

Understanding Western visual arts through Western culture

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Before the Renaissance

Byzantine art:
frontal
static
no emotion

Cimabue:

inspired by Byzantine art
but added strong emotions

Disciple of Cimabue: **Duccio**

same emotions shown as in Cimabue
interaction between the figures
first artist to sign his works

Greatest disciple of Cimabue: **Giotto**, the first Renaissance artist

Renaissance means “rebirth”
same emotions shown as in Cimabue, but more subtle
use of perspective
use of shadows to show 3 dimensions

Problems of Tempera: very difficult to paint believable shadows

Problems of fresco (Mural painting): the artist has to work fast on small portions of the wall

After Giotto: more and more feelings and interaction between the figures

Two important places for Renaissance: Florence and Sienna

In the Sienna town hall: the first landscape painting in Western Europe by the **Lorenzetti** brothers

Late Gothic and Renaissance in Northern Europe

In the rest of Europe: still the Gothic style
very decorative style in architecture
important use of light
more and more windows, less and less walls

In northern Europe: Flanders (North of France, Belgium and Holland)

invention of oil painting by **Jan van Eyck**: translucent
easier to make shadows, easier to make realistic pictures

At first, northern Europe painting does not use perspective
Then, with the exchanges between Italy and the North, perspective arrives

Result:
Realistic shadows + perspective = photorealistic pictures

In Italy: real people in real situation

In northern Europe: real people in real situation, but also a lot of monsters....

Antonello da Messina: the first Italian artist to use oil paint

Early Renaissance

Fra Angelico: decorative art in a 3 dimensional space
Gold and colours with shadows and perspective

Perspective is used from the experiment of the architects
Brunelleschi and **Alberti**

Masaccio: the first painter to use perspective
Traditional story telling in a 3 dimensional space

In the city of Urbino, **Piero della Francesca**
Perspective and composition
The ideal city and the dream of the perfect life

Perugino: master of Raphael

Pollaiuolo: the study of the human body
More and more paintings that are not religious

Ucello: the poetry of perspective

Signorelli: master of the bodies in a crowd
The only great influence on the work of Michelangelo

Botticelli: return to more ancient sources
Less perspective and less realism

Ghirlandaio: first completely realistic synthesis of
Perspective, shadow and believable story-telling

Leonardo da Vinci: the link between the experiments of
The early Renaissance and High Renaissance (= Classicism)

High Renaissance

High Renaissance: **Raphael** and **Michelangelo**
For 5 centuries, they will be considered as the greatest of all artists

Raphael: perfect balance and harmony

Michelangelo: expressive strength and passionate emotions

Mannerism

After Michelangelo, artists like **il Pontormo** and **Agnolo Bronzino** feel freer to express their own emotions and feelings.

Maniera: style

Every form can be used to express a pictorial idea, so human bodies and architecture can be transformed and twisted as the artist wants.

There is less interest in the imitation of Nature and a 3 dimensional space.

Giorgio Vasari writes the first history of art (Renaissance art).

His goal: to prove that the perfection of art has been reached in the work of Michelangelo.

From that moment on, every academy and school of art in the West will use the works of Michelangelo and Raphael for teaching.

El Greco, probably the most original Mannerist painter
Born in Greece, he made most of his career in Spain where he developed a style mixing influences from Italy, Spain and even his own Byzantine background (the Greek traditional painters were still using the old Byzantine style)
Almost forgotten after his death, he was re-discovered in the 20th century as a major artist

Venetian Renaissance

Florence: emphasis on the line (drawing and perspective)
Venice: emphasis on the colour (atmosphere and landscape)

Giorgione, the first great master and tutor of Titian

Titian was the most influential artist in Venice. He made a very long career and constantly experimented with effects of light and colors.

His two most important disciples were **Tintoretto** and **Veronese**.

Tintoretto used and explored the use of light initiated by Titian

Veronese used and explored the use of color initiated by Titian

Baroque (17th century)

The word "Baroque" means an irregular-shaped pearl
"Baroque" is used in opposition to "Classical"

Baroque: wild, irregular and dynamic

Classical: calm, regular and harmonious

Baroque in Italy

The **Carracci** family, leading a very influential academy of art in Rome

Caravaggio, one of the most important innovator in 17th century art

Realism: his paintings always use real people from the street and never any idealized figure

Tenebrism: from "tenebrae" meaning "darkness", his paintings are very often very dark with large portions in total darkness

There is also very often a lot of violence in his work

Bernini, the most famous and influential architect and sculptor of the Baroque style

Andrea Pozzo and **Pietro da Cortona**, perfect examples of Baroque painting

Perfect integration of the fresco and the architecture

Very dynamic and wild movements of all the elements of the painting

Nicolas Poussin and **Claude Lorrain**, perfect example of French painting

Both lived in Rome

They created a form of classicism that will become the rule in the late 18th and 19th centuries

Baroque in Spain

The Golden Age of Spanish culture in the arts

Most of the Spanish artists were very influenced by the Italian Caravaggio

There is always a sense of darkness in 17th century Spanish painting

Ribera enjoys painting crippled and strange persons

Zurbaran enjoys painting saints and rather sad figures

Velasquez, the greatest Spanish painter of the 17th century

A court painter, he liked the rough brushstrokes in the style of Titian

In some of his most famous paintings, he plays with mirrors and questions the role of the viewer

Baroque in Flanders and Holland

Rubens, the best representative of the Baroque style in Northern Europe

He was also a politician and ambassador

Van Dyck was his disciple and moved to England to make a great career as court painter

Frans Hals, not very successful in his time, he became very influential in the late 17th century because of his rough brushstrokes in the style of Titian

Rembrandt, the greatest Dutch painter of the 17th century

He also used rough brushstrokes in the style of Titian

His series of self-portrait is extremely famous today

He is also famous for using chiaroscuro in a very emotional way

Chiaroscuro: Italian for "clear" and "dark", to use very strong contrast of light and shade

Ruysdael, great landscape painter

The Dutch started a long tradition of great landscape paintings

Vermeer, almost forgotten after his death, he was re-discovered in the 20th century

Paintings of people and places with brilliant effects of light

Baroque in France

The whole 17th century is dominated by the king of France Louis the XIV

He created a style for the entire country that was harmonious and balanced

Very different from the Italian style

Vouet and Champaigne, a French very balanced version of the Italian style

De La Tour, a French more balanced and quieter version of the “Tenebrism” of Caravaggio

Le Brun, in charge of the decoration of the royal palace in Versailles

Rococo

“Rococo”: from the French word “rocaille” meaning a garden made with decorative rocks.
Decorative style with entertaining themes: love, beautiful surroundings and pretty women.

Rococo in Italy

Tiepolo, large decorative fresco

Canaletto, Venice with spectacular effects of light

Rococo in France

Watteau, he is creator of the Rococo style in painting. Dynamic use of painting to represent scenes of love and courtly life.

Boucher and Fragonard, court painters specialising in depiction of beautiful women.

Rococo as a decorative style: architecture, furniture and interior design.

Chardin, the most important still-life painter in Europe.

With **Greuze**, the Rococo style comes to an end: less fun and more moral tales.

Vernet introduces a more spectacular, less friendly, vision of nature.

