

## FIRST READ = TIME AND MOTION - PG 140-148 & FUTURISM - PG 516-517

Then - Transfer the green INSTRUCTOR NOTES below onto your homework page

Pattern's repetitive quality creates a sense of linear and directional movement. Anyone who has ever stared at a wallpaper pattern, trying to determine where and how it begins to repeat itself, knows how the eye will follow a pattern.

Pattern is a "motif" repeated on a grid

Nevertheless, one of the most traditional distinctions made between the plastic arts—painting and sculpture—and the written arts, such as music and literature, **is that the former are spatial and the latter temporal media.**

painting & sculpture = spatial

(take place in or concerned with depiction of or actual **space**)

music & literature = temporal

(take place in or concerned with depiction of or actual **time**)

That is, we experience a painting or sculpture **all at once**; the work of art is before us in its totality at all times. But we experience music and literature over time, in a linear way; a temporal work possesses a clear beginning, middle, and end.

painting & sculpture = understood / experienced in one moment

music & literature = understood / experienced in a duration of time

While there is a certain truth to this distinction, time plays a greater role in the plastic arts than such a formulation might suggest. Even in the case where the depiction of a given event implies that we are witness to a photographic "**frozen moment**," an instant of time taken from a larger sequence of events, the single image may be understood as part of a larger narrative sequence: a story.

art often depicts a "**frozen moment**" in time

the "**frozen moment**" can be part of a larger sequence called a **story** or **narrative**

Consider, for instance, Bernini's sculpture of David (Fig. 7-10). As opposed to Michelangelo's David (see Fig. 3-12) who rests, fully self-contained, at some indeterminate time before going into battle, Bernini's figure is caught in the midst of action, coiled and ready to launch his stone at the giant Goliath. In a sense, Bernini's sculpture is "incomplete." The figure of Goliath is implied, as is the imminent flight of David's stone across the implicit landscape that lies between the two of them. As viewers, we find ourselves in the middle of this same scene, in a space that is much larger than the sculpture itself. We intuitively back away from David's sling. We follow his

eyes toward the absent giant. We are engaged in David's energy, and in his story.

**Fig. 7-10 Gianlorenzo Bernini, David, 1623. Marble, life-size. Galleria Borghese, Rome. Galleria Borghese, Rome/Canali PhotoBank, Milan/SuperStock.**

Two ways of showing same story:

Bernini's sculpture of David (Fig. 7-10) = **in the midst of action, coiled and about to launch the stone** vs

Michelangelo's sculpture of David (Fig. 3-12) = **self-contained, relaxed before going into battle,**

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A work of art can also, in and of itself, invite us to experience it in a linear or temporal way. Isidro Escamilla's Virgin of Guadalupe (Fig. 7-11) narrates one of the most famous events in Mexican history. The story goes that in December 1531, on a hill north of Mexico City called Tepeyac, once site of a temple to an Aztec mother goddess, a Christian Mexican Indian named Juan Diego beheld a beautiful dark-skinned woman (in the top left corner of the painting). Speaking in Nahuatl, the native Aztec language, she told Juan Diego to tell the bishop to build a church in her honor at the site, but the bishop doubted Juan Diego's story. So the Virgin caused roses to bloom on the hill out of season and told Juan Diego to pick them and take them to the bishop (represented in the bottom left corner of the painting). When Juan Diego opened his cloak to deliver the roses, an image of the dark-skinned Virgin appeared on the fabric (represented at the bottom right). Soon, miracles were associated with her, and pilgrimages to Tepeyac became increasingly popular. In 1746, the Church declared the Virgin patron saint of New Spain, and in the top right corner of the painting, other saints pay her homage. By the time Escamilla painted this version of the story, the Virgin of Guadalupe had become the very symbol of Mexican identity.

