestrial elements or forces or could lend itself to other variations of meaning. The cross most frequently associated with Christianity is the Latin Cross, with the long vertical bar intersected by a shorter horizontal one—believed by many to be the form of the cross upon which Jesus Christ, the central figure of the faith, was crucified. (Variants of the Cross: http://wpmedia.vancouversun.com/2010/02/1346.crosses1.png) But its simplicity of conception lends itself to various other readings, as well, and in pre-Christian use it was related to sacred and cosmic beliefs.

Within Christian usage, the cross has taken a great number of different of forms, including the equal-armed Greek Cross, favored by the Byzantine Christians; Celtic crosses, with a circular addition to the crossing; X’s and upside-down crosses associated with specific Christian martyrs, individuals who died for their faith, on such instruments of torture; and many others. In art, we might see them as simple flat graphic works, or decorated in two-dimensional renditions, or as fully developed three-dimensional interpretations, like the numerous grave markers in Irish cemeteries, where they are further embellished with intricate motifs and iconographic depictions of Bible stories. (Figure 5.11)

The Ankh, another cross form, with a looped handle, seems to have been devised by the ancient Egyptians as a symbol of the life-giving power of the Sun. (Figure 5.12) It was one of the numerous pictographic symbols they used both as a
separate sign and as part of the hieroglyphic system of writing they developed.

Clearly, many other symbols have various meanings, especially when they are represented as more abstract graphic signs. To read their implications in any particular application will require your considering where it was made and for what specific purposes, as well as how it might have been adopt-
ed and turned to different use at that time or later. Sometimes the shifts in meaning may be radical, as in the form of the swastika, an ancient sacred sign used in many different cultures, including India and others throughout Asia, as well as the Near East, and Europe. (Figures 5.13, 5.14, and 5.15) It has historically been a very auspicious sign with implications of good fortune and positive movement, and was therefore adopted for the ground plan for Buddhist stupa worship centers. Of course, in the twentieth century, its appropriation by the Nazi Party as a symbol of the superiority of the Aryan heritage led to very different and now generally negative connotations.

Iconography is often more specific and definitive, with concrete reference to world experiences and, beyond that, to some form of narrative for the group involved.
Again, analysis of the pictorial form requires examination of the context in which the artwork was created. We can and must look at the underlying narrative, but, as we shall discuss in the next several chapters, the pictorial expressions evolve both independently of the narrative sources and in response to narrative and artistic change.

For example, Christians (more specifically that branch now known as Roman Catholics) debated the “true nature” of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. Among the points of debate was whether Mary was bodily in Heaven with her Son or whether she had to wait until the end of time when the whole of mankind would experience bodily resurrection, that is, at the time of the Second Coming and the Last Judgment, when everyone would have their lifetime of deeds assessed for purposes of learning whether they would spend eternity in Heaven or Hell. These Christian ideas are among those a great amount of art has been devoted to over time.

To illustrate, we can look at differences between two works about Mary and her place and role in Heaven that appeared in church relief sculpture during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These differing ideas focused on the implied elevation of Mary to a divine status, or to her not being seen as divine herself, in which case, the faithful needed to keep a view of her as being in a more subordinate or secondary status. The questions included consideration of Mary as the “Queen of Heaven,” who might be ruling alongside her son. At Senlis Cathedral (1153-1181) in France, she was depicted as apparently a co-ruler with Christ, but ensuing theological discussion took issue with this possible over-elevation. (Figure 5.16) So, while the renditions of Mary as the celestial queen continued in popularity, they made it clear that she was only considered to be there at the bidding and will of Christ. This can be seen at Chartres Cathedral in France, where she bows her head to Jesus. (North Portal of Notre-Dame Cathedral: https://www.bluffton.edu/~sullivann/chartresnorth/cportal.html)

What we see here, again, is that our full analysis of the artworks we encounter needs a complex approach that includes a variety of visual clues and a wide range of research on the contextual details of its creation and use. In contrast to the longstanding assertion that “beauty is in the
eye of the beholder,” the appropriate interpretation according to the intended symbolism and/or iconography must take the society, culture, and related circumstances into account to accurately reflect its intended meaning or original meaning for viewers. We will be exploring these ideas in greater detail in the next several chapters.

5.4.2 Symbolism, Iconography, and Visual Literacy

Symbols like the cross or the swastika will only have shared meaning for those who agree upon and affirm a specific interpretation, which can be positive or negative for any particular group of people. This specific meaning in symbols is always going to be the case for viewing of any visual expression, whether in simplified graphic sign form or a more detailed pictorial rendition. Additionally, the viewers must also often have some measure of instruction about how to view a particular work so they can understand its meaning more fully.

Also noteworthy is that members of any group use art as a means of sharing ideas and sentiment, as well as for expressing and teaching ideology. While the didactic uses of art have often been discussed in terms of instruction for the non-literate, we should recognize that the meanings of pictorial content and the tools used to create the picture must be learned as well. The apparent superficial meanings that are evident through unschooled visual examination do not produce the level of comprehension available in a more fully developed illustration of a tenet of a faith, political message, history lesson, or chart or graph of economic trends. So “visual literacy” should be considered a skill related to verbal and reading literacy for any didactic function. Only members of a group who have been led to understand and perceive the underlying principles will know how to “read” an illustrated message.

For example, we can look at the Ritual Vase from Warka (today Iraq) or the Seven Sacraments Altarpiece by Rogier van der Weyden. (The Warka Vase: http://dieselpunk44.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-warka-vase.html) (Figure 5.17) One
could likely identify the basic pictorial content of either work, but further knowledge would be needed to analyze them further. If you were a member of the intended audience, you might have a bit more insight into what each artist had created in pictorial terms, but even the initiated viewer would likely have a limited “reading” of the work.

In the case of the Ritual Vase from Warka, even if you had lived in ancient Sumer and had been a devotee of the goddess Inanna, you would likely need further instruction about how the carvings on the different registers of the vase were arranged to show the cosmological conception of the created world. That is, one starts at the bottom with the primordial earth and waters, moves to the plants and animals above them drawing sustenance so that they could be harvested and herded by the humans, who then offer part of their gleanings to the goddess serving them from the temple as seen in the upper realm of the middle photograph. This design would be further explained as a neatly hierarchical arrangement, in which the levels of the created world were presented in different sizes, according to their relative importance. Additional meanings could be layered upon this cursory explanation with repeated teaching occasions and viewings.

The Seven Sacraments Altarpiece was painted by Rogier van der Weyden in a region and an era of tremendously complicated iconography: Flanders during the Late Gothic/Northern Renaissance period. The presentation here includes detailed pictorial description of each of the seven sacraments that marked the stages and stations of Christian life. This symbolism again developed over time, and often in response to theological writings that informed the artist and the viewer about specific meanings. The written sources are detailed and complex, with the pictorial rendition richly reflecting what the well-instructed Christian would know about these important rituals and their effects.

The larger central panel of the triptych, or three-part, format was used by the artist to emphasize the Crucifixion as the dominant overarching event that is related to each of the sacraments. Additionally, he provided angels with scrolls to identify them as if speaking to the viewer. So, here the messages are both pictorial and inscribed, and the iconography is a complex program that relates all these ritual events to the whole of the Christian life and faith. Truly, the viewer must be an initiate to discern the meanings behind all the symbolism or a scholar to discover them. Nonetheless, even the casual or uninitiated can read much of what is present in the painting and can identify both familiar elements and those that might lead you to further investigation. This is often the task and the path in interpretation of iconography in art.

### 5.4.3 Symbolism and Iconography in Mythology and Storytelling

From early on, art contained expressions of mythical accounts that people shared about their beliefs and ways of living. From the time of the first great civilizations, for example, in Egypt, the Near East, China, Japan, and India, artwork related to the stories of the people. The degree to which any contemporary written sources confirm these interpretations varies, but that these myths had commonly understood meanings for the people for whom they were made is confirmed by both their frequent appearance and their apparent places in their culture’s artistic traditions, sometimes over centuries. Artistic iconographic traditions therefore show strong relationships to
beliefs and practices known from written sources—although written documentation sometimes does not appear until later times.

Because early stories were often passed along through oral tales, we do not always have a literary record of them until later times, even after the ideas had been expressed symbolically in pictorial art. An example of this symbolism may be found in the rich **hoard** (a collection of objects) known as the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial, found in England and deriving from the early Middle Ages era known as the Migration period (300–700 CE). Although the wooden ship itself has disintegrated, the burial hoard it contained provides details that confirm and broaden our incomplete understating of the adventurous societies of that time and their beliefs about needs for the afterlife. The diverse objects also lend certain insights into the epic tales of such warrior kings as Beowulf, whose story seems to have been a long-standing oral tradition, one perhaps re-told for centuries before being committed to written form. The lavish ornaments, such as this belt buckle and purse cover, give visual testimony to the tales of dragons and heroes like Beowulf through their expressive and intricate patterns and rich materials. (Figures 5.18 and 5.19) The fine metalwork on the purse cover is **cloisonné**, which is created by affixing gold or metal strips to the back...
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INTRODUCTION TO ART

surface, making compartments, that are filled with powder (in this case, ground garnets) and heated to 1,400-1,600 degrees F.

The art of ancient Greece often showed great concern with the stories of Greek mythology as well. Tales of the gods and warriors abound, including those about great physical or intellectual contest, such as the well-known struggles of Herakles (known as Hercules under the Romans) one of which is seen on this amphora. (Figure 5.20) Such tales were very familiar, and viewers were expected to supply the details of the rest of the story through the parts that were shown. However, the skillful artist can enliven the presentation of the figures with posture, gesture, expression, and such symbolic props as the club and the tripod Herakles holds.

As with literary accounts, the artworks associated with historical and legendary events often include a very wide range of symbols and imagery to help convey ideas. These range from mundane details to grand historical moments, as in the Column of Trajan, nearly 100 feet in height, which commemorates the military campaigns of Roman Emperor Trajan (r. 98-117 CE) against the Dacians (101-102 and 105-106 CE) in 155 scenes. (Figure 5.21) Or as appear in the Bayeux Tapestry, an embroidered cloth 230 feet in length that pictorially recounts the events of the Norman Invasion and Battle of Hastings in 1066. (Figure 5.22) Each of these works shows decisive points in their respective historical events in army operations and in the details of the hard work involved in preparing for battle. (Figures 5.23 and 5.24) In this way, they provide us with glimpses of everyday life in the respective eras alongside specific details about the particular campaigns, the cultures in which they were significant, and the
individuals who were key players in the historical events. The details of arms and armor, organized troops and chaotic fighting, building of defensive structures and devices, moments of victory and defeat, and innumerable other items and activities—all are individually and collectively efficient means of recounting the evolution of the events which, in each of these works, is dramatically developed across a long scrolled compositional field that further emphasizes the lengthy narrative each one progressively disclosed.

Like many works of public art of the Roman Imperial era, the column glorifies not only Trajan (the base of the column was designed to contain his ashes) and his deeds, but also the ideas of imperial rule, the role of conquest in expanding the Empire, and the skilled work of Roman soldiers in battlements and tactics. By contrast, the Bayeux Tapestry has more emphasis on the actual tumultuous battle scenes—replete with mounted cavalry in chain mail and elaborate helmets—but it also includes a great deal more sense of historical context: events leading up to the 1066 Battle of Hastings after the death of King Edward the Confessor (r. 1042-1066) and his burial in the newly refurbished Westminster Abbey he had adopted as his royal church. Both of these works also include inscriptions that explicate ideas and events, as well as serve to further present the political messages about the battles—presented on the tapestry in a sort of scene-by-scene narrative—again, for each, underscoring the relationships between literary and pictorial presentations of ideas.
5.4.4 Exploring Symbolic and Iconographic Motifs

Such items as arms and armor are obvious sorts of symbols that clearly depict their purposes, but much symbolism that we see in other artworks has more veiled and variable meaning. Such simple items as flowers and candles can be used in very complex ways in pictures that carry diverse meanings, thus requiring careful study and even deep research in order to discern their implications in a particular work.

