

A WORLD OF

art

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Part I: The Visual World

A World of Art



Fig. 1-1 Cai Guo-Qiang, *Footprints of History: Fireworks Project for the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games*.
© Cai Studio

THINKING AHEAD

What do all artists share?

What are the roles of the artist?

What is active seeing?

On August 8, 2008—the eighth day of the eighth month of the eighth year of the twenty-first century—the 29th Olympic Games opened in Beijing, China. The time was 08:08:08 pm. Eight is a lucky number in Chinese culture because it sounds like the word for wealth and prosperity. The New York-based, Chinese-born artist **Cai Guo-Qiang** had been chosen by the Chinese government two years earlier to serve as **Director of Visual and Special Effects for the opening and closing ceremonies of the games**. Cai's opening gambit was a trail of 29 firework “footprints of history” (**Fig. 1-1**), representing each of the 29 Olympiads and fired in succession for 63 seconds across the 9.3 miles of sky between

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Tiananmen Square in the center of the city and the Bird's Nest, the Olympic Stadium, designed by the Swiss firm of Herzog & de Meuron (**Fig. 1-2**). Itself a marvel, the stadium consists of a red concrete bowl seating some 91,000 people surrounded by an outer steel frame that structurally resembles the twigs of a bird's nest. One of China's first truly environmentally conscious buildings, it is heated and cooled by a geothermal heating system under the stadium floor, a rainwater collection system on the roof purifies water and recycles it for use in the venue, and a translucent roof provides essential sunlight for the grass below.

Born in 1957, Cai had left China in 1986 to study in Japan, where he began to explore the properties of gunpowder as a tool for making drawings, drawings that developed, eventually, into large-scale explosion events. He had staged one of the most dramatic of these in 1993, when, with a band of volunteers, both Japanese and Chinese, he returned to China to lay 10 kilometers (about 6 miles) of fuse and gunpowder clusters, one every 3 meters, in the Gobi Desert, beginning at the place where the Great Wall ends; at twilight, he detonated an

explosion that slithered in a red line on the horizon to form an ephemeral extension of the Great Wall. Entitled *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No.10*, he understood full well that it was best viewed from high above the earth. From the ground, the event was awe-inspiring. One could only imagine what it might have looked like from on high. Where the Great Wall had originally been built to separate people, Cai's extension brought them together. Where gunpowder was originally a force of destruction, now it was a thing of beauty. These were the same goals that Cai wished to achieve in his pyrotechnic display at the 29th Olympiad.

But *Footprints of History* met with almost immediate controversy. Although the pyrotechnic display actually occurred as Cai planned, it was not broadcast live. Television viewers saw instead a 55-second digital film, created from dress-rehearsal footage of the footprint fireworks exploding that was then sequenced into place using computer graphics. Given climatic conditions in Beijing, where smog often reduces visibility to a few hundred feet, Cai believed the video was necessary. In fact, he considered the video



Fig. 1-2 Herzog & de Meuron, The Bird's Nest—Beijing National Stadium, 2004–2008.

Corbis.

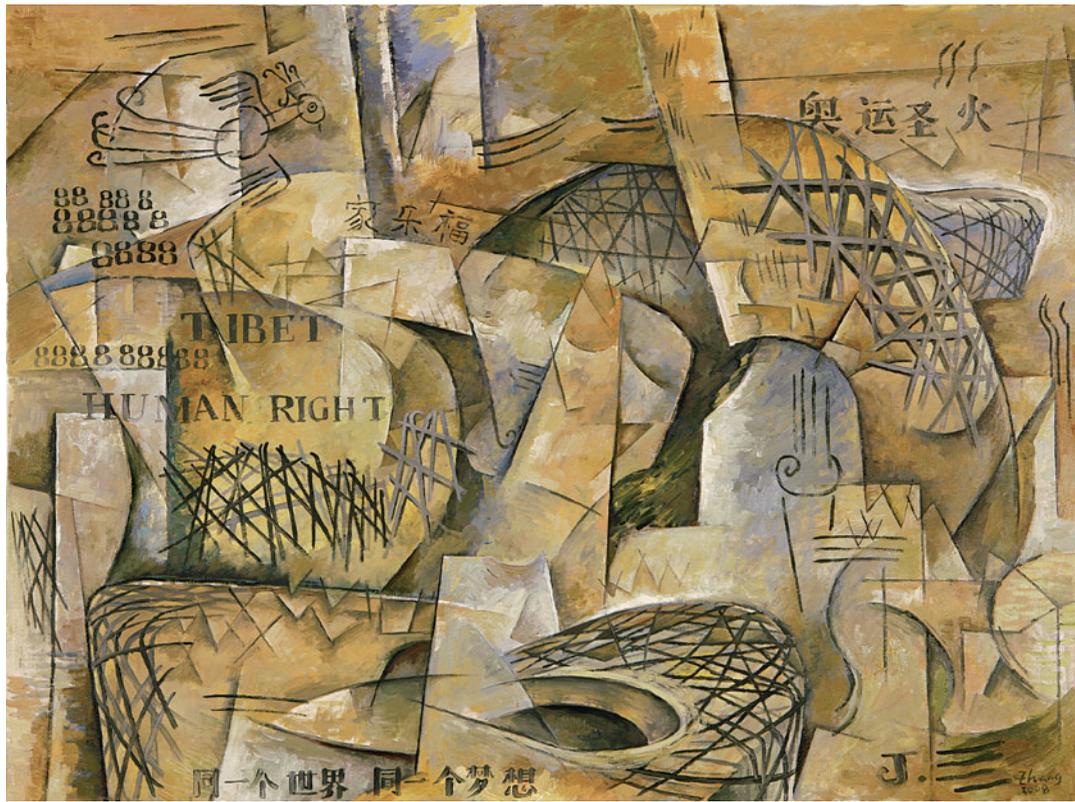


Fig. 1-3 Zhang Hongtu, *Bird's Nest, in the Style of Cubism* 2008.