**Instructor = a many events story shown in a single image - a composite**

Likewise, we naturally "read" Pat Steir's Chrysanthemum paintings (see Figs. 6-17 and 6-18) from left to right, in linear progression. While each of Monet's Grainstack paintings (see Fig. 6-38) can be appreciated as a wholly unified totality, each can also be seen as part of a larger whole, a time sequence. Viewed in a series, they are not so much "frozen moments" removed from time as they are about time itself and the ways in which our sense of place changes over time.

visual stories (like writing) often shown **in linear progression from left to right,**

**Monet paints one place many times** = shows changes of time (day / season) with

## light /color

**Fig. 7-12 Claude Monet (1840–1926), *Water Lilies, Morning: Willows (right side)*, 1916–26. Triptych, each panel 80 \* 170 in. Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, France.**

To appreciate large-scale works of art, it may be necessary to move around and view them from all sides, or to see them from a number of vantage points—to view them over time. Monet's famous paintings of his lily pond at Giverny, which were installed in the Orangerie in Paris in 1927, are also designed to compel the viewer to move (Fig. 7-12). They encircle the room, and to be in the midst of this work is to find oneself suddenly in the middle of a world that has been curiously turned inside out: The work is painted from the shoreline, but the viewer seems to be surrounded by water, as if the room were an island in the middle of the pond itself. The paintings cannot be seen all at once. There is always a part of the work behind you. There is no focal point, no sense of unified perspective. In fact, the series of paintings seems to organize itself around and through the viewer's own acts of perception and movement. According to Georges Clemenceau, the French statesman who was Monet's close friend and who arranged for the giant paintings to hang in the Orangerie, the paintings could be understood not just as a simple representation of the natural world, but also as a representation of a complex scientific fact, the phenomenon of "Brownian motion." First described by the Scottish scientist Robert Brown in 1827, Brownian motion is a result of the physical movement of minute particles of solid matter suspended in fluid.

**Claude Monet - Water Lilies -  
Huge Work, Takes up entire room. Viewer becomes contained in work.**

Any sufficiently small particle of matter suspended in water will be buffeted by the molecules of the liquid and driven at random throughout it. Standing in the midst of Monet's panorama, the viewer's eye is likewise driven randomly through the space of the paintings. The viewer is encircled by them, and there is no place for the eye to rest, an effect that Jackson Pollock would achieve later in the century in the monumental "drip" paintings he executed on the floor of his studio (see *The Creative Process*, pp. 144–145).

Some artworks are created precisely to give us the illusion of movement. In optical painting, or "Op Art," as it is more popularly known, the physical characteristics of certain formal elements—particularly line and color—are subtly manipulated to stimulate the nervous system into thinking it perceives movement. Bridget Riley's *Drift 2* (Fig. 7-13) is a large canvas that seems to wave and roll before our eyes even though it is stretched taut across its support. One of Riley's earliest paintings was an attempt to find a visual equivalent to heat. She had been crossing a wide plain in Italy: "The heat off the plain was quite incredible—it shattered the topographical structure of it and set up violent color vibrations. . . . The important thing was to bring about an equivalent shimmering sensation on the canvas." In *Drift 2*, we encounter not heat, but wave

action, as though we were, visually, out at sea.

**Fig. 7-13 Bridget Riley, Drift No. 2, 1966. Acrylic on canvas, 911/2 \* 891/2 in.**

Bridget Riley - Op Art (Optical Art) - With wavy lines or thin/thick lines creates the illusion that painting moves or vibrates