The care-free attitude of the 18th century gives way to a more serious, moralistic, approach.

18th century in England

A large variety of different styles at the same time.

Hogarth wants the painters to look to the lives of people to paint.

Reynolds, head of the Royal academy, prefers to look to the paintings of the Renaissance.

Gainsborough takes a middle-way approach

Wilson introduces the Romantic landscape in British art

Neoclassical

Artists go back to the study of Roman and Greek antiquity.

In the whole of Europe, a more systematic approach to art history make the artists more aware of a variety of styles they use in a more personal way.

David and the most important artists of the French revolution introduce a more heroic aspect to painting.

Eventually, a new interest for nature, a deeper knowledge of period styles and the seriousness of the historical events (French revolution, Napoleonic wars, etc.) lead the European artists to a new style: Romantic art.

Romanticism

Stubbs is the painter of horses and the untamed nature

Wright of Derby gives to the industrial revolution a poetic feel

Fuseli and Blake give to England their strangest, most magical paintings

Friedrich is the German painter of the vast untamed nature. He is the perfect romantic artist.

Goya is the witness of the horror of war in Spain and the painter of horrifying visions and nightmares

Gros depicts the adventure of the napoleonic wars and is one of the creators of the idea of the romantic hero

Gericault is also exploring the idea of the romantic hero. He is also fascinated by death and madness

Delacroix travels to the orient and explores the possibilities of color

Pre-Raphaelites

A group of English artists. They wanted to work like medieval artists and go back to the kind of art made before the High Renaissance (before Raphael). Their work was made in reaction against the manufactured objects made in the factories of England. They felt that beauty could only be found in the hand-made work of art. This is why they felt it was necessary to use the medieval studio system. Otherwise, their work does not look like Gothic art. It is in fact:

- extremely realistic
- great attention to details
- subject matter: religious stories, medieval stories and stories from the legend of King Arthur and the knights of the round table

Ford Madox Brown was only briefly in the Pre-Raphaelite group. His painting is a perfect example of Victorian art: detailed, moralistic and sentimental.

William Hunt belonged to the group much longer. Like Brown, his painting is a perfect example of Victorian art.

Dante Gabriele Rossetti, the leader of the group, was also a poet. His work, very often in pastel, is more flamboyant than

the other's. He preferred to illustrate medieval stories but made also a lot of imaginary portrait of beautiful women.

Everett Millais is particularly famous for one painting (Ophelia, 1851-52, Tate Gallery, London), the rest of his work has the same shortcomings as Brown and Hunt.

The Arts and Craft Movement

Directly following the Pre-Raphaelite movement, the Arts and Craft Movement, founded by William Morris, a former Pre-Raphaelite, wanted to use the system of the medieval studio. More than the Pre-Raphaelites, he was interested in creating objects more than paintings.

William Morris founded a company that produced furniture and decorative items like wallpaper, ceramic tiles and stained-glass windows. Morris also created the Kelmscott press that produced illuminated books in the medieval style. The Arts and Craft Movement was very influential for later schools of design like the Bauhaus in 20th century Germany.

Edward Burne Jones, who was also briefly a Pre-Raphaelite, worked for the William Morris Company as a designer. He was, with Dante Gabriele Rossetti, one of the best artists of the movement.

Realism

Daumier is the first Romantic artist to get an interest in the lives of the poor people

In England, the landscape became a tool for personal expressions in the hand of **Constable** and **Turner**

In France, **Corot** will be the first Romantic artist to help the young impressionist artists

Courbet invents the idea of "Realism": following the exploration of color of Delacroix and the political ideas of the revolutions, he invents a new style that will eventually lead to the first development of Impressionism. His paintings were shocking to the French audience because of the choice of subject matter and the way represents actual people without embellishing them.

Millet follows the Realism of Courbet but imbues his painting with a strong religious feeling. He preferred to paint the lives of farmers in the country.

Other trends and people before Impressionism

Whistler, the American-born artist, is one of the first artist to take an interest in Japanese prints. Motifs and composition were inspired by the framing of these prints. He also used the vocabulary of music to title his paintings: caprice, nocturne, etc. He also worked in interior decoration with the famous Japanese-inspired "Peacock room".

Fantin-Latour, specializing in still-life and portrait, he is one of the first to acknowledge the importance of the first Impressionist.

Baudelaire, an important French poet, was also an art critic. He is the first writer to advise artist to paint the modern life: people in their everyday clothes, machines, etc.

Chevreul, French chemist who was the first to study scientifically the perception of color. His ideas would be essential to many trends in the late 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, the idea that primary colors next to their complementary look more vibrant and vivid was found by Chevreul in his book *On the law of simultaneous contrasts of colors*.

By that time, most artist were very interested in Japanese prints and their flat brilliant colors, their strange framing and points of view will change the way artists look at their subject.

Impressionism

Impressionism is an anti-academic movement: its painters create works that go against anything that was being taught in the traditional schools of art (the Academies).

An Impressionist artist is painting outdoor (with a portable easel and oil paint in zinc tubes) to catch a specific state of light using the ideas of Chevreul: never mix the colors (a green is better made by juxtaposing a dab of blue and a dab of yellow side by side, the mixing being done at a distance in the eye of the beholder).

Not using black.

There are of course many exceptions to these rules.

Manet, the first Impressionist, was also the first to paint outdoor a group of modern people (and not Greek gods or ancient Romans).

His *Olympia* and *Picnic* shocked greatly the French viewers because of their subject matter (and nudity in odd situation), choice of color and general flatness. Nobody noticed that they were both homage to old masterpieces by Giorgione. He was also fascinated by Japanese prints. In his last work, he made a painting inspired by his favorite artist, Velasquez.

Pissarro experimented all his life with the ideas of Chevreul and later tried Pointilism (to paint with tiny dots of pure color) before giving it up for being too "scientific".

Degas was the artist the most inspired by Japanese prints, his compositions always remind us of the framing of these prints: the borders almost always cut a figure. This way of looking was also inspired by photography.

Degas always tried to catch a frozen movement, which is why he enjoyed painting dancers and horses. To work faster, he preferred to use pastel.

He was the first artist putting a real object with a bronze statue: a tutu on a lifesize sculpture.

Sisley, an English artist, was a typical Impressionist and never tried anything else.

Monet, the most famous of the Impressionist, was one of the most innovative artist of the group. His interest in light

appeared very early in his career and he started using Chevreul's idea around 1869.

He was also inspired by Japanese prints and photography.

He was responsible for the group being called "Impressionist" because of his painting Impression, Sunrise (the name was at first used as an insult by a journalist who did not like their style).

To catch the light at a given moment was his main interest, so he painted the same subject many times at different moments.

His last project was a vast mural painting called the Waterlilies where the forms dissolve into color.

Berthe Morisot specialized in soft subject, ideal to catch a hazy light covering very subdued colors.

Renoir started using the Impressionist method at exactly the same time and place as Monet. He was the painter of beautiful women and city life. Later on, dissatisfied with some aspects of Impressionism, he turned towards a more "classical" idea of art: nudes made in homage to the great Italian masters. However, his paintings always retain a great measure of sensuality.