For example, the *Merode Altarpiece* by Robert Campin (c. 1375-1444, Belgium) depicts the Christian story of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary by the Angel Gabriel that she will become the Mother of Christ, the son of God. (Figure 5.25) This work is full of symbols that have been widely studied to discern and interpret their messages. The lilies are generally interpreted to symbolize the purity and virginity of Mary—in other pictures, though, they might have other meanings, including reference to death, resurrection, birth, motherhood, or other events or conditions. Within this one work, the use of the candle, just extinguished with a trail of smoke, is given several different meanings by diverse viewers and scholars. It might show the moment of acquiescence, when Mary agrees to bear the Christ child, in which God takes human form. It has also been read as a foreshadowing of Christ’s death, of human death in general, and of the fleeting nature of life for all.

In the time and place of the altarpiece’s creation, symbolism in paintings was particularly apt to be rich and varied, offering the viewer/believer a lot to see and to contemplate further. In this way, if the symbols could be read in different ways, they could then provide ongoing stimulus for meditative reflection on the diverse levels of meaning.

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*Figure 5.25 | Annunciation Triptych (Merode Altarpiece)*

*Artist: Robert Campin*

*Source: Met Museum*

*License: OASC*
And some symbolic motifs, distinguishing features or ideas, carry different meaning in one context from what they might in another. Most symbols are not universal, although they often bear related meanings in diverse contexts. For instance, the sort of figure you might identify as an angel, that is, a winged creature with a human-like bodily form, has appeared in the art of many different cultures. They generally represent beings that can travel between the terrestrial and celestial realms, but their more specific roles can vary widely, for good or evil purposes. The Angel Gabriel, just seen in the Merode Altarpiece, was a messenger from God, according to the Christian tradition. This motif was built upon the Jewish tradition of angels sent from God for bringing news or instructions, or intervening as needed. Islamic interpretations, also building on the same traditions, are similar—although the figural representation is less common in Muslim artwork.

Prior to such figures, winged creatures known as Nikes were depicted by ancient Greek and Roman artists to show a moment of victory, sometimes, as is the case here, further symbolized by the award of a fillet, a band wrapped around the head, or laurel wreath. (Figure 5.26) These winged figures were sometimes gods or goddesses. The genie figures that adorned palace walls in the ancient Near East, including horses, bulls, lions, and other animals, were also winged to show their superior and sometimes god-like powers or origins. (Figure 5.27) Other examples include the goddess Isis of ancient Egypt, and the Persian god Ahura Mazda. (Figures 5.28 and 5.29)

Another set of prominent Christian iconographic motifs are the winged symbols which often represent the Four Evangelists in art: Matthew is the winged man or angel; Mark, the winged lion; Luke, a winged ox; and John, an eagle. (Figure 5.30) At the same time they refer to four key events in the life of Christ: the Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Interpretations
of these evangelist symbols are rooted in the Old Testament Vision of Ezekiel and the New Testament Book of Revelation, as related by the writings of St. Jerome in the fifth century CE. They accrued additional iconographic details over the centuries, with implications of their status as the special creatures who surround the celestial throne of God—again, signifying that the wings facilitate movement between the realms traditionally ascribed to a deity, a god or goddess, and divinely related creatures. This use of wings clearly reflects human contemplation of the abilities that birds have to defy gravity and to express artistically the lofty aspirations of the earthbound.

Another frequently used iconographic motif that appears across the ages and across cultures is the halo, usually a circular area of light appearing behind the head of a person or creature. One example is the halo that appears behind the heads of Christ and the symbolic winged creatures in Figure 5.30. Note that Christ’s halo has a cross form embedded in it, and his entire body is surrounded by a circle of light (made up of four arcs) known as an aureole or mandorla. Such devices, in many related forms, indicate a radiance that surrounds certain figures, showing their sanctity, divinity, or divine favor. It indicates their aura of holiness, with implications of their being infused with warmth, inflamed with divinity or with divine love. In some of the Asian versions, notably Hindu or Buddhist, the radiance is literally comprised of flames.

Frequently seen, as well, are such items as crowns, thrones, regalia like scepters, garments like official capes, monks’ robes, or uniforms of all varieties—indications of a person’s belonging to a specific group, class, or office that lead the viewer to identify
some specific aspect of who the person might be and what role they have in the depiction. The positioning of figures relative to one another should also be read in order to discern meaning, interactions, relative rank, and other implications. The types of garb, accompanying items, and positioning often relate the message to a specific time and place by giving historical and cultural context through details of style or motifs used.

For example, on the stele depicting his victory over the Lullubi, the Akkadian ruler Naram Sin (r. c. 2254-2218 BCE) wears a horned helmet and is much bigger than the men around him. (Figure 5.31) He ascends the mountain as his enemies beg for mercy under the watch of astral deities, and that shows his relationship to them as the source of his power and right to rule. In the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441, Belgium), we can also see a variety of such motifs: Christ, wearing the papal tiara as a crown; Mary, richly dressed and humbly reading; and John the Baptist, in his garment of penitence, and preaching. (Figure 5.32) Adorned with jewels and gold on his clothing, the throne on which he sits, and the crown at his feet, Christ is here being shown as the king of Heaven as well as Earth.
5.4.5 Metaphorical Meanings

The metaphorical meanings of specific artworks also depend upon a certain level of viewer knowledge and insight. A **metaphor** is a figure of speech in which one thing symbolically stands for another, perhaps unrelated, thing or idea.

In *1550 Chairs Stacked Between Two City Buildings* by Doris Salcedo (b. 1958, Columbia), we see a metaphorical treatment of life change. (*1550 Chairs Stacked Between Two City Buildings*, Doris Salcedo: [http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/doris-salcedo-1550-chairs-stacked](http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/doris-salcedo-1550-chairs-stacked)) It is a view of displacement resulting from a 1985 uprising in her Colombian homeland that left many migrants displaced or dead, as well as similar catastrophic events in locales across the globe. The jumbled mass of furniture alludes to the upheaval of lives that are...
overturned by mass violence and terrorism, often of those already without roots, community, or stable lifestyles. The victims, frequently anonymous and relatively invisible in the site of such a revolt, nonetheless left some hints of their presence in the chaotic remnants of their fleeting existence, in a place where they had established so little sense of their individual identities. Her metaphorical expression gives a probing glimpse of the devastation such events have wrought around the world.

5.5 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

Another way that we can consider art is to consider the context of its creation and use. Any work of art will reflect, to some extent, the cultural moment in which it appeared. This means that the artist and/or patron made choices that reflect the physical place and the cultural or subcultural group in which they lived and worked and the shared ways of being, living, or thinking that defined that group. The group’s defining features might be national, regional, racial, ethnic, religious, economic, or related to gender, age, occupation, avocation, class, condition, or some other aspect(s) they have in common, by choice or by chance.

The artworks we encounter are filled with iconographic reference, symbols, and metaphorical allusions that give us clues to the broader and deeper meanings that were intended by the artist or patron. These prompt us to further investigation and/or contemplation that can lead us to those meanings. At the same time, they can also prompt insights beyond the original meaning, especially when they are presented as a partial statement of a larger myth or narrative we already know and understand or we might discover through further research. It is important for us to distinguish between those types of reading as we explore—to carefully differentiate between what we can learn about the original meaning and our own responses to what we see. This is true of all sorts of symbolism, as we should avoid the temptation to ascribe a truly universal idea or meaning for a symbol or motif. This makes both the discovery process and the viewing experience endlessly interesting.

Some works purposefully oppose prevailing issues in the culture, and pointedly so. We will see these oppositions in detail when we look at works concerned with religion, war, race, gender, and other themes. Thus, in order to understand and analyze the full meaning of any specific artwork, we must take into account just where and when it was made and what socio-cultural, symbolic, and iconographic features and meanings might be considered as relevant factors in its creation and use.

Test Yourself

1. How are seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings related to historical events in the Netherlands at that time?

2. How did Lilly Martin Spencer counter social conventions of behavior at the time she was painting?
3. Describe an example of how industrial advances in the nineteenth century impacted art in the United States.

4. Give an example of how personal identity might be expressed in art.

5. Give an example of symbolism used and its meaning in Chinese painting during the Yuan Dynasty.

6. Give an example of art being used in scientific discoveries.

7. Give an example of a symbolic object and its meaning.

8. Define symbolism and iconography, and describe the difference between them.

9. Describe the relationship between symbolism and visual literacy.

10. What did objects found at the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial visually communicate?

11. What are some commonalities in what is represented in the Column of Trajan and the Bayeux Tapestry?

12. Describe changes in the symbolic motif of winged creature in human form (today an angel) prior to Christianity.

13. Describe how symbolic motifs can be used to indicate divinity or a ruler.

14. Give an example of metaphoric meaning in art.

### 5.6 KEY TERMS

- **aureole or mandorla**: a pointed circle of light or radiance surrounding a holy figure.

- **cloisonné**: decorative work created by affixing metal strips to a surface, making compartments, that are filled with powdered material and melted at high temperatures.

- **deity**: a divinity, a god or goddess.

- **genre**: subjects or scenes of everyday life.

- **golden ratio**: a relationship of parts achieved when the longer part divided by the smaller part is also equal to the whole length divided by the longer part; the golden ratio in art and architecture provides the most harmonious and visually pleasing proportions.

- **halo**: usually a circular area of light appearing behind the head of a holy person or creature.
Hierarchical arrangement: where the hierarchy or ranking of people or objects is represented by their different sizes, according to their relative importance.

hoard: a collection of objects.

iconography: the study and interpretation of subject matter and pictorial themes in a work of art.

mandorla: (see aureole).

martyr: individual who died for their faith.

metaphor: a figure of speech in which one thing symbolically stands for another, perhaps unrelated, thing or idea.
6.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the purposes art serves in society
- Understand the philosophy of aesthetics in the visual arts
- Understand the function of art as a means of communication
- Understand how architectural forms contributed and enhanced to religious cultures

6.2 INTRODUCTION

Art has been described as humankind’s most enduring achievement. From the time of early cave dwelling to contemporary society, art has served as a vehicle for translating our insights into understanding others and ourselves. The creation of art may have different aims, for example, to make something beautiful, to be broadly expressive and emotional (without connection to beauty) for personal reasons, to illustrate concepts and beliefs of great importance to its creators, to show ways in which a group is unified, or to make a social or political statement. These disparate aims have one thing in common: they each seek in some way to connect art to our lives.

6.3 AESTHETICS

Aesthetics, the study of principles and appreciation of beauty, is linked to our thinking about and connections to art. During the eighteenth century in Europe, philosophers and other thinkers began to question the interrelationship of art, beauty, and pleasure. German philosopher Immanuel Kant characterized the appreciation of beauty as the “judgment of taste,” which is comprised of two parts: subjectivity and universality. Subjectivity, as the term suggests, is based on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure experienced by the individual viewer. Universality refers to views about art that are held in common, the “norm,” so to speak. Kant believed the beauty of art can only
be appreciated when the viewer is “disinterested,” that is, when the viewer is deriving pleasure that is not based upon or produces desire. If the viewer’s subjective judgment is disinterested, then a universally valid measure of taste can be rendered. Only if the viewer can separate the appreciation of art from the desire for it, and is instead interested in art for its pure beauty, or aesthetics, can the viewer be said to have achieved the judgment of taste.

Writers, composers, and artists who were part of the Romantic movement that emerged in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century soon questioned Kant’s belief that aesthetics or the study of beauty in art, what he termed the judgment of taste, was both disinterested and universal. Turning away from categories and definitions based on rationality, Romanticism celebrated spontaneity, emotion, the individual, and the sublime: intellectual and imaginative sensations that defy measurement or explanation.

Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863, France) spent his lifetime seeking to express the extremes of human emotion and experience in his work based on history, literature, current events, and his own travels. With passages of brilliant color applied in thick, vigorous brush strokes, Delacroix depicted beauty, violence, tragedy, and ecstasy with equal passion, in waves of movement swiftly passing across his canvas. This quality can be seen in *The Death of Sardanapalus* where the shadowed figure of the Assyrian king surveys the scene of carnage taking place before him with dispassion. (Figure 6.1) Although historical accounts indicate that Sardanapalus did have all of his possessions destroyed, including his concubines and horses, rather than surrender them to his enemies, Delacroix largely relied on his own imagination for his frenzied interpretation and embellishment of the scene.