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## THE CREATIVE PROCESS

**Fig. 7-14 Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock painting Autumn Rhythm, 1950.**

**Gelatin silver print, Center for Creative Photography, Tucson. Photograph by Hans Namuth.**

While not as large as Monet's paintings at the O rangerie, Jackson Pollock's works are still large enough to engulf the viewer. The eye travels in what one critic has called "galactic" space, following first one line, then another, unable to locate itself or to complete its visual circuit through the web of paint. Work such as this has been labeled "Action Painting," not only because it prompts the viewer to become actively engaged with it, but also because the lines that trace themselves out across the sweep of the painting seem to chart the path of Pollock's own motions as he stood over it. The drips and sweeps of paint record his action as a painter and document it, a fact captured by Hans Namuth in October of 1950 in a famous series of photographs (Fig. 7-14) of Pollock at work on the painting Autumn Rhythm, and then in two films, one shot in black and white and the other in color. An excerpt from the black-and-white film can be viewed on [myartslab.com](http://myartslab.com). It shows Pollock first creating a linear network of black lines by dripping paint with a small brush over an entire canvas, and then overlaying that web of lines with white paint dripped from a much larger brush. The second, color film was shot from below through a sheet of glass on which Pollock was painting, vividly capturing the motion embodied in Pollock's work. The resulting work, No. 29, 1950 (Fig. 7-15), was completed over the course of five autumn weekends, with Namuth filming the entire event. After a false start on the painting, which Pollock wiped out in front of the camera, he created a collage web of paint, containing pebbles, shells, sand, sections of wire mesh, marbles, and pieces of colored plastic.

Namuth's photographs and films teach us much about Pollock's working method. Pollock longed to be completely involved in the process of painting. He wanted to become wholly absorbed in the work. As he had written in a short article called "My Painting," published in 1947, "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing . . . the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."

In Namuth's photographs and films, we witness Pollock's absorption in the work. We see the immediacy of his gesture as he flings paint, moving around the work, the paint tracing his path.

He worked on the floor, in fact, in order to heighten his sense of being in the work. “I usually paint on the floor,” he says in Namuth’s film. “I feel more at home, more at ease in a big area, having a canvas on the floor, I feel nearer, more a part of a painting. This way I can walk around it, work from all four sides and be in the painting.” We also see in Namuth’s images something of the speed with which Pollock worked. According to Namuth, when Pollock was painting, “his movements, slow at first, gradually became faster and more dancelike.” In fact, the tracteries of line on the canvas are like choreographies, complex charts of a dancer’s movement. In Pollock’s words, the paintings are energy and motion made visible— memories arrested in space.

Namuth was disturbed by the lack of sharpness and the blurred character in some of his photographs, and he did not show them to Pollock. “It was not until years later,” Namuth admitted, “that I understood how exciting these photographs really were.” At the time, though, his inability to capture all of Pollock’s movement led him to the idea of making a film. “Pollock’s method of painting suggested a moving picture,” he would recall, “the dance around the canvas, the continuous movement, the drama.”

Jackson Pollock - Abstract Expressionist - 1950 - the act of painting is like a dance, canvas on the floor - liquid paint is poured onto the canvas - energy and motion made visible

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Of all the arts, those that employ cameras are probably most naturally concerned with questions of time and motion. Time and motion are the very conditions of these media. Consider Nicholas Nixon’s ongoing series of photographs depicting his wife, Bebe Brown Nixon and her three sisters, the Brown sisters (Figs. 7-16 and 7-17). Each year, beginning in 1975, when the four women ranged in age from 15 to 25, Nixon has made a single black-and-white photograph of the four, always photographing them in the same order from left to right: Heather, Mimi, Bebe, and Laurie. Although he shoots any number of exposures, he has printed only one photograph each year. By 2011, he had created a series of 37 photographs that reveal not only the gradual aging process of the sisters, but, he suggests, the ever-changing dynamics of the relationships among them. Yet two of the most fascinating aspects of the series are the commitment of the women to sustain the project, and now, as they age, the prospect of their—or the photographer’s—eventual demise. The series is not only a testament to time’s relentless force, but to the power of family, and love, to endure and sustain us all, as if in spite of time itself. The power of the image to endure may, Nixon’s work suggests, in fact lie at the heart of every family’s commitment to documenting in photography its very history, even as the family is transformed and irrevocably changed by that history.