Mary Cassatt, American painter and follower of Degas, was also fascinated by Japanese prints. She often used pastel and also made engraving in a Japanese style.

Cézanne is usually considered an Impressionist but his work goes far beyond that. He used the division of colors introduced by Chevreul, by his idea of how to paint nature was very original.

He was an obsessive artist and painted many times the same subject. Not like Monet, who did that only to paint the different state of the light at different moments, but because he was sure it could always be better and observed more profoundly.

He is the first to say that the artist should look for more simple forms in his observation of nature and try to reduce everything to cubes, sphere and cones. This is why he was called the father of modern painting (Cubism in particular).

Impressionism was also practiced in the rest of Europe and in America.

Symbolism

Not a movement but a trend in Western painting. Symbolism is an important trend also in poetry.

Gustave Moreau, developed several original techniques like using the tip of the brush to incise a thick layer of oil paint. The subject matter is always about strange and violent stories from different sources (the Bible, Greek mythology, etc.). Moreau was also a famous teacher.

Odilon Redon, like the Symbolist poets, used very strange and mysterious themes. Very often it is almost impossible to put a clear meaning on his work. Sometimes, he also used religious themes like Christian or even Buddhist stories.

James Ensor, a Belgian artist, who painted a very pessimistic view of mankind. His characters are often empty suits with horrifying masks on.

Edward Munch, probably the most influential Symbolist artist, he is often considered to be the first Expressionist artist. His work was essential for the development of Expressionism in Germany.

His most famous painting, *The Scream* (whom he also made into a woodblock print) made him the most obvious example of a new interest for the human soul. At the same time, psychoanalysis and its new interpretation of the mind was becoming one of the most important new ways of thinking. In his original use of color too, Munch developed a new interest for a less figurative art.

Art Nouveau

Fundamentally a decorative art movement, some painters can also be considered representative of the Art Nouveau style.

"Art Nouveau" is French for "New Art"; all across Europe, artists, architects, engineers and craftsmen were creating a new way to look at things. It had several names:

In Italy "Stile Floreale" ("Flower style")

In France "Art Nouveau" or "Style Nouille" ("Noodle style")

In Germany "Jugendstil" ("Youth style")

In Austria "Weiner Sezession" ("Viennese Secession")

In Spain "Modernismo" ("Modernism")

Art Nouveau was inspired by:

floral patterns

Japanese art and other oriental cultures (like Islamic design)

New techniques in architecture and engineering

In Vienna, **Gustav Klimt** developed a highly decorative style in painting, mixing ideas from oriental art and themes from Romantic art.

In Belgium, the architect **Victor Horta** built the first entirely "Art Nouveau" buildings, full of motifs borrowed from the flexibility of plants. His buildings are also very bright, usually lighted by huge glass roofs.

In Scotland, **Charles Rennie Mackintosh** built some great classics of Art Nouveau. He also designed famous furniture.

In France, **Hector Guimard** created the "Style Nouille" ("Noodle style") with his famous gates for the Paris subway.

The greatest architect may be the Spaniard **Antoni Gaudi** who, in Barcelona, invented buildings that looked like living beings. His greatest masterpiece, the cathedral of the Sagrada Familia ("Holy Family") was left unfinished at his death.

In purely decorative art, **Alphonse Mucha** created some of the most famous poster designs of his time. Advertising became a medium full of potential for an inventive designer.

Pointilism

Following the innovations of the Impressionists in the use of color, **Georges Seurat** invents a "scientific" way to represent things.

The Pointilist artists used the ideas of the chemist Chevreul and followed them in every detail. Seurat and his follower **Signac** only use small dots of oil paints to paint everything. Their paintings are usually quite big, very carefully planned. The Impressionists were using the rules of colour intuitively; the Pointilists are using them scientifically.

Vincent van Gogh

Arguably the greatest artist of his time, he only worked for ten years and only sold one painting during his lifetime.

His influence on 20th century art was enormous, especially on the German Expressionist artists. He created a sense of colour that was even more developed than the Impressionists', and his colours were less dependent on reality.

He created the most famous part of his work in the south of France, in the city of Arles, where he briefly lived with Paul Gauguin. Of his own account, he went to the sun and strong colors of the south of France to look for the qualities he liked so much in Japanese prints.

It is well known that he was a very sick man (he even cut part of his ear), and eventually committed suicide.

Both his works as an artist and the tortured life he led left a profound mark on the artists of the 20th century.

School of Pont-Aven

Paul Gauguin and his friends tried to go away from civilisation to find a kind of life and a kind of art that tried to find new ways. They moved to Brittany in France (a very poor and remote area where people could hardly speak French) to find a more "primitive" way of life. There, they opened new ways of looking at reality, with:

a more inventive, less realistic, way of using color
a sense of flatness, making the painting look unreal
a desire to put real life and the life of dream on the same level

a use of the black line (this movement is also called "Cloisonnism", from the name of a certain kind of Chinese vases)

Paul Gauguin was the leader of the Pont-Aven school. As van Gogh, he started as an Impressionist painter. He was one of the first artists to be interested in the "primitive", particularly in African and Oceanian sculptures. He first moved to Brittany because it was so remote and so different from the rest of France, and then moved to the south of France to live briefly with van Gogh. But that was soon not enough and he eventually moved to Tahiti where he made deeply spiritual paintings.

Paul Sérusier followed Gauguin in many of his ideas. The painting called *The Talisman* was made under the direction of Gauguin, who would give such advice: "You see that shadow from the tree? Do you see it blue? Well, then, paint it blue." This painting started a new trend of reinventing color that eventually led to the paintings of the Fauves.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

Fascinated by Japanese prints, Toulouse-Lautrec also used flat colors, not much perspective and framings often cutting out figures from the picture.

A crippled man, he spent most of his days in ballrooms and brothels where he found his most interesting subjects.

A highly innovative artist, he also used the medium of posters to create some of the most famous images of late 19th century culture.

Sculpture

The most important sculpture of the late 19th century. **Rodin** is the first to give an "unfinished" look to his statues. He is also one of the first to make the fragments as interesting as whole statues.

His most famous pieces were created for a larger project *The Gates of Hell*, that was never completed.

With his statue of Balzac (a famous French writer), he redefined the concept of statue in the west.

a traditional statue is: finished, detailed, standing on a pedestal

Rodin's statue is: unfinished, looking like a standing stone, and directly on the ground.

Most of the sculptors following Rodin were either following him or rebelling against him.

Aristide Maillol reacted against the style of Rodin by making smooth and sensuous statues.

Fauves

"Fauves" means "Wild beasts" in French.

This movement is about an original use of colour: it is no more necessary to use the same colour we see in the scene we are painting, we can replace one colour by another.

It was a rather short-lived movement but had an enormous influence on the rest of 20th century art.

Maurice de Vlaminck and **André Derain** were the most prominent of the Fauves group, their painting explores the use of bright colour in thick impasto, original viewpoints and composition designed to enhance the brilliance of colors.

Raoul Dufy is considered the least interesting of the Fauves. His paintings are considered to be only pretty. He was all the same an artist who made that kind of expression more available to a larger audience.

Henri Matisse, though technically his work goes far beyond the limitations of Fauvism, was always interested in colour as an expressive means.