Oil on canvas, 36 × 48 in.

© Zhong Hongtu Studio

a second work of art. “From my own perspective as an artist,” Cai explained,

there are two separate realms in which this artwork exists, as two very different mediums have been utilized. First, there is the artwork that exists in the material realm: the ephemeral sculpture. This was viewed by people attending the ceremonies inside the stadium and standing outside on the streets of Beijing. This artwork was documented from various vantage points on video, which has been broadcast by many international media outlets. Second, there is a creative digital rendering of the artwork in the medium of video. It is a single version of the event viewed by a large broadcast audience. Such a conceptual work can exist simultaneously in these two separate realms. And perhaps to also take Footprints of History into this second realm was necessary because in many of my explosion events, such as Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters, the very best vantage point is not the human one.

Cai has posted five videos made by audience members of the “ephemeral” event on his website, www.caiguoqiang.com, under Projects for 2008

(a short, 1-minute 7-second video of the *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters* is available for viewing on the same site under Projects for 1993). To some people, Cai’s televised video seemed a form of subterfuge. Others wondered whether fireworks even qualified as art.

In the end, Cai’s pyrotechnics were stunning, and widely admired. Whatever trouble the broadcast of a back-up reel on television caused him was dwarfed by that endured by fellow Chinese artist Zhang Hongtu. When Zhang’s painting *Bird’s Nest, in the Style of Cubism* (Fig. 1-3) arrived in China for an exhibition at the German embassy, it was seized by Chinese officials. They were holding it, they said, pending “clarification of its meaning.” Modeled closely on Cubist works such as Georges Braque’s *Soda* (Fig. 1-4), with its fragmented objects (which appear to be a wineglass, a pipe, a sheet of music, and the word SODA, perhaps a label on a bottle), all set on an abstract Parisian café tabletop, Zhang’s painting includes Chinese characters for the French supermarket chain Carrefour, which has stores all over China and whose purported support of the Dalai Lama (the Buddhist head of the Tibetan government in exile) resulted in protests across China



Fig. 1-4 Georges Braque (1882–1963), *Soda*, Paris, spring 1912.
Oil on canvas, 14¹/₄ in. (36.2 cm) diameter. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

in the spring of 2008 as the government was struggling to complete final preparations for the Olympic games. The number “8” is repeated 23 times, a direct allusion to what Zhang called China’s “stupid” numerological superstitions. At the bottom right is the letter J beside four horizontal lines, a reference to June 4, the date of the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989. Finally, the motto for the 2008 Olympics appears in Chinese characters: “One World, One Dream.” If nothing else, these words clearly mean different things to Zhang Hongtu and Chinese government officials.

As it turned out, officially, the painting’s muted palette was deemed inappropriate for the celebratory nature of the Olympic games, and the government demanded that the painting be removed from China. But more than the painting’s Cubist idiom, the government was provoked by the inclusion of the word “Tibet” just above “Human Right[s],” both of which directly refer to China’s 50-year

occupation of that country (or province, from the Chinese government’s point of view). Reactions to both *Footprints of History* and *Bird’s Nest, in the Style of Cubism* differed depending on the point of view of their various audiences, but both raised the same questions. **What is the purpose of this work of art (and what is the purpose of art in general)? What does it mean? What is my reaction to the work and why do I feel this way? How do the formal qualities of the work—such as its color, its organization, its size and scale—affect my reaction? What do I value in works of art?** These are some of the questions that this book is designed to help you address. Appreciating art is never just a question of accepting visual stimuli, but also involves intelligently contemplating why and how works of art come to be made and have meaning. **By helping you understand the artist’s creative process, we hope to engage your own critical ability, the process by which you create your own ideas, as well.**

The World as Artists See It

If the work of Cai Guo-Qiang and Zhang Hongtu demonstrates how people understand and value the same work of art in different ways, similarly, different artists, responding to their world in different times and places, might see the world in apparently divergent terms. They do, however, share the fundamental desire to create. All people are creative, but not all people possess the energy, ingenuity, and courage of conviction that are required to make art. In order to produce a work of art, the artist must be able to respond to the unexpected, the chance occurrences or results that are part of the creative process. In other words, the artist must be something of an explorer and inventor. The artist must always be open to new ways of seeing. The landscape painter John Constable spoke of this openness as “the art of seeing nature.” This art of seeing leads to imagining, which leads in turn to making. Creativity is the sum of this process, from seeing to imagining to making. In the process of making a work of art, the artist also engages in a self-critical process—questioning assumptions, revising and rethinking choices and decisions, exploring new directions and possibilities. In other words, the artist is also a critical thinker, and the creative process is, at least in part, an exercise in critical thinking.