**Fig. 7-16 (top) Nicholas Nixon, The Brown Sisters, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 711/16 \* 95/8 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. 687.1976.**

photography and video - most naturally concerned with time and motion

The Brown Sisters - four sisters photographed every year for forty years  
commitment, endurance, change, aging  
a testament to relentless force of time

The ways in which time and motion can transform the image itself is one of the principal subjects of Grace Ndiritu, a British-born video and performance artist of Kenyan descent. Ndiritu makes what she calls “hand-crafted videos,” solo performances in front of a camera fixed on a tripod. *Still Life: White Textiles* (Fig. 7-18) is one part of the larger four-screen video work *Still Life*. (An excerpt from the *White Textiles* segment, as well as excerpts from a number of her other works, can be screened at [axisweb.org](http://axisweb.org), a British nonprofit corporation that describes itself as “the online resource for contemporary art.” Search Ndiritu’s name under the “artists and curators” heading.) Ndiritu’s title, *Still Life*, is entirely ironic, for seated between two sheets of African batik printed fabric, she caresses her thighs, moves her hands beneath the fabric, pulls it, stretches it—in short, she animates the cloth. At once hidden and exposed, Ndiritu creates an image that is at once chaste and sexually charged.

Art Influences Other Art = “*Still Life*” was inspired by a 2005 exhibition of paintings by Henri Matisse at the Royal Academy in London, “*Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles.*”

Seeing the show, she said, reaffirmed the similarity of our working process . . . we share the ritual of assembling textiles and setting up the studio with fabrics as a background to galvanize our artistic practice. Matisse understands and appreciates the beauty and simplicity of working with textiles. The hallucinogenic properties of overlapping patterns, shift and swell in his paintings, override perspective and divorce shape from color. The effects of which Ndiritu speaks are clearly visible in Matisse’s *Harmony in Red (The Red Room)* (Fig. 5-25), where the textile pattern of the tablecloth is mirrored in the wallpaper, flattening perspective and disorienting the viewer’s sense of space. After visiting North Africa in 1911, Matisse often painted female models clothed in African textiles in settings decorated with other textile patterns. But in Ndiritu’s work, time and motion transform the textile from decorative pattern into live action. By implication, the female body in Ndiritu’s “video painting,” as she calls it, is transformed from a passive object of contemplation—as it was in so many of Matisse’s paintings—into an almost aggressive agent of seduction. The power of the work lies in the fact that, hidden and exposed as Ndiritu is, that seduction is at once invited and denied.

**Fig. 7-18 Grace Ndiritu, *Still Life: White Textiles*, 2005/2007. Still from a silent video, duration 4 min. 57 sec. © LUX, London.**

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## FUTURISM (516-17)

If abstraction was the hallmark of the new century, certain thematic concerns defined it as well. The world had become, quite literally, a new place. In the summer of 1900, with the opening of the World's Fair, Paris found itself electrified, its nights almost transformed to day. The automobile, a rarity before the new century, dominated the city's streets by 1906. People were flying airplanes. Albert Einstein proposed a new theory of relativity and Niels Bohr a new model for the atom. Many people felt that there could be no tradition, at least not one worth imitating, in the face of so much change. In February 1909, an Italian poet named Filippo Marinetti published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* a manifesto announcing a new movement in modern art, Futurism. Marinetti called for an art that would champion "aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride . . . the punch and the slap." He had discovered, he wrote, "a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath . . . is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace." He promised to "destroy the museums, libraries, academies" and "sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals." There were, at the time, no Futurist painters. Marinetti had to leave Paris, go back to Italy, and recruit them. But as they exhibited their show of Futurist painting around Europe from 1912 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, outraging as many as they pleased, these painters—Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini—embodied the spirit of the machine and of rapid change that seemed to define the century itself. Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (Fig. 21-6) captures the Futurist fascination with movement. It demonstrates, as well, its debt to new technological media—in particular, photography, as in Marey's and Muybridge's work (see Figs. 3-8 and 12-1), and the new art of film. Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (Fig. 21-7) gives the sense of a figure striding forward, clothing flapping in the wind. But Boccioni probably means to represent a nude, its musculature stretched and swollen to reveal its movement through space and time. It could probably best be thought of as an organic response to Marcel Duchamp's mechanistic *Nude Descending a Staircase* (see Fig. 3-7).

abstraction = the hallmark of the new century

1900 - planes - automobiles - einstein - electric lights

Futurism - the beauty of speed, embodied the spirit of the machine and of rapid change that seemed to define the century itself

