

WORLD OF ART

EIGHTH EDITION



CHAPTER 22

The Cycle of Life

Learning Objectives

1 of 2

1. Describe how depictions of pregnancy cause us to reflect on our own humanity.
2. Outline some of the narratives suggested by images of youth and aging.
3. Discuss some of the ways in which an awareness of our own mortality is reflected in art.

Learning Objectives

2 of 2

4. Outline some of the ways in which burial practices reflect a belief in the afterlife.

Introduction

1 of 3

- In Tibetan Buddhism, the cycle of life is traditionally imaged by a painting of the *Bhavacakra*, or Wheel of Life.
- At the Wheel's center are three creatures, biting the other's tail in an endless circle.
 - There's a pig, who represents ignorance, a snake, representing envy and hatred, and a red cock, who stands for lust and greed.

Introduction

2 of 3

- The large areas between the spokes of the wheel depict the six different levels of existence into which one might be reborn.
- At the top is a sort of paradise on earth and at the bottom is hell.

Introduction

3 of 3

- The entire Wheel of Life represents the possibility of transforming suffering by understanding how we must transform ourselves if enlightenment can ever be won.
- It also represents the constant state of change that is the cycle of life itself.



Thangka depicting *Bhavacakra* (Wheel of Life), Bhutan.
15th–17th century. Mineral colors with organic matter. Private collection.
Photograph by John C. Huntington. Courtesy of the Huntington Photographic Archive at
Ohio State University. [Fig. 22-1]

Birth

1 of 4

- The Moche were master potters, depicting almost every aspect of Moche life.
- They were the first potters in the Americas to produce clay objects from molds.
- Portraits of people, especially rulers, sit atop the vessels and are individualized.

Birth

2 of 4

- The vessel with a birth scene gives a realistic depiction of childbirth, and may symbolize larger notions of fertility and regeneration.



Vessel with birth scene, Peru, Moche culture.
0–700 CE. Pottery, height 83/4 in. (spout broken off the handle). Ethnologisches
Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.
V A 47912. © 2015. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und
Geschichte, Berlin. [Fig. 22-2]

Birth

3 of 4

- The connection of birth to the cyclical patterns of nature was clear to Leonardo da Vinci.
- The miracle of the fetus in the womb led him to produce the famous anatomical study of an embryo.
- Whatever Leonardo was studying he was, at some level, also studying himself.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Embryo in the Womb*.

ca. 1513. Pen and brown ink, 11-3/4 × 8-1/2" The Royal Collection.

© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 2015/Bridgeman Images. [Fig. 22-3]

Birth

4 of 4

- We are probably meant to identify with the depictions of Adam and Eve in Jan van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*.
- Most agree that Eve's posture suggests her fertility rather than her actual pregnancy.



Jan van Eyck, *Eve* panel from *The Ghent Altarpiece*.
ca. 1432. Oil on panel, 7' × 12-3/4". Church of St. Bavo, Ghent, Belgium.
© 2015. Photo Scala, Florence. [Fig. 22-4]

Young and Age

1 of 7

- John Singer Sargent painted *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, and in it there is a real sense of disconnection among his subjects.
- The painting is a parable of the coming of age of young women in late nineteenth-century society.



John Singer Sargent, *The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*.
1882. Oil on canvas, 7' 3-3/8" x 7' 3-3/8". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Gift of Mary Louisa Boit, Julia Overing Boit, Jane Hubbard Boit, and Florence D. Boit in
memory of their father, Edward Darley Boit, 19.124. Photograph © 2015 Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston. [Fig. 22-5]

Young and Age

2 of 7

- It is within the family that the process of aging—the cycle of life—is most evident to us.
- This is the real subject of Nicholas Nixon's ongoing series of photographs depicting his wife and her three sisters.

Young and Age

3 of 7

- Every year since 1975, Nixon has made a black-and-white photograph of the four, always showing them arranged in the same order from left to right.
- The series is not only a testament to time's relentless force, but to the power of family and love—in spite of time itself.



Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*.
1976. Gelatin silver print, 7-11/16 x 9-5/8". Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Francisco.

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. [Fig. 22-6]



Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*.

2011. Gelatin silver print, 17-15/16 × 22-5/8". Museum of Modern Art, New York.

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco. [Fig. 22-7]

Young and Age

4 of 7

- The feminist, activist, and artist Suzanne Lacy has continually addressed the issue of aging in American society since 1976.
- One of the most visually spectacular of Lacy's works on this theme is *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind*.