John Dewey, an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, in 1934 wrote *Art and Experience*. He described the aesthetic experience in ways that somewhat reflect the process Delacroix brought to his painting. Dewey stated, however, that although it begins with the art object, the experience of art extends far beyond that one element to produce an ongoing exchange between artist, viewer, and culture at large that culminates in an experience that is a...
“manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization.” The “sudden” pleasure one feels when engaging with a work of art or architecture is, in fact, the product of a long process of growth and engagement. For example, walking around and through a grand structure such as Reims Cathedral (1211-1275) in France, with its High Gothic façade, lavish sculptural decoration, extreme verticality, and expansive windows, is breathtakingly impressive because object (building) and experience have coalesced. (Figure 6.2) Further, we continue learning from the experience of observing art or beauty—what, why, and when depends on how much we receive from the experience and from successive encounters.

The movement in thinking about aesthetics from Kant’s judgment of taste, with its assumption of an intellectually-based universality, to Dewey’s claim that the aesthetics of the work of art are found in the viewer’s experience of it, at that moment and over time, mirror substantial changes that have taken place in all aspects of scientific and intellectual thought over the past three centuries. What we can learn from their theories is that we can examine ideas about “fine arts,” “beauty,” and “aesthetics” and perhaps come up with similar definitions conveying ideas of pleasure, temporary enlightenment, and human experience—but, we may not.

For example, Miami-based artist Jona Cerwinske (USA), began his career making graffiti art and street murals and considers any surface a ground for art. In 2007, he covered a Lamborghini car with an intertwined network of organic shapes and geometric lines. (Lamborghini Art, Jona Cerwinske: [http://www.dubmagazine.com/home/cars/item/8746-jona-cerwinske-exotic-art](http://www.dubmagazine.com/home/cars/item/8746-jona-cerwinske-exotic-art)) This work of art could be described as an example of disinterested contemplation: you look at the Lamborghini and contemplate the beauty and elegance of the car and its design. In this way, the car’s aesthetic appeal stems from admiration of the object and the delight it gives; it is a judgment of taste. Conversely, it could be described as an aesthetic experience: looking at the Lamborghini produces a response of pleasure, perhaps at its beauty, its place in the history of fine motor cars, or the thought of owning and driving such a prestigious and fast vehicle. In this case, appreciation of beauty is both a broadly intellectual as well as an individual emotional response.

6.4 EXPRESSION (PHILOSOPHICAL, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, PERSONAL)

Art has important functions in facilitating various types of human expression. Both creating and viewing art can provide us means of stating or affirming our personal and collective feelings, thoughts, ideals, and attitudes. Often we learn values and philosophical ideas and themes through artistic means.

Among the many philosophy-based art movements of the late nineteenth century was the French group who called themselves les Nabis, or the prophets. Their task as artists, they believed, was to revive ideals of painting, to prophesy modern modes, and to affirm spiritual goals by envisioning nature’s roles in life and creating a new symbolism. Among the movement’s leaders was Maurice Denis (1870-1943, France), who often depicted landscape settings imbued with biblical or mythical themes. (Figure 6.3) His paintings are abstracted statements about his philosophies of faith and of the need for honesty in art. With willowy figural forms that were lyrically flattened in space, he asserted the two-dimensionality of the picture plane, seeking to avoid the delusions of depth and emphasizing the surface of the work and the beauty of color.

Political statements are often wed to philosophical principles in the ways that they are given artistic expression. Such was the case with grand American landscape paintings such as Emigrants Crossing the Plains by Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902, Germany, lived USA). (Figure 6.4) This painting was associated with the nineteenth-century philos-
ophy of Manifest Destiny which promoted the idea that the assimilation of land and the use of the natural resources of the western parts of the United States were God-given rights and duties for the people who had settled here. Essentially, the settlers (who were mainly of European descent) were destined to occupy and civilize the lands from one coast to the other. This philosophy justified the political actions that took away the Native Americans’ rights and also led to the Mexican-American War (1846-1848).

The history of art is replete with instances of political statements and political propaganda, as we have seen. In ancient Rome, the Emperor Augustus not only presented himself as very young and fit in his portrait (see Figure 4.20), but also promoted his political agenda through such public monuments as the *Ara Pacis*. (Figure 6.5) This altar dedicated to the goddess of peace is adorned with messages about the peace and prosperity Augustus was bringing to the citizens through his many virtues and achievements, including his conquest of foreign lands, association with the Roman deities, role as chief priest, promotion of the family as the cornerstone of the empire, wisdom of the imperial/senatorial rule, and alleged ancestry leading back to the legendary founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus. All these pictorial messages served to characterize the ways that Augustus wanted his relationship to the people to be perceived. With its enclosed altar table, the *Ara Pacis* also carried religious messages about the practices of making sacrifices to the pagan deities, carried out by Augustus in his role as chief priest.

Such public artistic expressions have been common throughout time, but there have also been many statements of personal belief, sentiment, or feeling. Personal statements can also reflect on a person’s status or occupation. Painter Adélaïde Labille-Guiard (1749-1803, France) portrays herself as highly positioned in society by virtue of her own skills in portraiture and her role as a teacher. (Figure 6.6) John Singleton Copley (1738-1815 USA, lived England) created a portrait of *Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwait* that conveys her
wealth and status through clothing and setting. (Figure 6.7) At the same time, by having her reach for the fruit on the table, he alludes to her other accomplishments, including being the mother of thirteen children, a gifted gardener, and a wealthy landowner with orchards in colonial Boston.

6.5 UNIFICATION/EXCLUSION

Art and architecture can be used as a means of bringing together a group of people with like beliefs or views, and emphasizing what they have in common. In demonstrating how they are alike, such objects and places can also indicate how others are different, which can lead to the exclusion of those who hold different beliefs or views. The Dome of the Rock is such a place.

The events that have been agreed upon as having occurred, and their relative importance, are key to understanding the Dome of the Rock or Qubbat as-Kakhrah in Jerusalem. (Figure 6.8) Its site, origins, and various past and present uses are all factors in the shrine’s meaning and significance to the people of different backgrounds and faiths for whom it is a holy place. The Dome of the Rock was completed in 691 CE as a shrine for Muslim pilgrims by the Umayyad caliph, or political and religious leader, Abd al-Malik. The sacred rock upon which the shrine is built marks the site where Muhammad ascended to heaven on a winged horse. Part of the Temple Mount or Mount Zion, the rock is said to have great importance before Muhammad, as well, by those of the Jewish, Roman, and Christian faiths. It is the site where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac; according to the Hebrew Bible, Solomon’s Temple, also known as the First Temple, was later erected there; Herod’s Temple, completed during the reign of the Persian King Darius I around 516 BCE was next built; and it was destroyed in 70 CE under Roman Emperor Titus, who had a temple to the god Jupiter built on the site.
As Christianity grew in the succeeding centuries, the city of Jerusalem, then part of the Byzantine Empire (c. 330-1453), became a destination for pilgrims visiting places Jesus was said to have lived or traveled to in his lifetime. But, the city came under Muslim rule in 637 CE, and it is thought that Caliph Abd al-Malik had the Dome of the Rock built on the holy site to demonstrate the lasting power of the Islamic faith, and to rival the Byzantine Christian churches in the region. As a young faith, Islam did not yet have a “vocabulary” of architectural forms established. Muslim builders and artisans instead borrowed from existing structures—houses of worship, palaces, fortifications—throughout the Mediterranean and Near East.

One of the inspirations for the Dome of the Rock is the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, also in Jerusalem, that was built in 325/326 CE on what is believed to be Calvary, where Jesus was crucified, as well as the sepulcher, or tomb, where he was buried and resurrected. (Figure 6.9) While the overall plans of the two buildings are markedly different, the domes are nearly the same shape and size: the dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is approximately sixty-nine feet in height and diameter, while that of the Dome of the Rock is sixty-seven feet. Each of the eight outer walls of the Dome of the Rock is sixty-seven feet, as well, giving the octagonal structure the balance of relative proportions, and rhythmic repetition of forms found in many Christian central-plan churches, that is, with the primary space located in the center. (Interior Diagram of the Church: https://www.studyblue.com/notes/n/3-islamic-art/deck/1762017)

The Dome of the Rock has passed between the hands of Muslims, Christians, and Jews many times since it was built. Today, Jerusalem is part of Israel, but the Dome of the Rock is maintained by an Islamic council within Jordan’s Ministry of Awqaf (religious trust), Islamic Affairs, and Holy Places. Since 2006, non-Muslims have again been allowed on the Temple Mount, during certain hours and after having gone through security checkpoints, but Muslims only are allowed into the Dome of the Rock. Some Orthodox Jews believe it is against their faith to visit the holy site at all.

The Dome of the Rock is one example of a holy site upon which a building or a succession of buildings devoted to different religious beliefs has been erected. Such a structure may have been used for hundreds of years by a group following a faith dissimilar to those before or after who claim ownership of it, and the structure may share architectural elements with houses of worship from other religious systems. Those things are not necessarily important to the believers, although there are numerous occasions in history when destruction of a holy building with the intention of replac-
ing it with a place of worship sacred to the new regime symbolizes a conqueror’s defeat of a people and their religion.

Key, however, is the conviction that the site is hallowed: the holiness of the place is believed without question. Keeping that in mind, recognizing the long, varied, and sometimes contentious history of the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock, and the city of Jerusalem, as well as the significance of events that have taken place there to people of the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian faiths, what is remarkable is the site is not one of exclusion. There is tension and at best a parallel existence of religious ideologies, but considering the divergent meanings and strong significance of the site as a place of pilgrimage and worship to so many, while the Dome of the Rock is far from being a model of unification, it is not an example of rejection.

On a more individual level, Winslow Homer (1836-1910, USA) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and started his career there as a printmaker before moving to New York City in 1859. He opened his own studio and did freelance work for Harper’s Weekly, making sketches that he and other illustrators produced as wood engravings for the journal. Once the Civil War began in 1861, Homer became an artist-correspondent for the magazine, sometimes traveling to capture scenes on battlegrounds, in soldiers’ camps, and other newsworthy locales. He often created informal narratives about both military and civilian life, the war as experienced by those on the battle lines as well as the home front. His images and the stories they told were about the people, their efforts, bravery, sacrifices, and attempts to maintain a semblance of normalcy in the midst of a war that was tearing the nation apart.

In addition to his drawings and prints, Homer began painting Civil War subjects in 1862. He showed a number of these paintings to critical and popular acclaim in the annual exhibitions at the National Academy of Design in New York between 1863 and 1866. One of the last Civil War paintings he created was The Veteran in a New Field. (Figure 6.10) He started it shortly after the war ended and President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, both events occurring in April 1865. Homer depicts a soldier who has returned to his farm. Having cast aside his Union jacket, the soldier-farmer has taken up his scythe and, with broad horizontal
sweeps, harvests a bountiful crop. This quiet scene is a reminder of the never-ending process of life, death, and rebirth. Homer captures the sense of anxious relief, deep sorrow, and tentative hope individuals and nation alike were experiencing at that time of transition.

Homer was quietly calling for a healing of the Union, seeking grounds for unification of a bitterly divided and sorely wounded nation. He saw this recovery as being possible through the continuity of meaning found in the land and commonalities of work.

6.6 COMMUNICATION

In past societies in which art played a central role, people communicated through their creativity. In societies where many people were illiterate, they understood and learned more from symbolism and images than from words. One such example is the *Snake Goddess* discovered by archaeologist Arthur Evans and his team in 1903 at the Palace of Knossos on the island of Crete. (Figure 6.11) Part of the Minoan civilization (c. 3650-c. 1,450 BCE), this deity is believed to be a fertility symbol, also known as a “Mother Goddess,” a religious symbol that appears from prehistoric eras until the Roman Empire. The snake held in each of the figure’s upraised hands is associated with fertility and symbolizes the renewal of life due to the fact that it periodically sheds its skin. The object tells us about the type of culture from which it is derived, articulating their beliefs, traditions, and customs. For the Minoans, there was no need to explain or interpret this image because it was easily understood by their community.