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

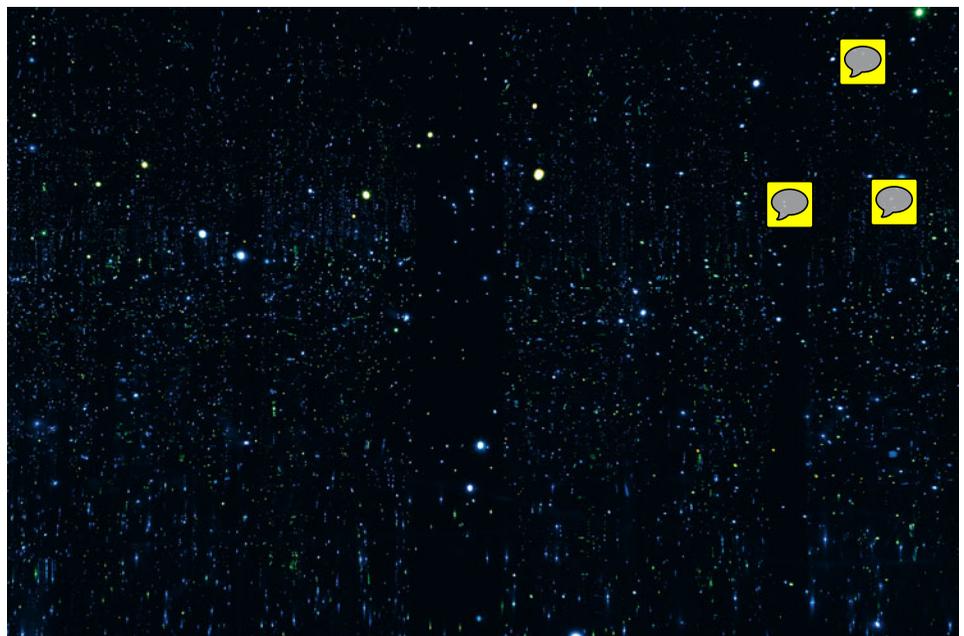
ROLES OF THE ARTIST

Most artists think of themselves as assuming one of four fundamental roles—or some combination of the four—as they approach their work: 1) they help us to see the world in new and innovative ways; 2) they create a visual

Fig. 1-5 Yayoi Kusama, *You Who Are Getting Obliterated in the Dancing Swarm of Fireflies*, 2005.

Mixed media. The Phoenix Museum of Art. Museum purchase with funds provided by Jan and Howard Hendler (2005.146).

Photo by Ken Howie. Courtesy Yayoi Kusama Studio, Inc.



record of their time and place; 3) they make functional objects and structures more pleasurable by imbuing them with beauty and meaning; and 4) they give form to immaterial ideas and feelings.

1) Artists help us to see the world in new or innovative ways.

This is one of the primary roles that Cai Guo-Qiang assumes in creating works like *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters*. In fact, almost all of his work is designed to transform our experience of the world, jar us out of our complacency, and create new ways for us to see and think about the world around us.

The work of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama has much the same effect. Kusama is widely known for her fascination with polka-dots. In the late 1950s, she began to produce paintings that she called “Infinity Nets,” huge canvases painted all over in tiny circles. The paintings were a means of coming to grips with an obsessive hallucinatory vision that she first experienced as a child:

One day I was looking at the red flower patterns of the tablecloth on a table, and when I looked up I saw the same pattern covering the ceiling, the windows and the walls, and finally all over the room, my body and the universe. I felt as if I had begun to self-obliterate, to revolve in the infinity of endless time and the absoluteness of space, and be reduced to nothingness.

Over a career that has spanned the last 50 years, she has covered people, rooms, buildings, and landscapes with her polka-dot patterns, and she has created

installations—room-sized environments—that quite literally reflect her sense of “the infinity of endless time.” *You Who Are Getting Obliterated in the Dancing Swarm of Fireflies* (Fig. 1-5) is an example. Created for the new 2005 addition to the Phoenix Museum of Art—where it has quickly become the most popular work of art in the collection—it consists of a room, the ceiling, floor, and walls of which are covered with mirrors that reflect the flickering glow of tiny dots of LED lights suspended in the space on small strings. Passing through, the viewer feels literally awash in a space so vast that all sense of self—or at least self-importance—is obliterated. Kusama makes us aware of just how small we are in the grand scheme of things.

2) Artists make a visual record of the people, places, and events of their time and place.

Sometimes artists are not so much interested in seeing things anew as they are in simply recording, accurately, what it is that they see. The sculpture of *Pat* (Fig. 1-6) almost looks as if it were alive, and certainly anyone meeting the real “Pat” would recognize her from this sculpture. In fact, *Pat* is one of many plaster casts made from life by John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, residents of the South Bronx in New York City. In 1980, Ahearn moved to the South Bronx and began to work in collaboration with local resident Torres. Torres had learned the art of plaster casting from his uncle, who had cast plaster statues for churches and cemeteries. Together Ahearn and Torres set out to capture the spirit of a community that was financially impoverished but that possessed real, if unrecognized, dignity. “The key to my work is life—lifecasting,” says Ahearn. “The people I cast know that they are as responsible for my work as I am, even more so. The people make my sculptures.” The photographer Nan Goldin responded to the same community by capturing it on film. Her portrait of her friend Cookie Mueller (Fig. 1-7), who later died of AIDS in 1989, was taken at Tin Pan Alley, a Times Square bar, in the era before Times Square was gentrified, where Ahearn and Torres decorated the walls with their plaster casts. “There was never another bar like that in New York,” Goldin recalls, “such a mix of the streets, the sex trade, artists, bands like the Clash on tour, and hip Japanese tourists.” Artists have always understood that in the myriad



Fig. 1-6 John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, *Pat*, 1982. Painted cast plaster, 28½ × 16½ × 11 in. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York. Collection Norma and William Roth, Winterhaven, Florida. Photo courtesy of Sotheby’s.



Fig. 1-7 Nan Goldin, *Cookie at Tin Pan Alley, New York City 1983*, from the multimedia installation, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Cibachrome print, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy of Nan Goldin and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. © 2006 Nan Goldin, courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

expressions and attitudes visible in the faces of the people who make up their world, something like the spirit of their age might be discovered, and Goldin's project in her constantly evolving slide show and subsequent photographic sequence *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, from which this photograph is extracted, was, she says, "to preserve the sense of peoples' lives, to endow them with the strength and beauty I see in them."

Portraiture is, in fact, one of the longest-standing traditions in art. Until the invention of photography, the portrait—whether drawn, painted, or sculpted—was the only way to preserve the physical likeness of a human being. In the sixteenth century, portraiture became especially valued by the Muslim Mughal

leaders of India. When the Mughal ruler Akbar took the throne in 1556 at the age of just 14 years, he established a school of painting taught by masters from Tabriz, Persia, and open to both Hindu and Islamic artists. He also urged his artists to study the Western paintings and prints that Portuguese traders began to bring into the country in the 1570s. By the end of Akbar's reign, a state studio of more than 1,000 artists had created a library of over 24,000 illuminated manuscripts.