After a short time using the technique of Pointilism but still with a much stronger sense of color, Matisse will prefer more and more flat surfaces of color. His themes often revolve around the ideas of calm and luxury. The famous *The Green Stripe* shows how much he was aware of the already old discoveries of Eugène Chevreul. With the *Joy of Life* and *Harmony in Red*, Matisse starts to explore the flat surfaces and the pure use of composition to convey moods and feelings. His work, from then on, will tend to more and more

simplification and reach the point where the forms become almost abstract (even though they are always recognizable). His exploration of colour will eventually make him use large sheets of paper painted with gouache. He will simply cut through them with scissors and assemble them on a wall, changing their position as often as necessary.

Nabis - Intimism

After the school of Pont-Aven started by Paul Gauguin, a group of artists came back to Paris with the name of Nabis, meaning the “prophets” in Hebrew. They felt they had a spiritual message to give through art to their contemporaries. Among them a small group preferred less religious subjects and more intimate scenes, like family life and the house: they called themselves “Intimist”.

Pierre Bonnard is the most “intimist” of them all. He only painted his house, with his wife, his children and his dog. Repeated endlessly in a series of extremely original compositions. His use of colour makes him an excellent representative of this part of the history of Western art: brilliant, poetic and always alive.

Maurice Denis, more of a Nabis than Bonnard since he went back to purely religious painting in a style very similar to the decorative design of stained glass, he is better remembered as the author of a very important definition of what is painting: “It should be remembered that a picture – before being a warhorse, a nude, or an anecdote of some sort – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.”

It was the first time, in this very important sentence, that the subject matter was not seen as the most important part of the picture. What is important has become the composition and the colours. It is the first important step towards Abstract painting.

African Art

After the Japanese prints, African and Oceanian arts were the most important formal influence on 20th century art. Several movements were directly inspired by African art: Expressionism and Cubism.

Expressionism

This German movement can be said to derive from the passion and the monsters of the Romantic movement of the 19th century. Expressionism is about human passions and all that cannot be controlled in human nature. Created after the First World War (1914-1918), Expressionism was the means of artists who did not believe in the goodness of man or in the possibility of a moral life.

The characteristics of Expressionism are:
criticism of Western civilisation (and especially the outcome of the First World War)
criticism of the idea of beauty (for the first time, artists are looking for the ugly and the grotesque)
an interest in “primitive” art (especially African and Oceanian arts)
use of strong colors and jarring compositions

very often, they used a traditional means of expression in Germany and northern Europe: the print and especially, the woodblock print.

The Expressionist movement was made of several groups: Die Brücke (The Bridge), Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) and Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider).

Die Brücke

It, of course, means The Bridge between the old and the new. It was founded by **Karl Schmidt-Rottluff** and **Ernst Ludwig Kirchner** who organized many exhibitions in Germany and Europe before the Nazis started to notice them. Most of the Expressionist artists had to leave Germany during the war; those who could not almost always ended up being killed. The style of the Die Brücke artists is usually considered to be exactly what Expressionism is about (as described in the preceding paragraph).

Neue Sachlichkeit

Among the artists of the Die Brücke group, some, like **George Grosz**, preferred more popular means of expression, like newspaper caricatures and book illustrations. They called themselves the New Objectivity artists because they felt they were describing accurately the disastrous condition of Western Europe civilization, and especially the horrible situation of Nazi Germany.

Der Blaue Reiter

This group of artists was more interested in formal effects than the Die Brücke and Neue Sachlichkeit painters.

Franz Marc was fascinated by animals; and the forms he developed to represent them went closer and closer to abstract forms.

August Macke preferred to paint the modern life of the streets, but his forms also evolved slowly towards abstract art. They both died during the First World War.

Wassily Kandinsky is today considered to be the first artist who made truly abstract painting (paintings representing ideas and without subject matter). The story goes that he came back one day into his studio and saw on the wall the most beautiful painting he had ever seen. Looking at it more closely, he realized it was one of his landscapes put upside-down. He then realized that what you represent does not matter, only the way you represent it does. That led him eventually to entirely abandon representation and focus only on color composition. Abstract art, probably the most revolutionary contribution to 20th century art history, was born.

Kandinsky developed very elaborate theories of color. He made use of them while teaching at the most important school of design in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, the Bauhaus.

School of Paris

Paris was, in the 1920s and 1930s, the capital of the arts and many artists from all over Europe came to Paris to participate

in the excitement. What we call the “School of Paris” does not represent a style, it just refers to the artists working in Paris at that time.

Chahim Soutine can be called an Expressionist artist, his taste for the shocking certainly makes him so.

Mark Chagall was a Russian, who briefly returned to the Soviet Union in the first years after the communist revolution, but mostly lived in France. His colorful style, often using abstract forms, also represents his life as a Russian Jew. His paintings are full of details from his personal life, his dreams and his childhood.

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian artist who used long and slender forms in his paintings. The portraits he made of many of the Parisian artists are among the most beautiful outcome of the School of Paris.

Pablo Picasso

The most famous artist of the 20th century, he was the creator of an endless variety of styles. The most important of these styles was created with a French artist, Georges Braque, was called Cubism. Cubism is about looking at all the sides of an object at the same time and try to represent all these sides in a comprehensive composition.

The analytical way they look at objects made them the first important followers of the Paul Cézanne. The first painting using the idea of cubism was also one of the first attempts to use the forms of African art; *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (“The Prostitutes from Avignon Street in Barcelona”) was so much in advance of its time that Picasso decided not to show it to the public after he made it.

Cubist artists were also the first to use collage, integrating real objects (like newspaper and advertising) in their paintings.

Cubism requiring the artist to follow very strict rules, Picasso could not remain a Cubist artist for very long. His very original, very free personality made him create endlessly new ways to paint. Using all possible mediums, Picasso left an undelible mark on 20th century art, eventually turning into the legend of the inexhaustible creator.

Cubism

George Braque created Cubism with Picasso. The works he make during the period of Cubism are almost impossible to differentiate from Picasso’s.

When Picasso and Braque used the same color schemes (brown, grey and ochres) to draw attention to the composition, **Juan Gris** enjoyed using a much brighter palette.

Other trends started within Cubism, like the “Orphism” of **Robert Delaunay**, the first Cubist artist to integrate purely abstract forms in his paintings.

With “Purism”, **Amédée Ozenfant** wanted to go back to a more simple form of Cubism. From this trend, however, came another extremely important 20th century artist, the

architect **Le Corbusier**. He was one of the creator of the so-called “International style” in architecture. Always looking for the purest and most simple forms, he preferred to use concrete and mass-produced materials for his buildings. Sometime influenced by other movement like *De Stijl*, he is best remembered for a few very original projects that created a style that is still in use in the building of personal or public housing.

Fernand Léger, also briefly a “Purist”, turned towards a semi-abstract style, full of the elements of city life in the 20th century: machines, construction sites, and factories. He was also the first to understand that public advertising is part of our lives and should not be ignored.

Futurism

This interest for the machine was shared by a group of Italian artists, the Futurist.

The group was founded by a poet, **Filippo Tomaso Marinetti**: he wrote a famous text describing how he fell in love with the machine after a car accident.