Young and Age

5 of 7

- In this performance, 154 women over the age of 65 sat around white cloth-covered tables and talk about their lives.

Young and Age

6 of 7

- The piece was motivated by several facts:
 - By 2020, one in five people in the U.S. will be over 65.
 - This population will be predominantly female and single.
 - Today, women account for nearly 75 percent of the aged poor.

Young and Age

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- The performance reinforced the strong spiritual and physical beauty of older women.
- The image of these women, in white, in this setting, also helps us to understand the beauty of their aging.



Suzanne Lacy, *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind*.
1984. Site photograph of a performance in the *Whisper Projects*.
Courtesy of Suzanne Lacy. [Fig. 22-8]

Contemplating Mortality

1 of 8

- The inevitable fact of death has troubled and fascinated the human imagination.
- around 7400 BCE.
- It was concluded that its culture was matrilineal based on multiple female figurines found.

Contemplating Mortality

2 of 8

- One figurine of a seated woman was believed to represent a fertility goddess.
- Now, she is interpreted as a woman turning into an ancestor, as a woman associated with death, or as death and life conjoined.
- understood that death lurks behind life.



Woman seated between two felines, Çatalhöyük, Turkey.
ca. 6850–6300 BCE. Terra cotta, height 4-5/8". Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, Ankara.
akg-image/De Agostini Picture Lib./M. Seemuller. [Fig. 22-9]

Contemplating Mortality

3 of 8

- This was the motivation for depictions of the decaying body in the Japanese art of *kusozu*.
- The text the *Discourse on the Great Wisdom* argues that contemplation of the nine stages of a decaying corpse allows one to overcome love of the body and carnal desire, and come ever close to enlightenment.



Kobayashi Eitaku, two scenes from the handscroll *Body of a Courtesan in Nine Stages of Decomposition*.

1870s. Ink and color on silk, 10" × 16' 5-1/2". The British Museum, London.
2008,3033.1. © The Trustees of the British Museum. [Fig. 22-10]

Contemplating Mortality

4 of 8

- Fascination with death and the thinking of our own mortality was never more all-consuming than it was in the fourteenth century because of the bubonic plague.

Contemplating Mortality

5 of 8

- The Book of Hours is a good example.
 - The images of *The Three Living and The Three Dead in the Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg* are an example of what is known as a *memento mori*.
 - *Memento mori* translates as "remember that you will die."



Jean Le Noir, pages with *The Three Living* (left) and *The Three Dead* (right), from the *Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy*. Before 1349. Grisaille, color, gilt, and brown ink on vellum, 5-3/16 x 7-11/16 in. opened. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Cloisters Collection, 1969.86 © 2015. Image copyright Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 22-11]

Contemplating Mortality

6 of 8

- Nicolas Poussin's *The Shepherds of Arcadia* is another example of *memento mori* and a directive to lead a virtuous, even ascetic life.
- Vanitas paintings such as *Still Life with Lobster* by Jan de Heem are also examples of the *memento mori* tradition because their models were dead specimens.



Nicolas Poussin, *The Shepherds of Arcadia* (a.k.a. *Et in Arcadia Ego*).
1638–39. Oil on canvas, 33-1/2 × 47-5/8". Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Inv. INV7300. Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Angèle Dequier. [Fig. 22-12]



Jan de Heem, *Still Life with Lobster*.

Late 1640s. Oil on canvas, 25-1/8 × 33-1/4". Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio. Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment. Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1952.25. Photo: Photography Incorporated, Toledo. [Fig. 22-13]

Contemplating Mortality

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- Still-life arrangements of flowers were among Robert Mapplethorpe's favorite subjects.
 - *Calla Lily* was shot in 1986, the same year that Mapplethorpe was diagnosed with AIDS and during the height of the AIDS contagion.
 - It is also considered *momento mori*.

Contemplating Mortality

8 of 8

- Still-life arrangements of flowers were among Robert Mapplethorpe's favorite subjects.
 - He invokes the battle for life in the midst of the dark of death—a spiritual strength in the face of AIDS.



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Calla Lily*.

1986. Gelatin silver print, 19-1/4 × 19-3/8". Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Gift, 93.4302. © Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission of Art + Commerce.

[Fig. 22-14]

Burial and the Afterlife

1 of 7

- Art and architecture have traditionally been associated with burial sites and the possibility of an afterlife in some other realm.
- The great pyramids at Giza are expressions of a sense of cyclical return.