For Chinese art, different periods in history have given way to different meanings attributed to its imagery. Although numerous textiles, calligraphy, ceramics, paintings, sculptures, and other objects and works from China are thousands of years old, the idea of grouping them under the description of “Chinese art” has a short history. In this sense, art in China is not really that old. This is because the vast majority of people in China did not see the artefacts that are the artistic heritage of that country before the twentieth century—when the Nantong Museum, the first built by the Chinese and not colonial occupiers, opened in 1905—despite the existence of a sophisticated tradition of creating art and of collecting and showing art to the elite.
Categorizing Chinese art allowed statements to be made about the art and people. The various ways in which different meanings have been read into Chinese art at different periods of time is well illustrated in this jade gui tablet. (Jade Tablet: http://culture.teldap.tw/culture/images/collection/20120807_NPM/jade04.jpg) A gui is a ritual scepter, held by a ruler during ceremonies as a symbol of rank and power. According to researcher Tsai Wen Hsiung, the history of using jade can be traced back seven thousand years. Looking at jade plaques unearthed from the Stone Age and Neolithic period, it is evident that the Chinese people were the first to carve jade for ornaments. This jade tablet is from the Late Shandong Longshan Culture (c. 2650-2050 BCE). Located in Shandong province, it was the last Neolithic jade culture in the Yangtze Valley River region, a land area rich in resources. The tablet is one of a large number of artifacts made from jade in that creative era, many of which replicated weapons and tools. Jade was the most precious material available in the Yangtze region at the time the jade gui tablet was made.

The tablet represents the excellent manufactured craftsmanship of the Shandong Longshan culture. The stone has a yellow tone with grey and ochre natural coloring resulting from aging over time. In low relief slightly below the middle of the tablet is a stylized face of a god shown in a typically flattened view. (Detail of Jade Tablet: http://culture.teldap.tw/culture/images/collection/20120807_NPM/jade05.jpg) There is an eighteenth-century inscription by a Chinese emperor who provides an explanation of the decoration. According to art historian Chang Li-tuan, the tablet was originally plain, but during the Ch’ien–lung reign two poems from different years were engraved on it; the last engraving in 1754 was by the Ch’ien–lung Emperor. The stone with its décor of symbolic images and inscriptions represents the Chinese love of antiquity, depicting a people uniquely proud of interpreting their history. It also shows us the tradition in Chinese art of contributing to the meaning of a work by adding words and imagery to it over time. In doing so, both the symbolism and the status of the object are enhanced.

A more modern use of communicating through symbols in art can be found among the Ashanti people of Ghana, West Africa, and the Kente cloth woven by them and others in the region, including the Ewe people. Using silk and cotton, the cloth is woven on specially designed looms in four-inch strips that are then sewn together. (Figure 6.12) Kente cloth was tra-
ditionally worn by kings during special ceremonies. The patterns and symbols woven into the cloth conveyed highly individualized messages that could not be reproduced by the weavers for any other individuals. Colors conveyed mood, with darker shades associated with grieving and lighter shades with happiness. Although the cloth was originally for political leaders, the design was not meant to convey a political message: it represented the culture’s spiritual beliefs in symbols and colors.

In his conceptual art, Mel Chin (b. 1951, USA) does make a political statement. For example, he examines the psychological and social issues of imperialism in his black nine-by-fourteen-foot spider. In the stomach of the giant, intimidating spider is a glass case containing an 1843 china teapot on a silver serving tray. (Cabinet of Craving, Jesse Lott and Madeline O’Connor: http://melchin.org/oeuvre/cabinet-of-craving) The sculpture symbolizes the destructive co-dependence of empires, depicting the English craving for tea and porcelain during the Victorian era and the Chinese desire for silver that led to the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60). Although Chin takes an indirect approach in making his political statement, it is nevertheless powerful.

6.7 PROTEST AND SHOCK

Art also connects to our lives as a means of expressing protest, as can be seen in the work of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith (b. 1940, USA), a Native American who often sarcastically comments on the history of the treatment of her people by Americans in general and by the United States government in particular. The impetus for these two works was the 1992 celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of the “New World.” (Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People), Juane Quick-to-See Smith: http://www.chrysler.org/ajax/load-artwork/26; Paper Dolls for a Post Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by US Government, Juane Quick-to-See Smith: http://sam.nmartmuseum.org/view/objects/asitem/People$0040636/5/primaryMakerAlpha-asc?t:state:flow=41dede4d-4192-4c2a-86e4-cd9d50f583c2) Her commentary includes the commercialization and stereotyping of her people, and their relegation to reservations, with forced cultural changes, as well as such harmful effects as the introduction of the deadly smallpox disease among people with no previous exposure to it. Her drawings and paintings are often very simple and straightforward in method and style but show masterful techniques that she developed through sophisticated artistic training.

Certainly, the category of shock could be applied to the works by Smith we have just seen, and shock has been used increasingly in contemporary art to bolster political statements of protest or just commentary on our expectations and frames of reference. Ron Mueck (b. 1958, Australia) has made a point of repeatedly challenging the viewer with questions about life and relationships in his hyperrealist sculpture. (Mask II, Ron Mueck: http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/mueck/images/MUECKron_MaskII_EXHII010912_RGB.jpg) He often creates works of the human form that are exceptionally out of scale, unexpectedly undressed, or placed in unusual postures, thereby creating many surprises among gallery goers, especially those who approach these uncanny works at a close distance.
6.8 CELEBRATION AND COMMEMORATION

The use of art to note the observance of particular life events for ordinary people, rulers, and officials of all sorts has been a frequent theme and appears in all eras and in myriad styles. The presentation of such an event can very effectively call attention to a distinctive new approach an artist takes. Such is the case for a painting in celebration of a wedding created by Henri Rousseau (1844-1910, France), a mostly self-taught artist. (Figure 6.13) Due to such stylistic traits as the lack of formal one-point perspective and simplified treatment of the human form, Rousseau was described by critics as a naive painter. His style was embraced by many avant-garde artists at the time, however, as boldly moving away from traditional methods and ideas taught in art schools at the time.

Artwork to express the grief of the living and to preserve and honor the memory of the deceased can be found in all ages and cultures. Funerary markers, some large and elaborate, have appeared in many eras. From ancient Greece, for example, we have a marble grave stele, or marker, carved with a portrait of a noblewoman seated on a Greek klismos chair, a curved-leg style then popular, while select-

Figure 6.13 | The Wedding Party
Artist: Henri Rousseau
Source: Wikiart
License: Public Domain

Figure 6.14 | Funerary Stele of Hegeso
Artist: Kallimachos
Author: User “Marsyas”
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: CC BY-SA 3.0
ing a piece of jewelry from a young servant woman standing before her. (Figure 6.14) The jewelry, now missing, stood for the wealth of the individual, family, and society at large, and the state of well being that will continue for the group in spite of one individual’s death.

6.9 WORSHIP

Perhaps the most frequent use of art as a means of connecting to viewers’ lives through the ages has been for religious purposes, often entailing the aspects of worship whereby a deity, person, or narrative is presented for the viewer to use in order to express their devotion, as an occasion of worship, or to contemplate its meaning. Among the most formalized types are cult statues—images of deities, saints, or revered figures—such as Varaha, the boar-headed avatar, or physical form, of the Hindu god Vishnu. Here, Varaha is rescuing the goddess Bhudevi by slaying the demon that had trapped her in the ocean. (Figure 6.15) Dangling in mid-air as she holds his tusk, Varaha returned Bhudevi to her rightful place on earth.

Other examples include the enormous altarpieces that were a central focus in churches during the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque (seventeenth century) eras in Europe, altarpieces such as El Transparente in the Cathedral of Toledo, Spain. Its elaborate carvings and gilding interplay with natural sunlight that streams in from strategically placed openings in the wall and ceiling. (Figure 6.16) Such works are designed to be awe-inspiring, presenting the viewer/believer with a spectacular visual expression of mysteries of the faith.
6.10 INFORMATION, EDUCATION, AND INSPIRATION

Art has often been used as a means to inform, to educate, and to inspire, and the religious works that we have viewed have been traditionally used for these purposes. In addition to those, we need to consider the many forms than have long been used to provide information for secular, or non-religious, purposes as well as those that have emerged more recently.

Perhaps the first would be the creation of scrolls and book forms, both of which occurred very early, the exact dates of which are indeterminate. We know the Egyptians created a form of paper made from flexible papyrus stems they rolled into scrolls and the Romans developed the codex form of books we use today, although each of these forms is also known to have been used by others. The Egyptians developed their system of writing in hieroglyphs, abstracted pictures that represent words or sounds, around 3,400 BCE. Literacy and writing was restricted among the Egyptians to highly educated scribes. (Figure 6.17) By around the first century BCE, the Romans had formalized a system of tiered education, that is, progressing through grades based on age and development of skills. Although formal schooling was generally reserved to those who could afford it, education was not restricted to any particular class or group. While the ancient Chinese used paper and printing methods from as early as the first century, these did not appear in the Western world for centuries afterwards. The invention of the printing press and movable type by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany in 1439 was truly momentous, as both written and pictorial forms could then be replicated and dispersed widely. (Figures 6.18 and 6.19)

The advent of photography beginning in the 1830s considerably broadened the potential dissemination of information. Photography’s use in
CHAPTER SIX: CONNECTING ART IN OUR LIVES

INTRODUCTION TO ART

printed matter developed, and is notable for, the journalistic approach and documentary features it brought to newspapers and magazines in the early twentieth century that continue to this day. The graphic arts presented new means and a new arena for artists and also for the spread of information. Of course, at the same time, the potential for manipulation of these means resulted in the spread of a great wealth of material of dubious accuracy and purpose. Misinformation is spread as easily as information, so the need to critically evaluate the material and ideas you gather is increasingly important if you seek truth from art.

The early and mid-twentieth century brought us movies and television. From the late twentieth century to the present, the growth of visual media has greatly expanded the possibilities to the point that we are constantly bombarded with data we must assess with regard to its truth and value. The possibilities for gathering information and for using artistic means to inform are now broad and deep, and provide us with richly enticing and inspirational imagery for our viewing, thinking, learning, and art-making of all types.

6.11 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

We have observed in this chapter that art is like a mirror reflecting, communicating, and interpreting self, individuals, and society. Throughout history from primitive to modern, humans have been able to express a variety of ideas and feelings and even to evoke responses from neighbors through artistic markings and with the creation of structures. Those artistic expressions have been a major source in understanding each other and the world we live in. It has communicated in many different ways and styles the practical and abstraction, the cultural and the aesthetics of a people. As we have previously noted, Immanuel Kant characterized beauty or aesthetics and the practicality of it as a systematic way in understanding the range of the arts. We have noted that art can be an instrumental discipline, a powerful social or political force by which society interprets, controls, modifies, or adapts to their environment or to their personal taste and/or beliefs. Examples include the political and social statements of Jaune Quick-To-See Smith’s “the Quincentenary Non-Celebration” or Jona Cerwinske’s graffiti and murals, or the romantic

![Etching of 16th Century Printer](Figure 6.19 | Etching of 16th Century Printer
Artist: Jost Amman
Author: User "Parhamr"
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain)
and sacred aesthetic styles of Albert Bierstadt and Maurice Denis; the genre representation of cultural identity in the Ashante Kente cloth and the hyperrealist works of sculptor Ron Mueck; and in earlier years, a holy site like the Islamic structure The Dome of the Rock that is identified and recognized as a holy place by several diverse religious groups: Muslims, Jews and Catholics, thus representing several diverse groups all of which communicate powerful artistic messages. Each and all bring people together with like beliefs or views through an artistic structure of communicating: *creativity* (a substance of inventive, original, imaginative ideas); *disposition* (the character, temperament, formal structure qualities, and sequence); and *style* (communicating and delivering specific resources and physical attributes that send off a reaction).