When the Cubist reconstruct the shapes of the object, the Futurists, like **Giacomo Balla** and **Umberto Boccioni** want to represent movement on the canvas or in the sculpture. Movement and speed are at the center of their preoccupations.

“De Stijl” or Neo-Plasticism

De Stijl (“The Style”) was a review published by a group of artists, designers and architects in Holland.

The most important of these artists was **Piet Mondrian**. Just like Kandinsky, he started painting in a style close to the French Fauves. But very quickly, he started to simplify the forms through geometry to arrive at the purest shapes possible: squares and rectangles.

He also reduced the colours to the essential primary colors. After moving to the United States, his work took on a more dynamic view of his painting.

Gerrit Thomas Rietveld and **Theo van Doesburg** also used the extremely simple forms initiated by Mondrian and adapted them to three-dimensional objects and architecture.

Bauhaus

Probably the most important school of design of the early 20th century. Created in Germany, most of its teachers had to move to other places during the war.

Its founder was **Walter Gropius**, who was the first to advocate the use of pre-fabricated industrial elements for the creation of simple and very functional buildings. He moved to the United States during the war, where he created with Mies van der Rohe a style still called today the International Style.

If the first skyscrapers were made in Chicago in the Art Déco style, the first glass and steel skyscrapers were invented by **Mies van der Rohe**. He was credited for the very famous

sentence: “less is more”. The International style would go on until the 1960s when it was first criticised for having made cities far too functional and standardised.

Among the painters who taught at the Bauhaus were **Vassily Kandinsky**, **Paul Klee** and **Josef Albers**.

Paul Klee, a Swiss artist, practiced many different styles and his interests were numerous. His paintings are often made in a “primitive” fashion that enhance the mysterious source of human culture. Magicians and strange animals appear very often in his work.

Josef Albers, like Kandinsky, used to teach the theory of colors. Albers works explore the function of colors and their relationships. He was one of the first to use the same shapes in the same arrangement but with different colours to show the possibilities of colour (the series called Homage to the Square).

Art Déco

Short for “Decorative Art”. Style used in architecture and design especially in the 1920s and 1930s, some famous skyscrapers were made in the Art Déco style like the Chrysler building in New York.

Very few important painters are said to have created in the Art Déco style. The most important might have been **Tamara de Lempicka**.

Suprematism

In Russia, before and after the Revolution, there was a very active creative atmosphere.

Kazimir Malevich created the movement called “Suprematism”, he wanted to create the “supreme” image in painting. Very much like Mondrian, he wanted to get painting rid of any superfluous detail. He reached this point very early with the black square on a white background. After that, he had to return to more complex images of geometrical forms arranged on a clear background.

Constructivism

A large group of artists, photographers, architects, stage designers, etc.

In these early years of the Soviet revolution, there was a lot of experimentation with forms of expression that would appeal to a larger audience: theatre, cinema, magazines and books.

Vladimir Tatlin, artist and designer, created the famous Monument to the IIIrd International, a building that was never built because of a lack of materials.

Naum Gabo, the first sculptor to use artificial (synthetic) materials.

Dada

The Dada movement (“Dada” has no meaning), was created in a Zurich café by a group of people who did not trust Western culture anymore because of the destruction brought

by the First World War. They wanted to attack one of the most precious achievements of Western culture: its art.

Dada is about irony and criticism of Western art and culture. Its members, through strange performances and absurd works of art, were the first to question the validity of Western culture.

Raoul Hausmann used collage to create strange, and often politically oriented, graphic compositions.

Francis Picabia created strange and useless machines.

Kurt Schwitters is the first artist to use garbage to make works of art. He also created one of the first total environment.

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)

French artists, who later became an American citizen. Probably the most important artist of the 20th century.

Duchamp started as a cubist artist, but experimenting with ideas looking more like the works of the Italian Futurist than that of the French Cubists. So his *Nude Descending a Staircase* was rejected by his French painter friends.

From the *Nude Descending a Staircase* to *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, it is possible to trace a very complex and complete chain of thoughts involving many different aspects of Western culture.

However, the most important contribution to 20th century art was the invention of the idea of “readymade”. Duchamp thought the following:

What is art? : art is made by the artists

What is an artist then?: somebody doing art

It is very difficult to get out of this vicious circle. A decision has to be made: the artist is a person who chooses to be an artist.

Technical knowledge is then helpful but not necessary (after all, a lot of artists, like sculptors, were helped by assistants and the resulting work of art was still considered to be a work by this artist).

So anything an artist is doing has the potential to become art, and the artist does not have to create the artwork himself/herself. The artist just has to create the idea of the artwork and not necessarily the actual object.

So, if an artist calls something art, it becomes art: an artist just has to go into a shop, buy anything and call it an artwork.

This “chosen” artwork is called a “readymade”. The most famous example (and the first) is the *Fountain* of 1917.

From that moment, anybody could be an artist and anything could be art.

Surrealism

Many members of the Dada movement went on to Paris and eventually became members of the Surrealist group.

Surrealism, created by the poet **André Breton**, was based on the ideas of Sigmund Freud about the unconscious (that part of the human mind where dreams are created).

These poets and artists believed that the most interesting works of art were created from dreams and from unconscious acts. They believed that these works of art could create something beyond reality: a sur-reality (meaning “above reality”).

There are two kinds of surrealist artists:

those who did not want to control too much their creation and developed techniques where pure luck has a part, in order to let the unconscious work (like **Man Ray**, **Max Ernst** and **Joan Miró**)

those who believed that only a very accurate and detailed style could reveal the mysteries of the mind (like **Salvador Dalí** and **René Magritte**)

Man Ray, an American photographer, developed techniques like the rayography where one simply puts objects on photo paper and flash a light on it, after development, the shapes of the objects appear. He also experimented with the movie camera.

Max Ernst, a German artist, created techniques like frottage, where you simply rub two surfaces covered with paint against each other to create patterns where one can recognize objects. He also made many collages and paintings about comical and absurd situations.

René Magritte, a Belgian artist, used his memories, his dreams and many other elements to paint dream-like pictures that seem like they are coming directly from the sleeping mind.

Salvador Dalí created strange associations of objects that try to make sense of very absurd situations. He was one of the most famous artists of the 20th century, famous for his eccentricity. He also made two very famous movies with the help of the director Luis Buñuel: *An Andalusian Dog* and *The Golden Age*.

Joan Miró, also Spanish, preferred to create more abstract forms where one can still recognize many real objects.

Several of the Surrealist artist and poets went to New York during the war where they became a major influence on the young American artists who would become the Abstract Expressionist.

Joseph Cornell was a purely Surrealist artist who gathered elements from his life and his dreams in small boxes.

Among the techniques created by the Surrealist were

- Automatic writing: one writes as fast as possible about anything that goes through one's mind (try to write without the control of reason)

- Automatic drawing: the same idea applied to drawing

- “cadavre exquis” (meaning “exquisite corpse”): a group of persons gather, the first person write a sentence on a piece of paper and folds the paper so that only the last word of the sentence appear. The next person continues the sentence starting with the last word of the previous sentence, and then folds the paper so that only the last word appear. And so on until the piece of paper is filled. When it is finished, the

paper is unfolded and an absurd text written by many different persons has been written.

