

Understanding Western Culture through Western Art

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Art history, art criticism, and art appreciation: what are we doing?

We examine how art represents ideas in a specific historical context

- a. Art *interacts* with its historical context; it reflects its environment, but it also comments on its environment.
- b. The context may be in the past (*art history*) or the present (*art criticism*).
- c. In any single context, different people may interpret a work of art in different ways; art has *multiple meanings*.
- d. Because we are usually not part of a work's original context, we create *new meanings* for works of art, based on our own historical context.
- e. *Appreciating art* includes understanding how art interacted with its original context and how it relates to our own context.
- f. Art appreciation requires both *factual analysis* and *subjective interpretation*.

Methods for analyzing and interpreting art

ex: Andy Warhol (United States), *Marilyn Monroe Series*, silkscreen, 1962-67

1. Analyzing a work (describing facts):

- a. How was the work made? (*medium* and *technique*)
- b. What does it show? (*subject*)
- c. How does it look? (*style*)

2. Interpreting a work (creating meanings):

- a. How is the work related to the society, politics, religion, or culture of its time? (*historical context*)
- b. For whom did the artist make it, and why? (*patronage*)
- c. Do we know what the artist said about his/her work? (*intentions*)

- d. Do we know what viewers at the time said about it? (*reception*)
- e. What kind of ideology does the work convey? (*interpretation*)

Ideologies of Western art

1. Art and power: how does a work reinforce or undermine political ideas or power relations?

ex: Jacques-Louis David (France), *Portrait of Napoleon at St. Bernard*, oil painting, 1800

ex: Various artists (China), *Accession Portrait of Emperor Qianlong*, ink and watercolor scroll, 18th c.

ex: Francisco de Goya (Spain), *The Third of May 1808*, oil painting, 1814

2. Art and religion: how does a work embody religious beliefs and values?

ex: Jan and Hubert van Eyck (Belgium), *Ghent Altarpiece*, oil on panel, 1432

ex: Gianlorenzo Bernini (Italy), *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, marble sculpture, Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, 1645-52

3. Art and social identity: how does a work represent people's place in society?

ex: Thomas Gainsborough (England), *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews*, oil painting, 1749

ex: Gustave Courbet (France), *The Stonebreakers*, oil painting, 1849

ex: Jacob Lawrence (U.S.), *Migration of the Negro*, series of tempera paintings, 1940-1942: *No. 10: "They were very poor"*

ex: Barbara Kruger (U.S.), *Untitled (We Won't Play Nature to Your Culture)*, photograph and text, 1983

4. Art and self-expression: how does a work express individual experiences or ideas?

ex: Albrecht Dürer (Germany), *Self-Portrait*, oil painting, 1500

ex: Francisco Goya (Spain), *Untitled (Saturn Devouring One of his Children)*, wall painting, 1820-23

ex: Vincent van Gogh (Netherlands and France), *Van Gogh's Bedroom*, oil painting, 1888

ex: Jackson Pollock (United States), *One*, oil painting, 1950

Strategies and genres of Western art

1. Realism: the desire to make an image resemble what we see

ex: Leonardo da Vinci (Italy), *The Last Supper*, tempera and oil painting, Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, 1495-1498

ex: Jan Vermeer (Netherlands), *The Milkmaid*, oil painting, c.1658

ex: Claude Monet (France), *Impression, Sunrise*, oil painting, 1872

ex: Claude Monet (France), *Wheatstacks* series, oil paintings, 1890-91

ex: Louis Daguerre (France), *View of the Boulevard du Temple, Paris*, daguerreotype photograph, c.1838

2. Beauty: “idealism” means making things look more perfect than in reality

ex: Polykleitos (Greece), *Spear Bearer*, ancient Roman copy in marble of an original bronze sculpture of c.450 B.C.