**Test Yourself**

1. How did the development of photography impact social consciousness and awareness in the arts; cite examples. Discuss and show change and influence.

2. Historically, markings have been a means of delivering a religious message to different cultures. Identify and discuss at least three different early written religious art forms used to communicate a message. Explain the message and how it is influenced by the artist style in written form or imagery.

3. How have people used art to commemorate events in their lives throughout history? Show examples of images and elaborate on artist style and presentation of depicting the event.

**6.12 KEY TERMS**

**aesthetics:** the study of principles and appreciation of beauty.

**Ara Pacis:** an enclosed altar in Rome dedicated to Pax, the Roman goddess of Peace.

**artifacts:** a tool, weapon, or ornament created by humans that usually has historical significance.

**avant-garde:** works of art that are innovative, experimental, different from the norm or on the cutting edge.

**avatar:** physical form of the Hindu god Vishnu.

**Bhudevi:** a Hindu earth goddess and the divine wife of Varaha, an Avatar of Vishnu.

**central-plan churches:** are symbolic to reference the cross of Christ. Its round, cruciform, or polygonal design was popular in the West and East after the fourth century.

**gui:** a ritual scepter, held by a ruler during ceremonies as a symbol of rank and power.

**hieroglyphs:** abstracted pictures that represent words or sounds.
Kente cloth: woven silk and cotton wrap worn by Ashante kings during special ceremonies.

klismos chair: a curved-leg chair style popular in Ancient Greece.

les Nabis: a movement of Post-impressionist graphic and fine artists in France during the 1890s.

Neolithic period: known also as the Stone Age, is the last stage of prehistoric human cultural evolution. It is a period known for its polished stone tools, spread of architecture, megalithic architecture, and domestication of animals.

Palace of Knossos: the first Minoan monument located in Knossos. It was the residence of King Minos’s dynasty, where he ruled.

Shandong Longshan Culture: Central China’s Neolithic culture named after Longshan, Shandong Province. The culture is known for its production of black pottery.

Stele: grave marker.

Varaha: a Hindu god in the form of a boar during the Satya Yuga.
7 Form in Architecture

Rita Tekippe, Jeffrey LeMieux, and Pamela J. Sachant

7.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

• Understand the differences between function and form in architecture
• Understand how form and function work together in architecture created for different purposes
• Understand different types and uses of architecture

7.2 INTRODUCTION

So far, we have given very little consideration to architecture, yet it is one of the most culturally significant forms of art. Often, with structures that were built for group activities, they reflect the culture, its values, style, purposes, and preferences in the time and place more broadly and deeply than settings where individual choices might predominate. And decoration of such architectural settings, even if individual needs and ideals have been expressed through painting or sculptural themes, generally reflects the greater permanence of a structure expected to serve the group’s purposes and needs.

The earliest buildings were likely designed to shelter a family or small group that lived together. Soon group needs came into play, and the community may have wanted to provide for joint activities of several types such as ritual/worship, group protection, government, markets, and other commercial needs. The types expanded as the societies grew, diversified, specialized, and sought ways to meet needs for both individuals and communities. The specific purposes led to diverse designs, and cultural values influenced both practical and stylistic choices. We will survey a small sample of landmark types from across the centuries from several different viewpoints, depending upon the significance of features for the individual examples. Our focus will sometimes be on the plan or layout of the structure, materials used in its creation, or spatial considerations as they relate to purposes and use. At other times, we will look at how the building is situated within a community, or
how patrons, owners, and community members influence its construction and use. We will examine in greater detail the ritual uses, meanings, and significance of architectural settings and their decoration, in Chapter 10 Art and Ritual Life: Symbolism of Space and Ritual Objects.

Before we start our discussion, you should familiarize yourself with the basics of building, that is, how you might create walls and place openings in the walls while supporting the parts of the structure above. The most basic method is the post-and-lintel design in which two upright beams support a horizontal one to create a rectangular opening. (Figure 7.1) Before long, builders also devised a variety of arches, a curved or pointed structure spanning an opening and supporting the weight above, and then created further modifications of these techniques to develop barrel vaults, a series of circular arches that form a ceiling or roof, and domes, spherical-shaped ceiling or roof. (Diagram of Roman Arches: https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/520/flashcards/1154520/jpg/untitled-13EF5EB39821CEF88AF.jpg; Domes: http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-jbiaW24DTZI/TVxCBDxxoTI/AAAAAAAACk/VytZmNg0UKo/si600/40-typology-dome.jpg) They also made variations that served decorative purposes. Over time, these have been imaginatively used for a tremendous variety of structural and decorative purposes, and you should keep them in mind as we investigate an array of buildings that reflect cultural concerns and human needs of all sorts. We will classify these buildings into several groups, although noting that a great number of them were multi-purpose: residential/housing, community needs, commercial buildings and centers, governmental structures, and those designed for worship.

7.3 RESIDENTIAL NEEDS

The earliest types of shelters were likely caves found by humans as they wandered to hunt and gather food and to find refuge from bad weather or pursuing creatures. The first independently standing structures were made of materials that were impermanent, that is, those found in nature—sticks, bones, animal pelts—and fashioned to create a covered space apparently as a protection from the elements. We have little evidence left for us to know fully how they were built and used, but some vestiges do remain that have enabled scholars to make reconstructions. (Figure 7.2)
As people became more settled, domesticated animals, and cultivated crops, they developed such construction techniques as wattle-and-daube (sticks covered with mud), rammed earth (moist dirt and sand or gravel compressed into a temporary frame), and clay bricks (unfired and fired that developed alongside their evolving techniques for creating pottery vessels). (Drawing depicting architectural structure of Chinese round houses: http://arthistoryworlds.org/wp-includes/images/nhatau.jpg) (Figure 7.3)

They used these methods for communal living centers such as the village of Catalhöyük in modern Turkey (7,500-5,700 BCE), including common walls so that the clustered houses supported one another. (Figure 7.4) Such building methods addressed security issues by confining entry into living spaces to openings in the roofs, with ladders that could be retracted to foil trespassers. All of these types had certain common features to meet such everyday needs as warmth, cooking, sleeping, and storage, and were usually centered around a hearth with provision for smoke ventilation. Catalhöyük also included rooms that may have been for other common purposes, varying from shrines to serving as bakeries.

The use of stone for building structures began in prehistoric times,
and an example of such a structure can be seen the Scottish village of Skara Brae (3,180-2,500 BCE). The walls were made of stacked stone while entryways and some of the furniture were created using the post-and-lintel method. (Figure 7.5) Because of the harsh northern climate, the structures were partially underground for protection from the elements. Additionally, covered walkways were created to facilitate movement among its eight units. Seven of these units apparently accommodated a family or small group, while the eighth was a common room, perhaps a workshop. In addition
to cultivating crops, these villagers likely herded, fished, and hunted for food. Stone furnishing such as seating, beds, storage spaces, and other items within the single-room units were around a central fire pit. (Figure 7.6)

With these basic methods, the humble shelter types of the Neolithic Age (c. 7,000-c. 1,700 BCE) and overlapping Chalcolithic (Copper) Age (c. 5,500-c. 1,700 BCE) provided a foundation for buildings of every sort used throughout history (with considerable elaboration of residential structures for the powerful and wealthy). Material choices eventually expanded to include first wood, brick, and stone, and later concrete and metal.

Residential palaces appeared by the time of the two great early civilizations of the Ancient Near East, Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as those of the Aegean Sea: Crete, Cyclades, and mainland Greece prior to the development of the Greek Empire. The Palace at Knossos on the island of Crete was a grand residence for rulers of the Minoan civilization; the palace was built c. 1,700 BCE, after an earlier structure was destroyed by an earthquake, and abandoned between 1,380 and 1,100 BCE. (Drawing of Knossos: http://res.cloudinary.com/hrscywv4p/image/upload/c_limit,f_auto,h_900,q_80,w_1200/v1/245626/Palace_Complex_of_Knossos_vsyfng.jpg) The sprawling complex included residential areas, throne rooms, a central courtyard, and food storage magazines for crops and seafood used in the commercial trading, an important industry and mainstay in sustaining the people. (Floorplan of Residential Palace: https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/16flashcards/3907016/jpg/aa6pxido-1419F6BAD180C1BB19F.jpg) An island civilization, the Minoans were in the rare position of not having to protect themselves from enemies. The Palace at Knossos and similar structures on Crete were not fortified, that is, built behind solid walls and gates to hold off invaders. The palaces were instead built with windows and colonnades, or covered rows of columns, on their exteriors, allowing free circulation of light and air.

Another palace complex, that of Neo-Assyrian King Sargon II (ruled 722-705 BCE) at Dur-Sharrukin, today Khorsabad in Iran, was clearly much more militaristic in character, evident by the surrounding defensive walls that strictly controlled access to the royal precincts. (Figure 7.7) Even after passage through a complex and imposing gateway, one had to cross guarded courtyards and passageways to approach the king’s throne room. The structural presence was one of imposing

Figure 7.7 | Model of Palace of Sargon at Khorsabad
Author: Internet Archive Book Images
Source: Wikimedia Commons
License: Public Domain
power, as you can see from the enormous towered main portal. (Figure 7.8) To intimidate the visitor, interior decorations further asserted the mighty and ferocious nature of Sargon II with wall carvings depicting victorious battles. The complex also included temples for worship of the deities as well as quarters for high-ranking officials and servants.

Later developments for residences include apartment buildings for urban dwellers; such multi-family dwellings have taken many forms over time, and we can view an early type, from the second-century CE Roman port town of Ostia Antica, called an insula, which is Latin for “island.”

(Figure 7.9) In middle-class “apartments” such as these, there were stores and vendors’ stalls on the ground floor facing the street. In some versions, the lower floors were for the wealthier people, while upper floors decreased in cost and desirability. The basic ideas of how to accommodate multi-family living were established by this time and have remained similar since. What has changed over time are the material and decorations used, styles adopted, provisions for electricity, water, and sewage management, and eventually zoning policies that would dictate locations, sizes,
required provisions for safety, and density of occupation.

Private homes existed for the middle class and wealthy in towns and in the countryside; the latter were called villas whether they were primary residences or vacation homes. A private home in town might also have shops around its perimeter, but the accommodations for family life, entertainment, and conducting the owner’s business were generally contained in a single floor layout. (Diagram of Roman Villa: http://michellemoran.com/CD/Roman-Villa.jpg) After passing through an entry from the street, one entered the atrium, a courtyard with a peristyle, a row of columns within a building often supporting a porch, left open to the sky with a pool in the center to catch rainwater. A private garden was in a second area open to the elements. The mild climate led to provisions for a good measure of outdoor living as well as fresh air and sunlight during much of the year, even including indoor and outdoor dining rooms. There were rooms for sleeping, storage, and household work off the atrium and garden, as well as a space for worship, known as the lararium. (Figure 7.10) Here, two Lares, or household gods, flank an ancestor figure; the snake below symbolizes fertility and prosperity.

Roman royalty had grand palaces, and we have good evidence of such from the retirement compound created for the Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305 CE) in Split set on the Bay of Aspalathos in the Roman province of Dalmatia, today Croatia. (Figure 7.11) The walled precincts with defensive watchtowers and fortified gateways included housing for his military garrison, a central peristyle courtyard, three temples, and his mausoleum, the building housing his tomb. The design, perhaps fitting for the aggressive persecutor of Christians and retired general, was quite militaristic in
many ways, resembling a Roman military encampment, or *castrum*. The private and public imperial areas were luxurious by contrast. Like most palace complexes, provisions were made to house soldiers and servants, and it was lavishly decorated throughout with frescos, sculptures, and *mosaics*, images or designs created on a wall or floor made up of small pieces of stone, tile, or glass.