- The same technique can be applied in drawing.

Abstract Expressionism

Strongly influenced by the Surrealist artists who came from Europe during the Second World War, the American artists know as the New York school or the Abstract Expressionist painters created the first internationally famous American art movement.

Because their work was generally abstract (not using figurative forms) and because they show the strong emotions resembling German Expressionism, their movement was called Abstract Expressionism. Some of the most important American artists belonged to that movement.

Three new ways of painting were introduced by the Abstract Expressionists: Action Painting, Color Field painting and Hard Edge painting.

Arshile Gorky, one of the first abstract artists of America, created large paintings resembling the early abstract works of Vassily Kandinsky.

The most important artist of the Abstract Expressionist movement was probably **Jackson Pollock**. Influenced by the works of the Native Americans, who created designs with sand on the floor, Pollock invented Action Painting.

Action Painting means to work with the unprepared canvas directly on the floor and, instead of using brushes, letting the paint (often industrial paint) drip on the surface. We can see in that the influence of the Surrealist who also let chance directs the work of the artist. Pollock also started this characteristic of the Abstract Expressionist school: the very large canvases.

Willem de Kooning still used some aspect of figurative art: most of his famous paintings represent women. His style varies between abstract forms and more expressionist paintings.

Franz Kline is famous for his variations on black and white compositions; like Pollock, his work rely on improvisation and accidents.

Mark Rothko started another trend in Abstract Expressionism: the Color Field. Color Field means large surfaces of color with very little modeling. Rothko's paintings, always very large, are variations on the use of squares and rectangles with blurred contours. He considered his painting to be religious acts and his last works were made for a chapel.

Philip Guston, originally an Abstract Expressionist painter, started in the 1960s to find absurd the research of this movement. In his own words, he thought it was absurd to think about arranging a blue next to a red when the United-States were facing a very serious social crisis. So his work became much politicized in the 1960s, dealing with issues of racism and intolerance.

Helen Frankenthaler, one of the very few women of the movement, preferred to remain an abstract painter and chose to use much diluted paint to let it penetrate the canvas and obtain very pale colors.

Robert Motherwell, the most articulate of the Abstract Expressionist artists, also explored the accidents of artistic creation the way the surrealist practiced it. Even if some of his work has a political message, his work remained abstract throughout his life.

Barnett Newman, one of the earliest Abstract Expressionist artists, realized very early in his career that you don't need to fill your canvas with a lot of complex brush strokes to make it full. Only a few lines on large geometrical surfaces were enough to express a maximum of intensity. His work started a new trend called Hard Edge painting. Hard Edge means that the paintings keep straight lines everywhere (contrary to the Color Field painting of Mark Rothko where you never have a sharp angle).

Ad Reinhardt continued this tradition and was instrumental in the creation of the Minimalist movement in the 1960s.

Neo Dada

Because they used the same ironic stand towards modern society and because their work is often extremely difficult to explain and understand, **Robert Rauschenberg** and **Jasper Johns** are often called Neo Dada artists, even though they never accepted this name. They are both considered to be precursors of Pop art.

Robert Rauschenberg used trash to create his "combine", assemblage of objects he found in the streets. He is now doing the same with photos and pictures from any possible sources. Both in his 3D and 2D works, he is a follower of Kurt Schwitters but adapted his work to the modern times.

Jasper Johns became famous with his series of American flags. Like the painting of Magritte *This is not a Pipe*, these flags are not flags because they are paintings. Jasper Johns plays with the signs, changing their meaning by changing their environment. Johns is also called a precursor of Pop art for a specific work: *The Ale Cans*. It is a bronze sculpture of an everyday object, later on the Pop artists would use the real objects themselves to make artworks.

Pop Art

The term Pop art ("popular art") was coined in England where the movement really started. Some English artists of the 1960s were instrumental in the creation of a kind of art that would take its source in everyday life and the consumer society. That meant using all kinds of expression that had not until then been considered art: comic books and advertising. The most famous Pop artists are, however, Americans.

In England:

David Hockney, who never thought of himself as a Pop artist, immigrated at a young age to the United States where

he became a prominent artist. Extremely cultivated and knowledgeable in every aspect of Art history, he experimented with every kind of painting style, but his most famous paintings describe the life of the high society in California.

Nowadays, he is more and more working with photography, assembling large compositions with Polaroid pictures.

Richard Hamilton created perhaps what is considered the first important picture of Pop art: Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? It is a Dada style collage using the elements of the new consumer society of the 1960s. He is very interested in the whole process of industrial creation and marketing and some of his artwork used both in a satirical manner.

Peter Blake introduced all his childhood memories to his paintings of popular culture in England. He is most famous for designing the cover of the Beatles album "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." Toys and comic books abound in his installations, but also references to classical art.

Allen Jones, whose works often revolve around the relations between men and women, become infamous for his series of furniture in the form of submissive women. This work is however a critical comment on the social status of women in the European culture and should not be taken as a literal desire: it is social satire. You can see one of his sculptures in Hong Kong in Taikoo place.

In the United States:

Pop art, besides representing the same values as in England, was also in the United States a reaction against the exaggerated seriousness and elitism represented by Abstract Expressionism.

Roy Lichtenstein used all the images and vocabulary of the comic books for his compositions. To accentuate the mass-produced quality of his cartoon heroines and fighter pilots, he imitated the newspaper printing style, using patterns of colored dots to achieve different tones (fewer dots read as a lighter shade), a limited number of colors, and heavy black outlines.

Andy Warhol is the most famous Pop artist. He is the first to have used repetition to illustrate the modes of production of consumer society. Because that is the way products appear in supermarket, he multiplies the Campbell soup cans. In a similar fashion, because the mass media and television endlessly repeat and reproduce the same images of movie stars and sensational events like accidents, Warhol will reproduce them endlessly through the process of silk screen.

Edward Kienholz, who never said he was a Pop artist, specialized in installations of sculptures and everyday objects describing the sad reality of life. Death and violence, comments on the state of American society in the 1960s are everywhere present in his very spectacular work.

Claes Oldenburg also use everyday objects but transform their reality by making them impossible to use. They are

become too hard or too soft, and very often too big to be related to reality. With *The Store*, he created one of the first complete environments of the post war era, an environment entirely made of consumer items that cannot be used.

James Rosenquist, who used to be a billboard painter, also focuses on elements of American consumer society.

Minimalism

It is another movement that reacted against Abstract Expressionism.

<u>Abstract Expressionism</u> and “traditional art”	<u>Minimalism</u>
Figures and expressive shapes	No figure
Recognizable parts	No parts
Strong relationships between these parts	No relationships
Often emphasize movement	No movement
Gives meaning to the artwork	No metaphors
One has to find this meaning	No secrets

Minimalism

Rejects imagery: not interested in nature

Uses inorganic materials: steel, concrete, plastic, polished metal

Is impersonal: machines can assemble the Minimal art objects and paintings

Rejects the human body and touch, exist only for the eye

Frank Stella, the most important early Minimalist, very inspired by Ad Reinhardt. He is famous for having said: “What you see is what you see”. There is no secret or hidden meaning in his painting, just the shapes and colors.