ex: Claude Lorrain (France), *The Judgment of Paris*, oil painting, c.1645

3. The body: the most important subject for realism, idealism, and narrative

ex: Michelangelo (Italy), *David*, marble sculpture, 1504

ex: Titian (Italy), *Venus of Urbino*, oil painting, 1538

ex: J.A.D. Ingres (France), *The Grand Odalisque*, oil painting, 1814

ex: Edouard Manet (France), *Olympia*, oil painting, 1865

ex: Pablo Picasso (Spain and France), *The Ladies of Avignon*, oil painting, 1907

4. Narrative: images that refer to a religious, historical, or literary story

ex: Michelangelo (Italy), *Sistine Ceiling*, fresco painting, the Vatican, Rome, 1508-1512

ex: Jacques-Louis David (France), *The Oath of the Horatii*, oil painting, 1785

5. Portraiture: images of specific individuals

ex: Leonardo da Vinci (Italy), *Mona Lisa*, oil painting, c.1503-06

6. Landscape: representing the harmony of people and nature

ex: John Constable (England), *The Hay Wain*, oil painting, 1821

7. Abstraction: the fundamental break with realism

ex: Pablo Picasso (Spain and France), *Violin and Compote*, oil painting and collage, 1913

ex: Piet Mondrian (Netherlands), *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue*, oil painting, 1922

ex: Mark Rothko (Russia and U.S.), *Orange and Yellow*, oil painting, 1956

8. Conceptual art, performance, and installation: re-defining “art”

ex: Marcel Duchamp (France), *Fountain*, porcelain and metal sculpture, 1917

ex: Christo (Bulgaria and U.S.), *Running Fence, Sonoma and Marin Counties, California*, temporary installation, 1976

Periods of Western art

1. Classical art (c.500 B.C.-c.400 A.D.): Greek and Roman political organization, technology, and humanism

ex: Ictinus and Callicrates, *The Parthenon*, Athens, Greece, 5th century B.C.

ex: *House of Vettii: the Ixion Room*, wall painting, Pompeii, Italy, c.70-79 A.D.

2. Medieval art (c.400-c.1400): the decline of classicism and rise of Christianity

ex: *Chartres Cathedral*, Chartres, France, begun 12th c.

ex: Anonymous (Ireland), *The Arrest of Christ*, in the *Book of Kells*, manuscript illumination (tempera paint), c.800

3. Renaissance and Baroque art (c.1400-c.1700): the integration of Christianity and classicism; the Protestant Reformation; the rise of kings and nations

ex: Michelangelo & others (Italy), *Saint Peter's Basilica*, Rome, Italy, begun 1546

ex: *Versailles Palace (Hall of Mirrors)*, Versailles, France, begun 17th century

ex: Sandro Botticelli (Italy), *The Birth of Venus*, tempera painting, c.1486

ex: Gianlorenzo Bernini (Italy), *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*, marble sculpture, Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome, 1645-52

ex: Jan Vermeer (Netherlands), *The Milkmaid*, oil painting, c.1658

4. Early modern art (c.1700-c.1900): the rise of public exhibitions, private art markets, romantic self-expression, and modern life

ex: Percier and Fontaine, *Rue de Rivoli*, Paris, France, begun 1806

ex: François Boucher (France), *Marquise de Pompadour*, oil painting, 1756

ex: Jacques-Louis David (France), *The Oath of the Horatii*, oil painting, 1785

ex: J.M.W. Turner (England), *Snowstorm, Steamboat Off a Harbour's Mouth*, oil painting, 1842

ex: Claude Monet (France), *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris*, oil painting, 1873

5. Modern art (c.1900-c.2000): the revolution of abstraction, individualism and the notion of the "avant-garde," the retreat of art from the public

ex: Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon, *Empire State Building*, New York, U.S., 1931

ex: Wassily Kandinsky (Russia/Germany), *Improvisations No. 30 (Cannons)*, oil painting, 1913

ex: Jackson Pollock (United States), *One*, oil painting, 1950

ex: Andy Warhol (United States), *Marilyn Monroe Series*, silkscreen, 1962-67

6. Contemporary art (the present): disintegrating the boundaries of “the West”