While the locations for palaces were always strategically selected, the rationale was not always defensive in character. When Charlemagne selected Aachen, Germany, as the site for his main palace (he had several), among the attractions was its centralized site within his growing empire and the healing waters of the natural spa there. In examining the reconstruction of his complex, you will notice the baths, shown to the left of the palace complex, are an important feature, as they had been in Roman society. (Figure 7.12) He had a large audience hall, a grand portal, courtyards, housing, and an impressive palace chapel, which is the major structure still standing. (see Figures 3.13 and 7.64)

The church was an important statement for this model Christian ruler, and although it has been enlarged from its original central-plan design, the structure still carries notable features that were both impressive and influential for later medieval church architecture. Charlemagne’s throne was positioned on the *gallery* level, an upper level overlooking the floor below. (Figure 7.13) The throne was above the entrance to the church, with an enormous “window of appearance” above the portal facing out into the atrium courtyard, where Charlemagne could address his Christian subjects gathered there. This emphasis on the western entryway was developed into the grand western facades of Romanesque and Gothic churches.

The Doge’s (Duke’s) Palace in Venice is another impressive statement of rulership wed to Christian leadership. (Figure 7.14) With its façade on the waterfront, the church of San Marco sitting directly be-
hind it, state offices located across from it, and the communal, open-ended piazza, or courtyard, between them, the palace literally connects the secular, religious, social, and political realms of Venetian life. (Figure 7.15) Public courtyards at the heart of cities became typical during the Italian Renaissance, as did private, interior courtyards in the center of Italian homes for rulers, wealthy aristocrats, and high church officials. As an official governmental center and residence, this Venetian palace included private quarters for the Doge along with meeting

Figure 7.14 | Doge’s Palace and St. Mark’s Tower, Venice
Author: User “Rambling Traveler”
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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Figure 7.15 | Courtyard of Doge’s Palace
Author: User “Benh LIEU SONG”
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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rooms and council chambers, all richly decorated with marble, stucco, and fresco and including iconographic themes related to Venice, its history, and civic identity.

In Japan, the fourteenth-century Himeji Castle, built as a fort by the samurai Akamatsu Norimura, was situated dramatically atop Himeyana Hill. (Figure 7.16) Though a defensive posture was its primary motive, the great beauty and lyrical appearance of its curved walls and rooflines are its predominant effects. It has been called the “white heron” in response to the impression it gives of a great bird about to take flight. The complex, again, has many purposes and comprises eighty-three different structures. The grounds include huge warehouses, lush gardens, and intricate mazes. Despite its fairytale looks, its defensive systems are complex and effective, including moats, keeps, gates, towers, turrets, and mounts and brackets for a variety of weapons. It has withstood numerous attacks and natural disasters over the centuries.

The final such royal complex we will explore is the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, established in 1645 by the fifth Dalai Lama; the palace functioned as the spiritual and governmental center for Tibetan Buddhism until the fourteenth and current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), fled for political refuge in 1959. (Figure 7.17) The basic purpose of the palace was that of a Buddhist monastery; its original foundation was centered on two chapels of historical and spiritual significance to the order of monks. The palace is named after Mount Potalaka, the mythical abode of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara, and the paradisiac implications are meaningful to devotees.
As at Himeji, the hillside is a striking component of its appearance, and the enormous complex makes a very dramatic presentation. Indeed, whether intended for defensive purposes or not, its imposing appearance is often a very important feature for royal architecture. The impression of this palace’s organic relationship to the mountain is enhanced by its sloping walls, flat roofs, and numerous stairways that lead to its various structures. The complex includes living quarters for the Dalai Lama and the monks as well as governmental offices, a seminary, assembly halls, shrines, libraries, storage rooms, and numerous chapels. It includes statues and portraits of historical and spiritual leaders and many devotional and didactic depictions painted on walls and banners, and works for meditation and prayer. Burial mounds and tombs contain the remains of lamas and important scriptures.

The residential structures of the wealthy of previous eras have often been lost to us; however, we can examine some of the aristocratic family homes of the last several centuries to gain insight into some of the additional trends for creating dwellings that go far beyond the need for simple shelter and that show some of the design ideas devised by artists and architects. The house created for Lord Burlington in 1729 in Chiswick, England, is a good example of the Neo-Palladian style of architecture. (Figure 7.18) Andrea Palladio (1508-1580, Italy), a Venetian Renaissance architect, deeply studied ancient Greek and Roman architecture and architectural theory and developed new designs based on those but better fit to the means, methods, and needs of his day. His ideas were popular and have remained widely influential throughout the West to this day.

Lord Burlington created his neo-Palladian villa design under the influence of Palladio’s ideas and those of other related designers. The basic idea here derives from a combination of a Greek temple front and a Roman dome, here supported by an octagonal drum, or circular or multi-sided base. Lord Burlington planned the house to showcase his fine collection of pictures and furniture and his architectural library as well as to provide comfort for his family living there. Great attention was paid to the surrounding gardens, and their design was very much a part of the overall scheme. Inspired by Roman gardens, they were designed by his friend William Kent (c. 1685-1748, England), an architect and early landscape architect, and included classicizing statues and miniature temples of a sort that were popular in English gardens of the day, thereby providing interesting and restful stopping points to a refreshing stroll outdoors. The logic and order of the layout of the building and grounds as well as the villa’s sense of grandeur led to its admiration and emulation by other builders who sought a similar elegance.

The Neo-Palladian style was carried to the United States by Thomas Jefferson for the campus of the University of Virginia, the state capitol of Virginia, and his own home of Monticello,
near Charlottesville, Virginia. (Figure 7.19) Jefferson adapted ideas he gathered while U.S. Ambassador to France by using humbler materials such as the red brick made from local clay that he considered a better choice for a less pretentious statement than marble or limestone. At Monticello, he also brought the structure lower to the ground and added a wooden balustrade, a railing supported by upright supports, to the roofline. Nonetheless, its Palladian design origins are clear. The interior of the house is full of provisions for Jefferson’s notable intellectual and work habits such as his bedroom that opened into his office, his workrooms, and his collections of American artifacts.

In the United States of the late nineteenth-century Gilded Age (c. 1870-1900), a time of rapid technological, commercial, and economic expansion, wealthy industrialists built enormous...
mansions in cities and at the seaside resorts or mountain retreats they favored. Among these, the Vanderbilt family (whose wealth came from shipping and railroads) commissioned several notable residences, mostly in the French-inspired Beaux Arts style, a period and style known in the U.S. as the American Renaissance (1876-1917).

One of these residences was The Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island, a lavish resort area replete with such structures. (Figure 7.20) The oceanfront house, designed by Richard Morris Hunt (1827-1895, USA), has seventy rooms on five floors and covers nearly an acre of land on a thirteen-acre lot with elaborate gardens. It was built with the most lavish material such as marble and wood from around the world and was decorated with rich and sumptuous furniture, fittings, and valuable artwork, as can be seen here in the library. (Figure 7.21) Clearly a residential structure of this type went far beyond the simple needs of housing to shelter a family from the elements and served to make a very grand and ostentatious statement of wealth and power.

By contrast to design ideas of the architects who catered to the wealthiest Americans, a new conception for providing living space came into being in the early twentieth century with Frank Lloyd Wright, who developed what he called the Prairie Style. He sought to counter the blocky forms that had become the standard for American homes with a structural sweep that hugged the ground, echoed the landscape, and fostered communication between the spaces in the house and the natural elements around it.

Perhaps the epitome of this thinking was realized in Wright’s design for Falling Water, a western
Pennsylvania mountain home he created for the Kaufmann family of Pittsburgh. (Figure 7.22) At their request, he incorporated elements of their favorite recreation spot into the design: the rocky outcrop where they held picnics is in the living room, and the adjacent Bear Run waterfall pours out beneath the house’s cantilevered terraces, self-supporting rigid structure projecting from the wall. Like most of Wright’s houses, the place has flowing interior space, a great number of windows, and abundant natural light, as well as carefully coordinated use of stone and wood to incorporate the structure into the natural setting.

### 7.4 COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT

Clearly, many of the palaces and complexes we have explored included accommodation of community government needs. There were others throughout history that had somewhat more pointed community needs in mind for their creation but were often combined with other purposes as well. From the time of the rise of the earliest civilizations, the needs for government and religious expression often coalesced.

In the Mesopotamian Valley of the ancient Near East, today Iraq and Iran, we see this exemplified in the structure of the Ziggurat of Ur. (Figures 7.23 and 7.24) With the idea that the deities resided in the heavens, the ziggurat was conceived as a man-made mountain that served as a base for the temple, raising it closer to the celestial regions where the deities were. The pathways to the temple at the summit were steep and the approach to the gods was appropriately aggrandized and formalized. At the same time, the basic platform structure was part of a complex that included the provisions for a variety of other community services, record keeping, and commercial and governmental functions. The compact complex was located at the center of the community and in many aspects became the hub of life.

The people of the ancient Near East built with mud brick, sometimes baked, that has not proven to be durable, so the remains of these structures, constructed from around 2,400 BCE until the sixth century BCE, are generally not well preserved. Still, there are sufficient clues in
the ruins to reconstruct the ways they were built and used.

The Romans generally made provisions for community functions in the forum, an open public space at the center of each city; the cities were often laid out in a grid plan organized with areas dedicated to various types of industrial, commercial, communal, and residential needs. (The Master Plan of Verbonia: https://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/864/flashcards/4000864/jpg/roman_city_plan-141E58EF1FF4A4DE1CC.jpg) The number and types of buildings varied, but they often included temples, libraries, markets, public baths (thermae), and judicial structures. The Forum at the heart of Rome was the site of numerous architectural statements and additions for the public good that were created by successive rulers.

One of the most influential of the buildings in the Forum of Trajan in Rome was the Basilica Ulpia, a center for law courts, business, and public gatherings. (Figure 7.25) The basilica included a long and broad open center space, a nave, flanked by aisles that fluidly expanded the area.
(Figure 7.26) This design provided a readily adaptable concept for other purposes, most notably perhaps the congregational space needed for Christian churches that would arise in later centuries as the Christian populace grew.

Significant community spaces sometimes have as their boundaries adjoining but separate architectural structures. These spaces are nonetheless important gathering places that need to be considered as such and in connection with the surrounding architecture that defines them. The National Mall in Washington, D.C., is one such place. (Figure 7.27) We identify it by its location within the capitol city and by its placement among all the government and other public/community buildings that line and define it. One only has to see it as a site for a presidential inauguration celebration or other large public gatherings to realize its significance as a community center.

(Figure 7.28) Theatre of Epidaurus
Author: User “Olecorre”
Source: Wikimedia Commons
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(Figure 7.29) Colosseum in Rome
Author: User “Andreas Tille”
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Community needs for ceremony and entertainment have been addressed with specifically purposed architectural works since antiquity as well. Both the Greek and the Romans designed and built theaters, outdoor structures for dramatic performances, and amphitheaters, round or oval buildings with a central space for events, that provided models for such structures to this day. (Figures 7.28 and 7.29) While the basic concepts were devised by the Greeks to present religious festivals and ritual dramas, the Romans with their great ingenuity in engineering and material development added considerably to the potential for these designs to cater to changing needs and broader applications.

One of the most important contributions to the history of architecture was the Roman development of concrete for use as building material. Its greater strength, flexibility, and potential for adaptation made concrete far superior to the cut stone used to that point. These advances enabled the Romans to create new architectural forms by expanding the types of vaulting and means of spanning space they had previously used. Both of these important community structures, the theater and the amphitheater, were enlarged and put to new uses because of the Roman architectural contributions.

Pacific Island cultures, as do those of Native Americans, particularly venerate tribal heritage and so celebrate the communal events related to their heritage. Native North Americans of the Kwakiutl Nation created the clan totems, objects or animals that hold significance for a group of...
people, at the Wawadit’la, also known as the Mungo Martin House in honor of the chief and artist who built it in Victoria, British Columbia. (Figure 7.30) The recognition and celebration of their shared culture is expressed, as well, in the Meeting House of the Maori people at Waitangi, New Zealand, with its deep front porch and big open hall for group events. (Figures 7.31 and 7.32) Additionally, the carved and painted decorations inside and out have specific iconographic and symbolic significance for the individuals who gather together at such communal sites.