Carl Andre, very important minimalist sculptor. He used very rough materials and eventually specialized in arranging these raw materials. His bricks, bought by the Tate museum in London for a very large sum, became a public scandal in England. That kind of art can exist only in a museum: bricks on a construction site are just bricks; bricks arranged in a certain order in a museum are a work of art. The context of the work of art is essential.

Donald Judd, the oldest of the group, created a large series of work made of stainless steel in Texas. His work was usually made directly by the factory.

Dan Flavin refused to use any special material, he decided then to use only colored light in special installations.

Eva Hesse belonged to the group but her work is not especially minimalist. Her work involves tactile sensations, like her very famous *Accession II*.

Post-Minimalism

In the late 60s, some artists wanted to go back to the contact with the material, to feel its weight and texture.

Richard Serra then used rough steel or lead to create his sculptures. The largest ones made of steel are standing only because of their weight.

Postmodern

Even though art critics and art historians are still trying to organize the artists of the second half of the twentieth century into art movements or schools, it is increasingly difficult to classify these artists into clearly categorized groups. **It is a characteristic of the so-called postmodern art (a term very difficult to define since no one agrees on what it actually means): it cannot be reduced to schools of movements since every artist is exploring his/her own way.**

Even though you can still recognize trends in the 1970s and 1980s, like Op Art of Hyperrealism, today’s artists prefer not to be classified in any categories and many of them will explore different ideas and different media.

Painting since the 1950s

Lucio Fontana, an Italian artist who, following some aspects of Action painting, decided to slash, pierce and puncture his canvases. Doing so, he felt he was exploring new space in paintings. These ideas he also applied to sculpture and some of the most original installations of neon-tube lights.

Op art (“Optical art”) was an important movement in the 60s and 80s. The artists of Op art used optical effects and movement to explore the visual impact of different forms of geometrical abstract art. These artists never hesitated to work in design and also industrial design. Two of the most important artists of this movement were **Bridget Riley** and, even more famous, **Victor Vasarely**.

Robert Indiana was an artist using the ideas of Pop art with some of the visual aspects of Op art.

Francis Bacon, probably the most important British artist of the first half of the 20th century. His powerful paintings are always full of suffering flesh and tortured individuals. At the same time, he was fascinated by classical art (especially the painting of Velasquez) and the pioneers of photography, like Muybridge.

Lucian Freud, a close friend of Francis Bacon, he is the grand-son of Sigmund Freud, the creator of psychoanalysis. His painting, less terrifying than Bacon’s, also seems to express the deepest fears and the sadness of human beings.

Hyperrealism was an international trend, but its most interesting representatives were Americans. They believed photography was far more selective than the human eyes, so, to represent reality in EVERY detail, they preferred to use painting. The result is so saturated with information that it becomes almost abstract. Some of these painters were **Richard Estes** and **Don Eddy**.

Malcolm Morley often used a hyper realistic style to paint. His style is extremely varied. The example shown here is

about a contemporary idea: appropriation. An artist simply copies a famous masterpiece to explore the implications of originality (what is an original artwork?) and authorship (who is the author of a piece?).

Howard Kanovitz shows in this painting the reliance of art on money.

Chuck Close, a kind of hyperrealist painter, he chooses VERY large format for his extremely detailed portraits.

Michelangelo Pistoletto shows the strange relation between painting and the reproduction of reality by painting his figures on steel plates. The viewer is thus reflected in the painting and becomes part of the work of art.

Gerhard Richter is very difficult to identify his style since he explores the idea of originality and all the problems created for painting by the other ways of creating art. Is painting now an important medium? By trying to paint realistically, and then use an abstract style, and then an expressionist one, etc. Richter questions the possibility of painting to express the "soul" of the artist.

Georg Baselitz, like Richter a German artist, chose for a long time to paint his expressionist paintings upside down.

Bad painting was a short-lived movement founded by **Julian Schnabel**. He chose, at a time painting was almost abandoned by all the other artists in the 1970s, to go back to the pleasure of free creation, without any ideological constraint. His very large paintings were for a time very successful. He is now also making movies.

New Fauves was a movement started in the 1980s in Germany. Among them were very different painters like **Berthold Heisig**, **A.R. Penck** and **Jörg Immendorff**. Like the Bad painting movement, they chose to oppose the dominant trend of Conceptual art (art using ideas and very little material) to go back to the pleasure of painting.

Anselm Kiefer, another German artist, favored painting about German culture. His canvases are very often about 19th century German music or literature, something German artists preferred not to talk about after the war.

Transavanguardia (Trans-avant garde) is an Italian movement whose ambitions are very similar to that of the New Fauves. Its most important artists are **Sandro Chia**, **Mimmo Paladino**, **Enzo Cucchi** and **Francesco Clemente**. Their themes are very varied, from popular or primitive art to the recreation of classical art.

Jean-Charles Blais is a French artist, who uses torn paper and posters as canvases. His style is thus quite close to the artists of Graffiti art.

Graffiti art, a movement launched by **Keith Haring**, used the designs created in the streets by young people. Keith Haring is still very famous for his outline figures and characters. The other very famous artist of this trend is **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, an American artist of Haitian descent, who used

both the graffiti designs of the streets and a lot of references to his Haitian and African-American culture.

Sigmar Polke, very much like his contemporary Gerhard Richter, also questions the possibility of painting to exist as a valid expression in the late 20th century.

Peter Halley made a specialty of a kind of geometrical abstraction he says resemble architectural blueprints and electronic printed circuits.

Robert Combas and **Gudmundur Erro**, two European artists, use the vocabulary of comic books to create their strange pictorial worlds.

Body art, Performance, Happening and Conceptual art

Allan Kaprow was the first to see in Action paintings not so much the final result (i.e. the painting itself) but the action that created it. For Kaprow, art resided more in the creative art than in the final object. He will then create environments and installations where the viewer's participation is expected. The viewer becomes as much part of the work of art as the objects themselves.

John Cage and **Merce Cunningham**, with their open-ended performances, were very important in the creation of that artistic expression.

Gutai 俱體: in Japan, the artists were very influenced by Action painting and an artist like Shozo Shimamoto created artworks made through action (the result sometimes resemble the work of Julio Fontana). **Kazuo Shiraga** was painting with his feet; **Saburo Murakami** invented actions in which he runs through large sheets of paper.

At the same time in France, an artist like **Georges Mathieu** also created paintings in public through dynamic action. Here also, the act was as important as the final painting.

Yves Klein, one of the most important Conceptual artist in France, imitates Jackson Pollock and Action painting, but instead of using sticks and drippings, he used the bodies of women to create his artwork. He always used exactly the same hue of blue in all his work. Interested in Oriental philosophy, he wanted to experiment the void by hurling himself into the air.

The German artist **Wolf Vostell** was the first in Europe to organize large-scale performances where everything was made by the public. The first of his performances took place around an entire city, with events taking place to surprise the viewers and put them into unexpected situations.

Joseph Beuys, the most influential German artist of the post-war era and a very important Conceptual artist. Beuys worked in the mid-1960s with the international avant-garde art group known as Fluxus. During this period he began to stage "actions," events at which he would perform acts of a ritual nature. For one of his best-known actions, How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare (1965), Beuys covered his head with honey and gold leaf, wore one shoe soled with felt

and one with iron, and walked through an art gallery for about two hours, quietly explaining the art therein to a dead hare he carried. His art was compared by some critics to that of the German Expressionists, both for its obsessive and unsettling qualities and for its linking of artistic revolution and social revolution.