Akbar ruled over a court of thousands of bureaucrats, courtiers, servants, wives, and concubines. Fully aware that the population was by and large Hindu, Akbar practiced an official policy of religious toleration. He believed that a synthesis of the world's faiths would surpass the teachings of any one of them. Thus he invited Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others to his court to debate with Muslim scholars. Despite taxing the peasantry heavily to support the luxurious lifestyle that he enjoyed, he also instituted a number of reforms, particularly banning the practice of immolating surviving wives on the funeral pyres of their husbands.

Under the rule of Akbar's son, Jahangir, portraiture found even greater favor in India. The painting *Jahangir in Darbar* is exemplary (Fig. 1-8). It shows Jahangir, whose name means "World Seizer," seated between the two pillars at the top of the painting, holding an audience, or *darbar*, at court. His son, the future emperor Shah Jahan, stands just behind him. The figures in the street are a medley of portraits, composed in all likelihood from albums of portraits kept by court artists. Among them is a Jesuit priest from Europe dressed in his black robes. The stiff formality of the figures, depicted in profile facing left and right toward a central axis, makes a sharp contrast to the variety of faces with different racial and ethnic features that fills the scene. But the painting does, nevertheless, fully document the variety and tolerance of the Mughal court.

No one would mistake Claude Monet's representation of the Gare Saint-Lazare (Fig. 1-9) for a portrait. And yet his depiction of the Paris train station that by 1868 was handling over 13 million commuter passengers a year captures, as fully as *Jahangir in Darbar*, the spirit of its age. Beginning in 1852, Paris had undergone a complete transformation. Long, straight, wide boulevards had been extended across the city. Working-class citizens, who had previously lived in the labyrinth of ancient streets that the boulevards replaced, were removed to the suburbs, along with the industry they supported. Shops, cafés, and the world's first department stores lined the broad sidewalks of the new promenades. New parks, squares, and gardens



Fig. 1-8 Attributed to Manohar, *Jahangir in Darbar*, Mughal period, India, about 1620.

Opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 13³/₄ × 7⁷/₈ in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Francis Bartlett Donation of 1912 and Picture Fund 14.654.

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

were built, and the avenues were lined with over 100,000 newly planted trees. In order to allow traffic to flow seamlessly around the train station, a massive new bridge, the Pont de l'Europe, was built over the tracks. By the time Monet painted the Gare Saint-Lazare in 1877, these changes had been effected. His painting captures the transformation of not only Paris, but modernity itself. Here is a portrait of the new modern world, for better or worse—both the promise of the railroad, of modern speed and industry, and the atmosphere of steam and smoke created in its wake. All around this scene—and Monet painted it seven times in 1877—are the new open avenues of airy light, but here, Monet seems to suggest, just below ground level, lies the heart of the new modern city. In describing the world, the artist is free to celebrate and praise it, or critique and ridicule it, or, as is the case here, acknowledge its ambiguities.



Fig. 1-9 Claude Monet, *Le Pont de l'Europe, Gare Saint-Lazare*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 25¹/₄ × 31⁷/₈ in. Musée Marmottan, Paris, France. Giraudon / Art Resource, New York.

3) Artists make functional objects and structures (buildings) more pleasurable and elevate them or imbue them with meaning.

It is, perhaps, somewhat surprising to recognize that the sculpture of a cocoa pod by African artist Kane Kwei (**Fig. 1-10**) is actually a coffin. Trained as a carpenter, Kwei first made a decorative coffin for a dying uncle, who asked him to produce one in the shape of a boat. In Ghana, coffins possess a ritual significance, celebrating a successful life, and Kwei's coffins delighted the community. Soon he was making fish and whale coffins for fishermen, hens with chicks for

women with large families, Mercedes-Benz coffins for the wealthy, and cash crops for farmers, such as the 8 1/2-foot cocoa bean coffin illustrated here. In 1974, an enterprising San Francisco art dealer brought examples of Kwei's work to the United States, and today the artist's large workshop makes coffins for both funerals and the art market. Today, Kwei's workshop is headed by his grandson, Anang Cedi, and a video of Cedi's work can be viewed on myartslab.

Perhaps the object upon which cultures lavish their attention most is clothing. Clothing serves

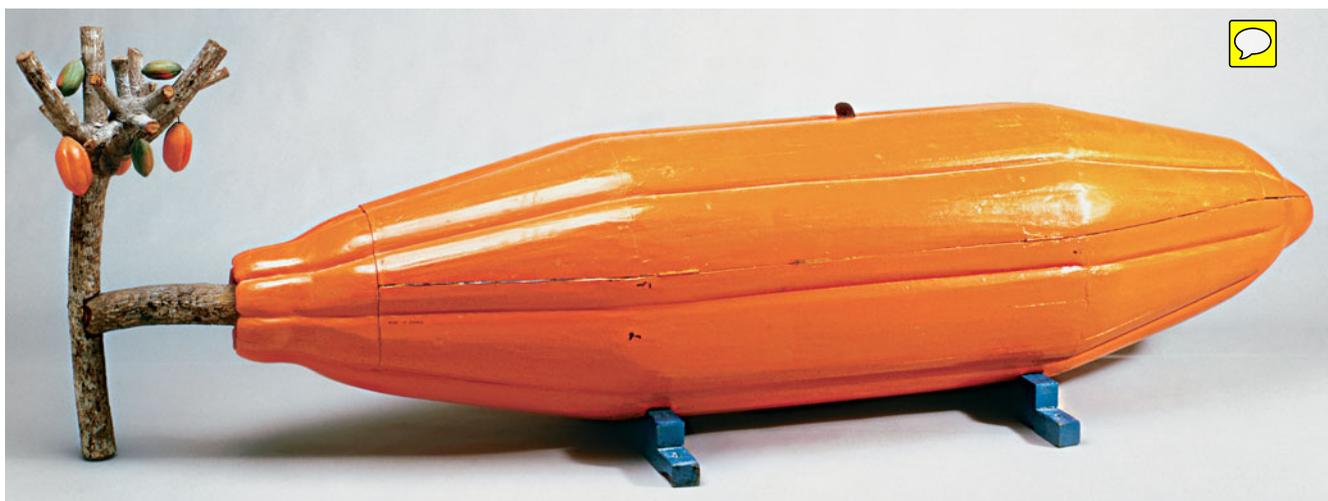


Fig. 1-10 Kane Kwei (Teshi tribe, Ghana, Africa), *Coffin Orange, in the Shape of a Cocoa Pod*, c. 1970. Polychrome wood, 34 × 105¹/₂ × 24 in. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Gift of Vivian Burns, Inc., 74.8.