**7.5 COMMERCE**

Buildings for commerce have appeared over time. Early systems of trade and barter in some places eventually became formalized in ways that required marketplaces and commercial establishments with temporary or permanent housing. While open-air markets with vendor stalls continue to be used in many places, in others shops or full buildings evolved for commercial and service transactions.

An early example appeared in ancient Athens, Greece, in the area where the open market or **agora**, was also located. The **Stoa** of Attalos, built by King Attalos II of Pergamon (r. 159-133 BCE), was comprised of a two-story covered walkway made of marble and limestone with columns on one side and a closed wall on the other. (Figure 7.33) Along the closed wall, there were twenty-one rooms on each level with each room providing space for a shop. These rooms were similar in character and purpose to those we noted on the ground floors of Roman villas and apartment buildings, but they provided for a more concentrated shopping area.

Our modern provisions for shopping centers and department stores were designed with different ideas about merchandising, sales, and consumerism but, as we have seen...
with the rapid rise of on-line shopping for durable and perishable goods, this scenario will likely be ever evolving. Indeed, grocery and department stores may become completely passé. But their development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presented new possibilities for architectural design.

An example is the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Store in Chicago, designed by Louis Sullivan (1856-1924, USA) and built in 1904. (Figure 7.34) One of the early applications for steel frame, or “skeleton frame,” construction that made the development of skyscrapers possible, this sort of building also opened new possibilities for retail and office space. Here, the large ground-floor windows and corner entrance could provide a great deal of display space for attracting pedestrians while the expansive multi-story interior offered shoppers a wide array of goods, especially compared to the sorts of small shops and markets that had been its predecessors.

Not only the structure but also the decorative approach was innovative, as Sullivan combined Beaux Arts ideas with Art Nouveau motifs in the building’s surface design. (Figure 7.35) The elaborate, curvilinear, plant-based motifs central to the Art Nouveau movement, c. 1890-1910, in cast metal relief panels above the doors and ground floor windows added to visual appeal for potential customers.

New designs emerged for other commercial firms in this era as well. The Austrian Postal Savings Bank in Vienna, Austria, designed by architect Otto Wagner (1841-1918, Austria) has a huge multi-story façade covering a broad open interior space on the ground level; its sleek and modern aesthetic was startlingly new and different when it was completed in 1905. (Figure 7.36) One of Wagner’s aims in the design was to create a sense of strength and solidity that engendered trust and a feeling of financial security in customers. The main banking customer area is filled with natural light. Wagner used marble, steel, and polished glass for the simplified decoration of the reinforced
concrete building, turning away from the Art Nouveau aesthetic and replacing it with his sense of modernism.

The use of steel and reinforced concrete that facilitated the advent of the skyscraper truly revolutionized architecture and began a contest for height that continues today. Wealthy entrepreneurs and ambitious developers from around the world have joined in the competition for buildings of modern distinction. One example is the Chrysler Building in New York City, designed by William van Alen (1883-1954, USA). (Figure 7.37) Its décor in the Art Deco style (c. 1920-1940), including the ribbed, sunburst pattern made of stainless steel in the building’s terraced crown, celebrates American industrialism and the automobile. At 1,046 feet, the Chrysler Building was for eleven months after its completion in 1930 the tallest in the world. (It was surpassed in 1931 by the Empire State Building at 1,454 feet.)

A more recent example is the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, designed by César Pelli (b. 1926, Argentina, lives USA). (Figure 7.38) Inaugurated in 1999, they were the tallest buildings for several years and remain the tallest twin towers to this day. The buildings’ design motifs are inspired by Islamic art and culture; for example, the shape of each tower is the Muslim symbol of Rub el Hizb, or two overlapping squares that form an eight-pointed star. Both structures house commercial and business concerns and symbolize the architecture of modern business.

In the late twentieth century, architectural ingenuity, new materials, and the potential of computer design led some architects to develop radically innovative approaches to structures that might house any number of different types of needs. Among the most innovative in this regard is Frank Gehry (b. 1929, Canada, lives USA), who has designed buildings all over the world including museums, business towers, residences, and theaters.

In Los Angeles, he created the Walt Disney Concert Hall, completed in 2003. (Figure 7.39) Using titanium sheathing for multiform, swooping curvilinear forms and volumes,
his buildings are sculptural in effect from a visual standpoint. Yet in each case, his buildings have proven effective and dynamic in creating spaces for the activities they house. The acoustics of the concert hall are widely praised as is the beauty of the architectural form in capturing the whimsical spirit of Walt Disney, the creator of so many American comics, cartoons, and movies.

7.6 WORSHIP

Structures for worship, as we have noted, were sometimes combined with or were near those created for other communal needs. We saw this with the ziggurat, in the Roman forums, and in palaces, among others. But we also have a considerable history of architecture intended solely for religious purposes. From early times, there were two distinctive conceptions for a sacred building: whether it was a house for the deity or a house for the worshippers. Beyond that, it might be for individual devotional activities or for accommodating a congregational group. We can keep these points in mind when examining the types of building designed for these goals.

Among the earliest examples are the pyramid complexes from ancient Egypt. (Figure 7.40) The pyramids were tombs composed of millions of
large stones in mathematically regular geometric structures carefully oriented to the stars. Pyramids evolved over thousands of years out of pre-Egyptian burial practices that began with placing heavy stones over gravesites to protect the occupants and their grave goods buried within.

The Egyptians created these elaborate and massive groupings of buildings for the royal dead on the west bank of the Nile River, creating a necropolis, or city of the dead. At Giza, the body of the pharaoh or other royal family member was brought down the river from the palace to the valley temple on the edge of the pyramid precinct. After priests mummified the body of the deceased and prepared it for entombment, the body would be taken to a mortuary temple near the pyramid. (Figure 7.41) That temple was the site where ceremonies were carried out at the time of the mummy’s placement within the pyramid, as were the perpetual rituals required to honor the king in the afterlife.

There were also temples for the living that the king would have had commissioned and served. One example is the Temple of Horus at Edfu, which has a number of typical features, although it was built relatively late in Egyptian history. It is of the pylon type, so named for the two upright structures that form its monumental façade and flank the main ceremonial portal. (Figure 7.42) The approach to temples was often along an avenue of sphinxes, imaginative hybrid creatures, part human, part animal, that led to the main door. Beyond the pylon wall was an open courtyard (Figure 7.43) and
then a **hypostyle hall**, a structure with multiple rows of columns that support a flat roof, leading to the sanctuary. Typical of many sacred structures is this sort of staged progression by which one moves from the public or profane spaces through gradually more sacred, and often more restricted, areas that lead ultimately to the most sacred and reserved part. It is often the case that only priests or otherwise consecrated and dedicated persons are allowed in the **sanctuary**, the innermost and holiest space, while most of the congregation or worshipers are confined to less sacred parts of the temple, and the general public may be denied access to the premises altogether.

Greek temples like that devoted to Hephaestus in Athens, Greece, were not congregational at all. (Figure 7.44) They were designed as houses for the deity with a **cella**, or room, inside that was provided for the cult statue. Sometimes, there was also a cult treasury room within the temple, but ceremonies and sacrifices were conducted outside in the temple courtyard. Like the ziggurats, Greek temples incorporated the belief that the gods were on high, in the celestial realms, so they were often located in an **acropolis**, or sacred city high on a hill.

This can clearly be seen in the case of the Parthenon, dedicated to the goddess Athena, the patron of the city of Athens. (Figures 7.45 and 7.46) As in all Greek temples, a mathematical relation can be found ordering the size and relation of the Parthenon’s elements. The length to width of the structure, the height to the width, the diameter of the columns, and their spacing all...
conform to the golden ratio of 4 to 9. This use of a single relation between the various elements of the structure gives it an aesthetically pleasing, unified, and more solid appearance, as does the use of several optical corrections. The columns lean slightly inward, and the styllobate, the base upon which the columns stand, bows upward slightly in the middle, both to give the appearance of being completely straight and flat.

Roman temples were often built in emulation of those of the Greeks, but they made many practical changes to the designs and often placed them in the center of the community, as opposed to the separated locations preferred by the Greeks. An important and very innovative temple design was created during the early Imperial era to honor the pantheon of nine planetary deities. To address the honor of the group, rather than individual gods, this temple, the Pantheon, took a different form. (Figure 7.47)

The building had a traditional temple front made up of columns supporting a triangular pediment. Rather than continuing into a rectangular, gable-roofed structure, however, the interior was an open circle with cult statues arrayed around its perimeter, each in a separate niche, or shallow recess in the wall. (Figure 7.48) That circular interior, acting as a drum, supported a huge domed space with an oculus, a circular opening, at its summit. Combining the circles of drum and dome creates a perfect sphere (diameter = height). (Figure 7.49) The whole of the structure was constructed using the ingenious Roman concrete, which allowed the creation of an unsupported dome—greatly facilitated by the use of coffers, or recessed squares, which tremendously reduced the dome’s weight. The circle and square are not only featured in the ceiling construction, the repetition of those shapes is carried out in all of the architectural and decorative elements of the Pantheon’s interior and exterior.
In addition to these singular features, the Pantheon was the first temple structure the congregation was allowed to enter. Once Christianity supplanted the ancient Roman religions, spaces with large, open interiors would be needed to house the faithful attending mass. The Pantheon served the needs of a Christian church well, and it was converted in 609 CE. Its adaptation as a Christian church prevents our viewing it as it was intended to be used, but the Pantheon still stands in well-preserved condition and with little alteration to the structure and basic décor of fine marbles for the floor and interior columns, due to its continuous service as a house of worship since it was built in the second century CE.

Some of the earliest evidence of worship in India shows that it was conducted in caves; we also see attempts to create worship spaces by excavating the living rock and creating larger caves for this purpose. While rock-cut architecture exists in many places around the world, its extent in India over the centuries is unsurpassed and, due to its great durability, many fine examples of it are preserved.

A very early example is the Lomas Rishi Cave in the Barabar Hills from the third century BCE. (Figure 7.50) Because it is unfinished, we have a good idea of the methods and plans for the excavation, which included the addition of a large rectangular chamber leading into a smaller circular one. The sculptural treatment of the frame of the portal is a good example of the ways in which early architecture and decoration in stone imitated prior work in impermanent materials such as wood, as was the case for early architectural design around the world. Here, the designs simulate lattice, beams, and bentwood construction.

Later Indian worship structures such as the Brihadeshwara Temple dedicated to the Hindu god
Shiva, from the eleventh-century Chola Dynasty era, show the great complexity of conception of this type of worship space. (Figure 7.51) The tower at the far end is over the garba griha, or sanctuary, and as with the Temple of Horus at Edfu, there is staged progression from the profane (everyday) space to the most sacred. The whole is raised on a platform, a feature also seen in many sacred structures. Here, one must begin the approach by entering a gated courtyard, then ascend the stairs, and pass through the mandapa, or audience hall, before approaching the sanctuary. Outside the main temple but within the courtyard are subsidiary temples and shrines, as the worship is polytheistic, that is, with a great number of diverse deities.

As is the case with most Hindu and Buddhist temples, although there are certainly ceremonial and ritual functions that are priestly duties, there is no restriction for lay people entering the sanctuary as the relationship to the deity is generally considered to be a personal one, not mediated by a priesthood.

The coexistence of Hindu and Buddhist deities evidenced by their shrines appears at many sites, though usually one or the other predominates at a given site. In addition to temples, another basic structure associated with Buddhism is the stupa. (Figure 7.52) One of the oldest stupas is in India where Buddhism first arose, at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh. Established in the third century BCE, it was conceived as a burial mound of a type, as it was believed to contain part of the earthly remains of Sakyamuni, founder of Buddhism. Surrounded by a tall stone fence, it is designed for the devotee to enter the fenced area and circumambulate, or walk around, the stone-faced, rubble-filled mound.

A great deal of symbolism is associated with the form including a yasti, or mast, rising from the center of the dome that stands for an axis mundi, or axis of the world, separating the earth from the sky above. The fence and gateways are also covered with mythological carvings related to Buddhist and Hindu beliefs. (see Figure 4.23) When the Buddhist stupa form...
migrated to China, Japan, and elsewhere, the design evolved to include native architectural traditions resulting in the stupa form becoming the multi-tiered pagoda, a Hindu or Buddhist sacred building.