Burial and the Afterlife

2 of 7

- The pyramids were the largest of the resting places designed to house the *ka*.
 - One theory states that the pyramids' sides represented the descending rays of the sun god Re.
 - Another is that the three pyramids are aligned to reflect the three stars that form the belt of the constellation Orion.



Pyramids of Menkaure, Khafre, and Khufu
Pyramids of Menkaure (ca. 2470 BCE), Khafre
(ca. 2500 BCE), and Khufu (ca. 2530 BCE).

Original height of Pyramid of Khufu 480', length of each side at base 755'.
© Free Agents Limited/CORBIS. Photo: Dallas and John Heaton. [Fig. 22-15]

Burial and the Afterlife

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- Burial prepared a king for a "last judgment," which was routinely illustrated in Books of Going Forth by Day.
- Like the Egyptian pyramids, the Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque was erected over the king's grave and rises in nine steps, representing nine levels of the Mayan Underworld.



Last Judgment of Hunefer by Osiris, from a Book of Going Forth by Day in his tomb at Thebes. Dynasty 19, ca. 1285 BCE. Painted papyrus scroll, height 15-5/8". The British Museum, London.
© The Trustees of the British Museum. [Fig. 22-16]

Burial and the Afterlife

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- The lid of the king's sarcophagus represents Pacal falling off the Wacah Chan, the great tree that connects the Upperworld, the Middleworld, and the Underworld.
- Cultures often treat the death of their rulers with special memorial architecture.



Cast of sarcophagus cover of K'Inich Janab Pacal, died 683 CE, from the Temple of Inscriptions, Palenque, Mexico.

Limestone, 12' 6" x 7'. National Anthropological Museum, Mexico.

Art Archive/National Anthropological Museum Mexico/Gianni Dagli Orti. [Fig. 22-17]

Burial and the Afterlife

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- Before the nineteenth century, most burial sites in Europe and America were in the middle of the towns.
- In France, they realized these were a breeding ground for disease and reburied the dead in catacombs beneath the cities.

Burial and the Afterlife

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- This vast removal of the dead amounted to a banishment of the specter of death from the daily life of the city.
- Napoleon decreed each corpse would have an individual plot in one of four garden environments outside the city proper—one being the Père Lachaise Cemetery.



After Pierre Courvoisier, *View of Père Lachaise Cemetery from the Entrance*.
1815. Color engraving. Bibliothèque des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.
Archives Charmet/Bridgeman Images. [Fig. 22-18]

Burial and the Afterlife

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- In Mexican culture, the dead are remembered with *ofrendas*, temporary altars generally created for the annual Dia de los Muertos celebration.
- In 1984, the year after actress Dolores del Rio died, Amalia Mesa-Bains created *An Ofrenda for Dolores del Rio*.
 - It honors someone who inspired and affirmed her own artistic life.



Amalia Mesa-Bains, *An Ofrenda for Dolores del Rio*.

1984, revised 1991. Mixed-media installation including plywood, mirrors, fabric, framed photographs, found objects, dried flowers, and glitter, dimensions variable; as seen here, approx. 8 × 6 × 4'. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Museum purchase through the Smithsonian Institution Collections Acquisition Program, 1998.161. © 2015. Photo Smithsonian American Art Museum/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © 2015 Amalia Mesa-Bains. [Fig. 22-19]

The Critical Process: Thinking about the Cycle of Life

1 of 2

- In 2013, choreographer Stephen Petronio asked artist Janine Antoni if she would be interested in doing the visuals for his new dance, *Like Lazarus Did*.
- The work was inspired by themes of birth, death, and resurrection.

The Critical Process: Thinking about the Cycle of Life

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- For the hour-long performance, Antoni lay completely still, a caged light bulb in her left hand, suspended above the audience, contemplating her own body and her own death.
- Petronio and Antoni collaborated on a 14-minute video of a dancer moving in a honey-coated tube, which they called Honey Baby—imitating the womb.



Janine Antoni and Stephen Petronio, *Honey Baby* Performer: Nick Sciscione.
Videographer: Kirsten Johnson. Composer: Tom Laurie. Editor: Amanda Laws.
2013. Still. Video, 14 min. Edition of 10 and 4 AP.
Courtesy of the artists and Luhring Augustine, New York. [Fig. 22-20]

Thinking Back

1 of 2

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