Fig. 1-11 Karaori kimono, Middle Edo Period, Japan, c. 1700.
Brocaded silk, length 60 in. Tokyo National Museum, Japan.

many more purposes than just protecting us from the elements: It announces the wearer's taste, self-image, and, perhaps above all, social status. The Karaori kimono illustrated here (**Fig. 1-11**) was worn by a male performer who played the part of a woman in Japanese Noh theater. In its sheer beauty, it announced the dignity and status of the actor's character. Made of silk, brocaded with silver and gold, each panel in the robe depicts autumn grasses, flowers, and leaves. Thus, the kimono is more an aesthetic object than a functional

one—that is, it is conceived to stimulate a sense of beauty in the viewer.

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

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

The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center in Nouméa, New Caledonia, an island in the South Pacific, illustrates these principles (**Fig. 1-12**). The architect is Renzo Piano, an Italian, but the principles guiding his design are anything but Western. The Center is named after a leader of the island's indigenous people, the Kanak, and it is dedicated to preserving and transmitting Kanak culture. Piano studied Kanak culture thoroughly, and his design blends Kanak tradition with green architectural principles. The buildings

are constructed of wood and bamboo, easily renewable resources of the region. Each of the Center's 10 pavilions represents a typical Kanak dwelling (in a finished dwelling the vertical staves would rise to meet at the top, and the horizontal elements would weave in and out between the staves, as in basketry). Piano left the dwelling forms unfinished, as if under construction, but to a purpose—they serve as wind scoops, catching breezes off the nearby ocean and directing them down to cool the inner rooms, the roofs of which face south at an angle that allows them to be lit largely by direct daylight. As in a Kanak village, the pavilions are linked with a covered walkway. Piano describes the project as "an expression of the harmonious relationship with the environment that is typical of the local culture. They are curved structures resembling huts, built out of wooden joists and ribs; they are containers of an archaic appearance, whose interiors are equipped with all the possibilities offered by modern technology."

For many people, the main purpose of art is to satisfy our aesthetic sense, our desire to see and experience the beautiful. Many of Pablo Picasso's representations of women in the late 1920s and early



Fig. 1-12 Renzo Piano, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center, Nouméa, New Caledonia, 1991–1998.*

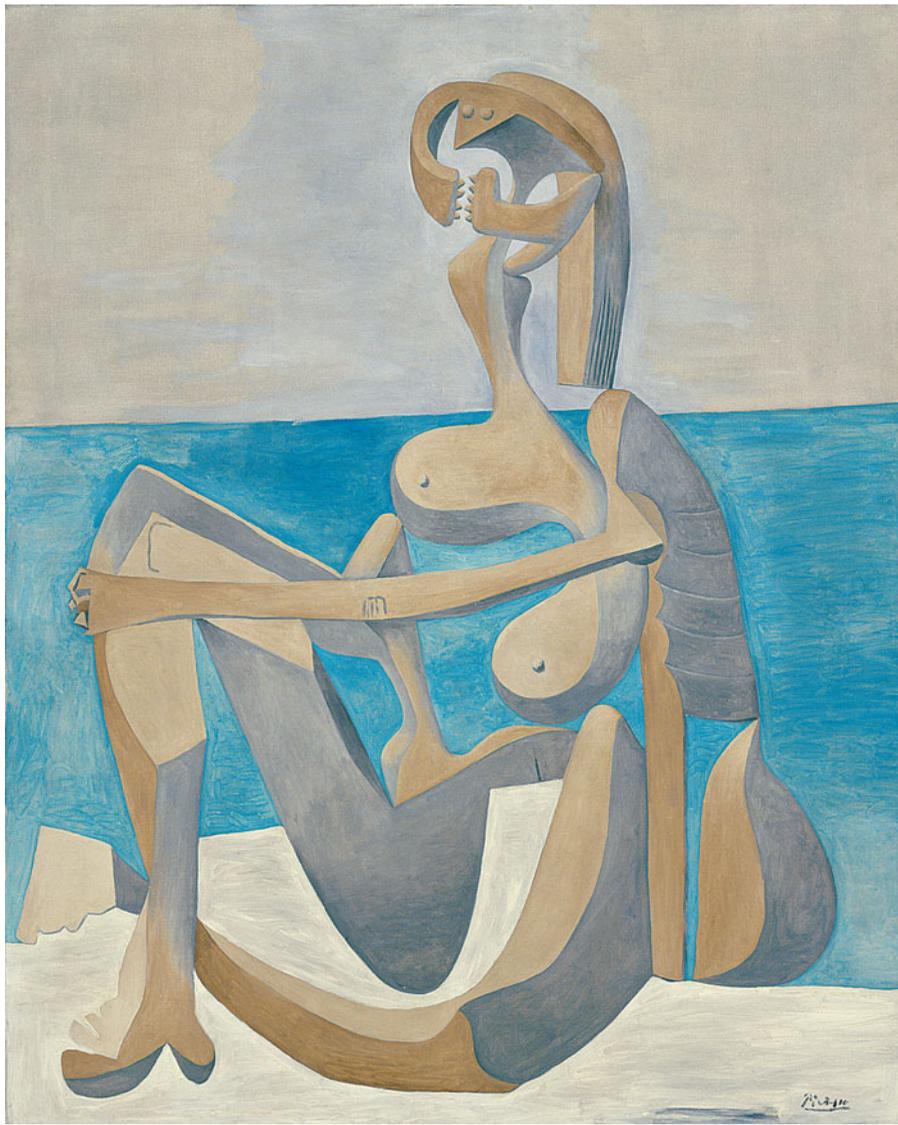


Fig. 1-13 Pablo Picasso, *Seated Bather (La Baigneuse)*, Paris, early 1930.