Centers for Islamic worship are housed in architectural structures known as mosques. While churches and temples associated with other faiths are generally oriented to the four cardinal directions, usually with the altar toward the east where the sun rises, the mosque will always be situated so that the worshippers face in the direction of the qibla, a fixed wall aligned to face Mecca, the city that is the epicenter for Islam. This orientation remains consistent regardless of where in the world the building is set. While several different standard architectural forms exist for a mosque, its most common distinguishing exterior feature is the minaret, the slender tower from which the call to prayer is issued. The Sultan Ahmed Mosque shows six minarets while four are common at other sites. (Figure 7.53)

The most basic architectural form for Christian congregational churches is the basilica, a structure of longitudinal plan adapted from the Roman public building form. (Figure 7.54) The Roman basilica had an entrance on one long side that led to the large open interior space, the nave. The Christian basilica, unlike that used by the Romans, has an entrance on one end, is divided into a center nave and side aisles along its length, and holds a semi-circular apse, or recess, containing the altar at the opposite end of the longitudinal building from the entrance. (Figure 7.55) As in other centers for worship we have seen, the holiest part of the church is farthest away from the most profane or public spaces. The progression from one end of the church to the other is a procession ritual, enhanced by the long rows of columns flanking the nave, the long exterior walls, that were often heavy wood or masonry structures until the Gothic era, and the filtered light that played among the structural components.
This was the case in Old St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, (Figure 7.56) built in the fourth century CE on the model of the Roman basilica type. Also based on the Roman secular model was an atrium that was placed before the entrance. The original St. Peter’s was the center of the Christian world for centuries and a model for church architecture, but it was replaced during the Italian Renaissance and Baroque periods with the much grander structure that exists today in Rome.

Christians in the Western Roman Empire used the basilica, or Latin cross, plan, but those in the Eastern Roman Empire, more commonly known as the Byzantine Empire, also employed the central plan, which had its origins in the circular plan, such as that used for the Pantheon. In the West, however, the circular, or central plan, church was used for a palace church such as Charlemagne’s at Aachen, (Figure 7.57) mausoleum (tomb building), or martyrium (site marking the death of a martyr, someone who died for their faith), where the placement of the altar does not need to address large crowds.

Perhaps the most familiar basilica or Latin Cross churches are those in the Gothic style in Europe that began in 1144. (Figure 7.58) When these structures were being built, they were not called “Gothic.” Instead they were called “opus francigenum” or “work of
the Franks” because of its origination at the Abbey of Saint-Denis. The term “Gothic” was coined in the sixteenth century, originally meant as an insult, by artist and historian Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574, Italy). He wanted to distinguish the architectural style, based on forms from ancient Greece and Rome at that time practiced in Italy, from medieval Christianity and its associations with the destruction of classical learning and culture. The Goths were Germanic tribes that he believed had invaded and destroyed the refined culture of ancient Rome. His pejorative name has persisted but without its originally negative connotation.

That first Gothic architecture was seen in the rebuilt choir at that Abbey Church of St. Denis, outside Paris, France, that was designed by the Abbot Suger and completed in 1144. (Figure 7.59) Several of the defining features of the Gothic cathedral were used there: the pointed arch, the ribbed vault, flying buttresses, and stained glass windows. Unlike the Roman circular arch, the Gothic or pointed arch is formed by two arcs with parallel sides. (Figure 7.60) A ribbed vault is formed at the intersection of two barrel vaults, with stone ribs sometimes
added to support the weight of the vaults. The flying buttress is a load-bearing component located outside the building, connected to the upper portion of the wall in the form of an arch. (Figures 7.61 and 7.62) The combination of the pointed arch, ribbed vault, and flying buttress allowed the height of the interior spaces to be dramatically increased and the thickness of the outside walls dramatically decreased. This development led to the widespread use of stained glass throughout the church and the addition of the rose window, a circular stained glass window dedicated to the Virgin Mary, usually found above the main portals. (Figure 7.63) The much larger number and size of windows allowed natural and multicolored light to flood the interior of formerly dark churches as was the case at St. Denis. (Figure 7.64)

Gothic churches were built throughout continental Europe and England, with regional variations, in the center of their communities usually, especially if they were cathedrals, or Bishop’s churches. Whether viewed from a distance approaching a town or standing within the cathedral itself, the building soared above all others as it reached to the heavens. They were filled with architectural and sculptural ornamentation to teach the
doctrines of the Church, Bible stories, and the accounts of Mary, the Apostles, and the other saints. Portals were especially the focus of sculptural effort. Standing figures in high relief of prophets, kings, and saints graced the sides of the jamb, or upright supports to either side of a door. (Figure 7.65) And many other sacred and secular figures, relief sculptures, often of Jesus and symbols of the Four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were included in the tympanum above the doors. (Figure 7.66) The architects, masons, and sculptors responsible for these monumental buildings were highly skilled and creative, and Gothic cathedrals remained the dominating forms of the Western urban landscape until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the modern structural steel skyscraper surpassed them in height and scale.

The overall effect of walking into a Gothic cathedral is to be drawn upward into a vast, light, and airy space, and to be dislocated from the physical and drawn into the spiritual. (Figure 7.67) This effect is the epitome of the Gothic Christian view that the physical and sensual world is to be ignored or even disdained in favor of chastity, spiritual awareness, and religious devotion.
Christian churches of all denominations today generally follow the basilica model, but the sanctuaries vary considerably for diverse ceremonial practices. The Gothic type, with its pointed arches and glass windows that filter mystical light into the interior, is still common.

One example of an updated version is Thorncrown chapel, designed by E. Fay Jones (1921-2004, USA). Jones created a number of elegantly simple nondenominational chapels set into nature that let in diffuse light. (Figures 7.68 and 7.69) A pupil of Frank Lloyd Wright, Jones was inspired by Wright’s principles of using simple, local materials to thoroughly integrate structure and setting. The most striking feature at Thorncrown, located in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, is the structure’s light airiness. The whole of the interior for each of Jones’s chapels is a small sanctuary that seems entirely at home in the forest.
7.7 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

We have seen architecture change throughout history in style, concepts, and purpose. However some aspects remain the same: its use for different purposes, expression of different types specific in each instance to the particular patron or designer and to the purposes for the structure. Its uses for residential, commercial, communal or religious purposes, spiritual ideas, and sentiment.

This chapter allowed you to understand a broader range of methodologies in context of issues in modern art that evolved over time and with a world that became more complex. Architecture, other forms of art, has experienced great change in the designs of contrasting skyscrapers, incorporating more functionality and fluidity for the lives of modern people. Especially notable, perhaps, from our current perspective, are developments in art and architecture that occurred after World War II, when art’s focus moved from Europe to New York. With the focus on the West, art changed to incorporate more freedom in technique and style as opposed to rules that governed art and structures. Artists and architects are now committed to societal issues and personal expression in art and architecture, using all aspects of society to define and explain. This new construct reflects tradition and non-tradition, gives more voice on societal issues, expresses more culture, and resonates individual expression and identity and society’s aesthetic personality. Postmodern art focuses on public attention and its role in contemporary society by defining, questioning, and examining art’s function, form, content aesthetics, and value.

Test Yourself

1. Describe at least three different examples of architectural work – each built for a different purpose, and discuss specific features of the work that are designed to meet certain distinctive needs.

2. Discuss two different structures built for religious use, explaining how form is related to purposes, and how the form is used by that religious group. Be specific about how it meets particular ritual or other needs of the group.

3. Select four different types of architectural structures and explain the type of architecture and the purpose of each building. Discuss characteristics of each façade, and how the façade addresses the user of the building.

4. Describe different features of temple/church structures that reflect specific beliefs about the deity/deities of the people who use it for worship. Discuss why those particular features are logical and suitable for the ways they are used.

7.8 KEY TERMS

Acropolis: “high city” – a hilltop setting such as that reserved for the temple complex in ancient Athens associated with Classical Greece, including several temples to Athena and other sacred
sites and structures. The elevated location is associated with greater proximity to the gods who were believed to reside in the celestial realms.

**Aesthetics**: the branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the definition of beauty and with considerations of the purposes and value of art.

**Aisle**: one of the longitudinal divisions of a basilica building. Basilica form churches usually have either three or five aisles, the central one being called the nave.

**Amphitheater**: a round or oval building with tiers of seats around a central area used for performances and sport events.

**Arcade**: a colonnade with arched spaces between the columns.

**Art Functionalists**: believe that form follows function and that the value of art consists in its function or performance.

**Avatar**: an embodiment of a deity on earth.

**Avant-garde**: new, original, and experimental.

**Basilica**: a building of longitudinal plan, originally designed for Roman law courts and public meetings, later adopted for Christian usage because of its suitability for accommodation of large congregations and processional ritual.

**Bodhisattva**: a Buddha-to-be; a being who has achieved enlightenment but has postponed Nirvana in order to help fellow seekers in their spiritual quests.

**Cantilever**: a long beam or other horizontal prop projecting from a wall to support a balcony, stairs, or similar structure.

**Castrum**: a Roman military encampment or fortress, specifically designed on a grid plan, with specific zones related to activities/uses.

**Colonnade**: row of columns supporting a roof or entablature.

**Deity**: a religion’s god or goddess.

**Form**: the structural components of a work of art or architecture.

**Forum**: open public space in Roman cities that served social, commercial, religious, and political needs of the residents.

**Function**: the meaning or purpose a work of art.

**Gallery**: a balcony or upper floor of a church or hall.

**Garba Griha**: Literally, the “womb” or most sacred precinct in a Hindu temple -- the sanctuary.

**Gothic**: a late medieval (12th-14th centuries) architectural style that may include pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and flying buttress. Gothic churches have very tall structures, high interior
spaces and, increasingly, the walls are filled with stained glass windows that filter mystical colored light into the interior.

**Hypostyle hall**: structure consisting of a “forest of columns” arranged in numerous rows that support a flat roof.

**Iconography**: the subject matter and/or symbolism of an artwork, including reference to religious or other narrative meaning.

**Insula**: an apartment building in the ancient Roman civilization.

**Logo**: a design used by an individual or organization to identify itself or its products.

**Mandapa**: an audience hall in Indian architecture, often a porch-like ante-room to a temple, but also a free-standing gathering hall.

**Mausoleum**: a building containing one or more tombs.

**Middens**: refuse heaps, often of kitchen waste, but also for other discarded materials.

**Minaret**: a tower, usually tall and slender, associated with a mosque and signifying Islamic presence in a location.

**Oculus**: “eye”; an opening in an architectural structure, to let in light, located in a ceiling, a dome, or on a wall.

**Peristyle**: a row of columns that surrounds a space such as a courtyard.

**Post-and-lintel**: basic architectural means of creating an opening in a wall by placing two vertical members (posts) to either side of the opening and spanning the upper part of the space with a horizontal member.

**Propaganda**: biased, and sometimes misleading or hidden, information intended to influence views, beliefs, or behavior.

**Qibla**: a wall in an Islamic mosque that is situated so that prayer is oriented towards Mecca.

**Rammed earth**: dampened earth mixed with sand, gravel, or clay that is compacted into a temporary frame to create a wall.

**Sphinx**: a hybrid human/animal sculpture.

**Stele**: an upright stone slab often serving as a grave marker or public monument.

**Stoa**: a covered walkway in a public area, often fronting market stalls or other commercial spaces.

**Stupa**: a domed, hemispherical structure that functions as a Buddhist shrine. The conception is of a burial mound, designed for ritual circumambulation.

**Tympanum**: the semicircular area above a doorway, often decorated with sculptural artwork, especially as noted in Romanesque and Gothic church portals.
**Wattle and daub**: branches intertwined with twigs and straw, then coated with a substance such as plaster or clay to create a wall.

**Ziggurat**: a man-made mountain, designed to be the platform for a temple, raising it closer to the heavens where the gods were believed to reside.