Oil on canvas, 64 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 51 in. (163.2 × 129.5 cm). Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. (82.1950). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

1930s are almost demonic in character. Most biographers believe images such as his *Seated Bather by the Sea* (Fig. 1-13) to be portraits of his wife, the Russian ballerina Olga Koklova, whom he married in 1918. By the late 1920s, their marriage was in shambles, and Picasso portrays her here as a skeletal horror, her back and buttocks almost crustacean in appearance, her horizontal mouth looking like some archaic mandible. Her pose is ironic, inspired by classical representations of the nude, and the sea behind her is as empty as the Mediterranean sky is gray. Picasso means nothing in this painting to be pleasing, except our recognition of his extraordinary ability to invent expressive images of tension. Through his entire career, since his portrayal of a brothel in his 1907 *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (see *The Creative Process*, pp. 12–13), he represented his relation to women as a sort of battlefield between attraction and repulsion. There can be no doubt which side has won the battle in this painting.

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

4) Artists give form to the immaterial—hidden or universal truths, spiritual forces, personal feelings.

Picasso's treatment of women in both *Seated Bather* and *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* gives form to his own, often tormented, feelings about the opposite sex. In *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, the power of these feelings was heightened by his incorporation of African masks into the composition.

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

A fascinating example of the latter is a type of magical figure that arose in the Kongo in the late nineteenth century (**Fig. 1-14**). Known as *minkisi* (“sacred medicine”), for the Kongo tribes such figures embodied their own resistance to the imposition of foreign ideas as European states colonized the continent. Throughout Central Africa, all significant human powers are believed to result from communication with the dead. Certain individuals can communicate with the spirits in their roles as healers, diviners, and defenders of the living. They are believed to harness the powers of the spirit world through *minkisi* (singular *nkisi*). Among the most formidable of *minkisi* is the type known as *minkonde* (singular *nkonde*), which are said to pursue witches, thieves, adulterers, and wrongdoers by night. The communicator activates a *nkonde* by driving nails, blades, and other pieces of iron into it so that it will deliver similar injuries to those worthy of punishment.

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



Fig. 1-14 Female Figure (*nkisi*), Kongo people (Muserongo), Zaire, late nineteenth century.

Wood, iron nails, glass, resin, height 20¹/₄” × 11” × 8”. The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, IA. The Stanley Collection, X1986.573.

 **View** the Closer Look on *nkonde* figures on myartslab.com

European military commanders saw them as evidence of an aggressive native opposition to colonial control.

Despite their suppression during the colonial era, such figures are still made today and continue to be used by the peoples of the Kongo and among Caribbean peoples of African descent. In fact, Cuban

THE CREATIVE PROCESS



No one could look at Picasso's large painting of 1906–07, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (Fig. 1-17), and call it aesthetically *beautiful*, but it is, for many people, one of his most aesthetically *interesting* works. Nearly 8 feet square, it would come to be considered one of the first major paintings of the modern era—and one of the least beautiful. The title, chosen not by Picasso but by a close friend, literally means “the young ladies of Avignon,” but its somewhat tongue-in-cheek reference is specifically to the prostitutes of Avignon Street, the red-light district of Barcelona, Spain, Picasso's hometown. We know a great deal about Picasso's process as he worked on the canvas from late 1906 into the early summer months of 1907, not only because many of his working sketches survive but also because the canvas itself has been submitted to extensive examination, including X-ray analysis. This reveals early versions of certain passages, particularly the figure at the left and the two figures on the right, which lie under the final layers of paint.

An early sketch (Fig. 1-15) reveals that the painting was originally conceived to include seven figures—five prostitutes, a sailor seated in their midst, and, entering from the left, a medical student carrying

a book. Picasso probably had in mind some anecdotal or narrative idea contrasting the dangers and joys of both work and pleasure, but he soon abandoned the male figures. By doing so, he involved the viewer much more fully in the scene. No longer does the curtain open up at the left to allow the medical student to enter. Now the curtain is opened by one of the prostitutes as if she were admitting us, the audience, into the bordello. We are implicated in the scene.

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

We know, through X-rays, that all five nudes originally looked like the central two. We also know that sometime after he began painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso visited the Trocadero, now the Museum of Man, in Paris, and saw its collection of African sculpture, particularly African masks. He was strongly affected by the experience. The masks seemed to him imbued with power that allowed him, for the first time, to see art, he said, as “a form of magic designed to be a mediator between the strange, hostile world and us, a way of seizing power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires.” As a result, he quickly transformed the faces of three of the five

(This item omitted from WebBook edition)

Fig. 1-15 Pablo Picasso, *Medical Student, Sailor, and Five Nudes in a Bordello* (study for *Les Femmes d'Alger*), Paris, early 1907.

Charcoal and pastel, 18½ × 25 in.
Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett.

Photo: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin P. Buhler.

prostitutes in his painting into African masks. The masks freed him from representing exactly what his subjects looked like and allowed him to represent his idea of them instead.

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

Nowhere is this clearer than in the squatting figure in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. She seems twisted around on herself in the final version, her back to us, but her head is impossibly turned to face us, her chin resting on her grotesque, clawlike hand. We see her, in other words, from both front and back. (Notice, incidentally, that even the nudes in the sketch possess something of this “double” point of view: Their noses are in profile though they face the viewer.) But this crouching figure is even more complex. An early drawing (Fig. 1-16) reveals that her face was originally conceived as a headless torso. What would become her hand was originally her arm. What would become her eyes were her breasts. And her mouth began as her bellybutton. Here we are witness to the extraordinary freedom of invention that defines all of Picasso's art, as well as to a remarkable demonstration of the creative process itself.



Fig. 1-16 Pablo Picasso, *Study for Les Femmes d'Alger*. Head of the Squatting *Femme*, 1907. Inv.: MP 539. Gouache and Indian ink on paper, 24³/₄ × 18⁷/₈ in. Musée Picasso, Paris. Reunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY. © 2012 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Fig. 1-17 Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907.

Oil on canvas. 8' × 7'8" (2.44 × 2.34 m)
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

 **View** the Closer Look for *Les Femmes d'Alger* on myartslab.com



Fig. 1-18 Tania Bruguera, *Displacement*, embodying a Nkisi Nkonde icon, 1998–99.

Cuban earth, glue, wood, nails / textile. Dimensions variable. Still from film of the original performance in Havana, Cuba, 1988–89, exhibited at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY, January–April, 2010.

Courtesy of Studio Bruguera

performance artist Tania Bruguera dressed up as a *nkisi nkonde* in August 1998 (**Fig. 1-18**), standing still in the lobby of the Wilfredo Lam Center of Contemporary Art in Havana until she began to wander the city as if in search of those who had broken the promises made to the icon in return for its help, asserting the power of the icon even as she revealed the vulnerabilities of her audience. The performance was reenacted at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York, in 2010.

In the West, the desire to give form to spiritual belief is especially apparent in the traditions of Christian religious art. For example, the idea of daring to represent the Christian God has, throughout the history of the Western world, aroused controversy. In seventeenth-century Holland, images of God were banned from Protestant churches. As one contemporary Protestant theologian put it, “The image of God is His Word”—that is, the Bible—and “statues in human form, being an earthen image of visible, earthborn man [are] far

away from the truth.” In fact, one of the reasons that Jesus, for Christians the son of God, is so often represented in Western art is that representing the son, a real person, is far easier than representing the father, a spiritual unknown who can only be imagined.

Nevertheless, one of the most successful depictions of the Christian God in Western culture was painted by Jan Van Eyck nearly 600 years ago as part of an



Fig. 1-19 Jan and Hubert van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1432.

11 ft. 5 in. × 15 ft. 1 in. Church of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

 **View** the Closer Look for the *Ghent Altarpiece* on myartslab.com

altarpiece for the city of Ghent in Flanders (Figs. 1-19 and 1-20). Van Eyck's God is almost frail, surprisingly young, apparently merciful and kind, and certainly richly adorned. Indeed, in the richness of his vestments, Van Eyck's God apparently values worldly things. Van Eyck's painting seems to celebrate a materialism that is the proper right of benevolent kings. Behind God's head, across the top of the throne, are Latin words that, translated into English, read: "This is God, all powerful in his divine majesty; of all the best, by the gentleness of his goodness; the most liberal giver, because of his infinite generosity." God's mercy and love are indicated by the pelicans embroidered on the tapestry behind him, which in Christian tradition symbolize self-sacrificing love, for pelicans were believed to wound themselves in order to feed their young with their own blood if other food was unavailable. In the context of the entire altarpiece, where God is flanked by Mary and John the Baptist, choirs of angels, and, at the outer edges, Adam and Eve, God rules over an earthly assembly of worshippers, his divine beneficence protecting all.

The World as We Perceive It

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

THE PROCESS OF SEEING

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

reception → extraction → inference

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



Fig. 1-20 Jan van Eyck, *God*. Panel from *The Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1432. Church of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium. Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Seeing, in other words, is an inherently creative process. The visual system makes conclusions about the world. It represents the world for you by editing out information, deciding what is important and what is not. Consider, for example, what sort of visual information you have stored about the American flag. You know its colors—red, white, and blue—and that it has 50 stars and 13 stripes. You know, roughly, its shape—rectangular. But do you know its proportions? Do you even know, without looking, what color stripe is at the flag’s top, or what color is at the bottom? How many short stripes are there, and how many long ones? How many horizontal rows of stars are there? How many long rows? How many short ones? The point is that not only do we each perceive the same things differently, remembering different details, but also we do not usually see things as thoroughly or accurately as we might suppose. As the philosopher Nelson Goodman explains, “The eye functions not as an instrument self-powered and alone, but as a dutiful member of a complex and capricious organism. Not only how but what it sees is regulated by need and prejudice. It selects, rejects, organizes, discriminates, associates, classifies,

analyzes, constructs. It does not so much mirror as take and make.” In other words, the eye mirrors each individual’s complex perceptions of the world.

ACTIVE SEEING

Everything you see is filtered through a long history of fears, prejudices, desires, emotions, customs, and beliefs. Through art, we can begin to understand those filters and learn to look more closely at the visual world. Jasper Johns’s *Three Flags* (**Fig. 1-21**) presents an opportunity to look closely at a familiar image. According to Johns, when he created this work, the flag was something “seen but not looked at, not examined.” *Three Flags* was painted at a time when the nation was obsessed with patriotism, spawned by Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-communist hearings in 1954, by President Eisenhower’s affirmation of all things American, and by the Soviet Union’s challenge of American supremacy through the space race. Many of the painting’s first audiences saw the fact that the flag becomes less grand and physically smaller the closer it gets to the viewer as a challenge to their idea of America. While contemporary viewers may not have experienced that



Fig. 1-21 Jasper Johns (b. 1930), *Three Flags*, 1958.

Encaustic on canvas, $30\frac{7}{8} \times 45\frac{1}{2} \times 5$ in. (78.4 × 115.6 × 12.7 cm) 50th Anniversary Gift of the Gilman Foundation, Inc., The Lauder Foundation, A. Alfred Taubman, Laura-Lee Whittier Woods, and purchase 80.32. Collection of Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

© Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Cold War era, the work still asks us to consider what the flag represents.

Faith Ringgold's *God Bless America* (Fig. 1-22) has as its historical context the Civil Rights Movement. In it, the American flag has been turned into a prison cell. Painted during a time when white prejudice against African Americans was enforced by the legal system, the star of the flag becomes a sheriff's badge, and its red and white stripes are transformed into the black bars of the jail. The white woman portrayed in the painting is the very image of contradiction, at once a patriot, pledging allegiance to the flag, and a racist, denying blacks the right to vote. She is a prisoner of her own bigotry.

The World as We Understand It: Thinking Thematically

Painted the year after Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream Speech," delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C., Ringgold's painting is a product of her times. But in its desire to address the politics of the moment, it represents one of the traditional themes that, over the centuries, art has addressed.

There are many others. This book will focus on six major themes:

- Art, Politics, and Community
- Art and Spiritual Belief
- Art and the Passage of Time
- Art and Beauty
- Art, Gender, and Identity
- Art, Science, and the Environment

It would be possible to describe virtually every work of art in this book in terms of these themes. They represent universal concerns, concerns that all creative people, in all cultures and at all times, have sought to explore and understand. If different cultures and different eras have inevitably addressed them differently, the quest to understand the world and our place in it is common to us all.

Throughout this book, you will find, in the captions to nearly 150 images, a "tag" line referring you to the Thinking Thematically section of myartslab.com. There you will find an introduction to the theme, outlining its general significance, followed by images of the works in *A World of Art* that address the theme, each with its own discussion of the ways in which it specifically relates to the given theme. This approach not only allows us to broaden our discussion of the works in question, but it has the distinct advantage of approaching the themes of art in a way that allows



Fig. 1-22 Faith Ringgold, *God Bless America*, 1963.

Oil on canvas, 31 × 19 in.

© Faith Ringgold © 1963

you to view the work in relation to other works of art, from throughout the book, that address similar concerns. Furthermore, it provides you with the opportunity to think critically about how various cultures and eras have addressed the same questions and issues.

For instance, if you turn to the Thinking Thematically section of myartslab.com, under the Art, Politics, and Community heading, you will find a reproduction of Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (see Fig. 20-17) painted in 1830 in France. It depicts the events of the July Revolution of 1830. At the apex of a mound of bodies lying in the streets of Paris stands Liberty (the same Liberty whom the French would later give the United States as the Statue of Liberty). In her hand,

she hoists the French flag. The discussion of the image addresses not only the politics of the July Revolution, but the meaning of that flag to the French people in 1830.

Another reproduction illustrates one of the most controversial works of art that has ever addressed the politics that surround the American flag. It was first displayed on February 20, 1989 in an installation at the Art Institute of Chicago consisting of works of art by 66 students who were members of minority groups. Dread Scott's *What Is the Proper Way to Display a US Flag?* (**Fig. 1-23**) consisted of a 34 × 57-inch American flag draped on the floor beneath photographs of flag-draped coffins and South Koreans burning the flag. Beneath the photos was a ledger in which viewers were asked to record their opinions. The problem was not only that the flag was on the floor, but that it was difficult to write in the ledger without stepping on it. Thus the flag became a barrier to the freedom of expression it was meant to defend. Viewers had to choose which they revered more—the flag or freedom of speech.

Angry veterans wearing combat fatigues protested the exhibit soon after it opened, waving American flags, singing the national anthem, and carrying signs saying, "The American flag is not a doormat." Said one: "When I walked in there and saw those muddy footprints on the flag, I was disgusted. It would be different if it was his rendering of the flag. But it was a real flag. And it belongs to the American people." Scott responded that he had purchased the flag at a store for \$3.95. It had been made in Taiwan.

The subsequent battle over the installation would finally be resolved in the Supreme Court of the United States. You will have the opportunity to consider, in the Arts, Politics, and Community section

of myartslab.com, the relationship between the flags in both Scott's work and Delacroix's. What do they tell us about national pride? And about the nature of revolution and civil rights? These are just two of the questions that thinking thematically can generate.



Fig. 1-23 Dread Scott, *What Is the Proper Way to Display a US Flag?*, 1988.

Gelatin silver print of installation, U.S. flag, book, pen, shelf, audience, 80 × 128 × 60 in.

Thinking Thematically: See **Art, Politics, and Community** on myartslab.com

THINKING BACK

What do all artists share?

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

What are the roles of the artist?

Most artists think of themselves as assuming one of four fundamental roles—or some combination of the four—as they approach their work. Artists may help us to see the world in new and innovative ways, create visual records of specific times and places, imbue objects with beauty and meaning, and give form to feelings and ideas. What roles do artists John

✓ [Study and review on myartslab.com

Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres play in their work *Pat*? What distinguishes Kane Kwei's decorative coffins? How does Pablo Picasso give form to the immaterial in his painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*?

What is active seeing?

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

THE CRITICAL PROCESS

Thinking about Making and Seeing

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

Here, Andy Warhol's *Race Riot* (Fig. 1-24) depicts events of May 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama, where police commissioner Bull Connor employed attack dogs and fire hoses to disperse civil rights demonstrators led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The traditional roles of the artist—to help us see the world in new or innovative ways; to make a visual record of the people, places, and events of their time and place; to make functional objects and structures more pleasurable and elevate them

or imbue them with meaning; and to give form to immaterial, hidden or universal truths, spiritual forces, or personal feelings—are all part of a more general creative impulse that leads, ultimately, to the work of art. Which of these is, in your opinion, the most important for Warhol in creating this work? Did any of the other traditional roles play a part in the process? What do you think Warhol feels about the events (note that the print followed soon after the events themselves)? How does his use of color contribute to his composition? Can you think why there are two red panels, and only one white and one blue? Emotionally, what is the impact of the red panels? In other words, what is the work's psychological impact? What reactions other than your own can you imagine the work generating? These are just few of the questions raised by Warhol's work, questions designed to help you initiate the critical process for yourself.



Fig. 1-24 Andy Warhol, *Race Riot*, 1963.

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, four panels, each 20 × 33 in.

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