The Viennese Action Group, with artists like **Hermann Nitsch**, **Günther Brus**, **Otto Muelh**, and **Rudolf Schwarzkogler**, always staged very violent actions involving blood, killing of animals and cruelty. Some of their motivations were political activism and rejection of religion.

Bruce Nauman is still a very influential artist but his influence was created at the time Conceptual art was very popular, the 1970s. His performances, installations and video pieces are about human behavior and all the things that unsettle it: everything shocking and disagreeable. Art, with Nauman, can never be a pretty thing; it is there to question what makes us human.

Vito Acconci also investigated human behavior. His performances are always involving the public in ways they would not like to be involved. For Acconci art should never be something comfortable and pretty we can forget easily; if art does not make us question what we believe is true, it is useless.

Chris Burden, contrary to Acconci, puts himself in uncomfortable and dangerous situation. For him also, art should be violent and dangerous in order to make use of the things we take for granted.

Much more than Chris Burden, **Gina Pane** put herself in danger. She chose to hurt herself in public to do so.

Marina Abramovic and her companion **Ulay** organized performances where they put themselves in embarrassing situations for the same reasons as Burden and Pane.

Spencer Tunick made himself famous in the 1990s for his pictures of naked people in public places.

Paul MacCarthy shows very clearly that even the most pretty objects, and the most popular, can hide very disturbing and violent things. Nothing is innocent for him.

Orlan, a feminist artist, used plastic surgery on herself to question the position of women in Western society.

Stelarc, convinced that the future will see androids and mechanical humans, experiments on himself with machines. He often puts his bodies in very painful and dangerous situations to do so.

Sculpture since the 1950s

Louise Nevelson, American sculptor born in Russia, she used wooden crates, boxes and refuse to create large assemblages looking like strange and useless furniture.

Jean Tinguely, a Swiss artist, used metal parts to create moving machines. These machines move in endless and pointless rotations, self-destruct in spectacular shows or create endless rolls of improvised paintings. He thus proves that the artists might not be entirely necessary for the creation of artworks (this is an idea of the 1960s: the artist is not necessarily the only person involved in the creation of an artwork).

His wife, the French artist, **Niki de Saint-Phalle**, started using guns to shoot at balloons filled with paint which created patterns on assemblages of objects glued to a canvas. Later on, she created very colorful and popular figures called 'Nana' ('woman' in French slang). At the end of her life, she was still working on a vast project of statues called the 'Tarot garden' in Italy.

Louise Bourgeois, a French-born American artist, used her classical training as marble sculptor to create dramatic elements for the assemblages she calls 'Cells'. These 'cells' are about the fear human beings experiment of their own flesh: fear of physical death, fear of sex, and, generally, the fear of existence.

Jean Dubuffet was the creator of 'Art brut' ('raw art'), a kind of art only interested in the productions of the mentally insane and children. His paintings and sculptures are inspired by the primitive designs he found in the paintings and drawings he found in hospitals and schools. For Dubuffet only these works are capable of conveying the pure creativity of human beings.

Duane Hanson, who is usually considered to do Pop art, created these extremely realistic statues made of fiberglass. These characters are always representing the most common, and often ugly, people. Hanson never wanted to show an idealized version of mankind. Each one of his statues are frighteningly real.

Jeff Koons, one of the most famous contemporary artists, uses the ideas of Pop art and makes them look even more kitsch ('bad taste'). Everything he makes comes from popular culture, and he uses these shapes to enhance their worst quality. From Michael Jackson to a sort of horrible 'Halo Kitty', Jeff Koons exaggerate the worst of modern consumer culture.

Gilbert and George, two English artists whose work go far beyond simple sculpture, were the first to use themselves to create 'living sculpture'. They are also interested in non-idealized beauty and are not afraid to seem disgusting and shocking.

Absalon uses the simple shapes of modernist architecture to shape those white and pure forms. All of them seem to derive from the forms of houses and buildings. He created a new kind of living environment, one that cannot really be used for living, to enhance the worst characteristics of modernist architecture: the coldness and horrible 'efficiency' of it.

The **Chapman brothers** used ideas invented by the surrealist Hans Bellmer to create very disturbing sculptures. Their aim

is simply to shock. They belong, like Damien Hirst, to the group called 'Young British artists'.

Damien Hirst made himself very famous by slicing up whole animals and showing them in galleries in large glass cases and formaldehyde. The shock value of these works is what made them so famous, death remaining one of the most important social taboos. However, his rendering of animals inscribes this work in an old tradition of depiction of animals, and his representation of death is also an ancient preoccupation of serious artists of ancient times.

Installation art

An installation is an arrangement of objects in a specific space. It can be

- An arrangement of artworks by one artist;
- An arrangement of artworks by one artist with other objects;
- An arrangement of objects not made by the artists by still conveying the idea of that artist.

The concept of arranging objects together to create an artwork can already be found in the 'combines' of Robert Rauschenberg. His use of everyday objects in original presentations makes him one of the most interesting pioneers of what we can call installation today.

An installation can also be the remains of a performance. **Joseph Beuys**, one of the most influential artist of the second half of the 20th century was familiar with this technique. Beuys also made many artworks assembled with objects from his past and the past of his country, Germany. The chair with fat for instance is about his experience of having been saved during the Second World War by a tribe of nomadic people who used fat and felt to cure him. This mystical experience can be found in many of his works where he shows himself as a kind of 20th century magician. Other objects put together show remnants of the horrible killing the Nazi were responsible for during the war.

The first artists who intentionally created installations were the Pop artists. Before creating environments, artists like **Tom Wesselman** was creating artworks mixing oil paintings and real everyday objects. The fact that this is not really a movable artwork already makes it a simple installation.

The French artist **Ben Vautier**, a long time member of the Fluxus movement, decided that, since Marcel Duchamp everything could be art, he had no reason to throw anything away. He then opened his 'shop' in the French city of Nice, and exhibited anything he could put his hand on. One version of the shop was even moved to a museum. The fact that he arranged (without any order though) these objects in a specific space made this an installation.

Christian Boltanski, one of the most famous French artists alive, always talks about death and disappearance. He uses photography and objects of any kind for his installation. His works often rely on darkness and a subtle use of light to convey a sense of isolation and spiritual life (the kind of light you could get in a church or a synagogue). For Boltanski, the

tin boxes people use to keep papers and photography look like tiny coffins, the kind where the ashes of the dead are preserved. His memory of the Holocaust is also conveyed in his large installation of clothes.

His wife of several years, **Annette Messager**, is also working with memories. But her focus is often on childhood and all the feelings children had but have lost as adults. Her use of cuddly toy in strange and sometimes disturbing installations made her one of the foremost French artists.

Angela Bulloch uses technology for her interactive environments. Every object in the installations are activating at random movements, music and light in other objects of the room and the activities of the viewers in decide what kind of event will take place. This idea of interactivity seems to be a major trend in installation art today.

Sylvie Fleury makes installation about consumer society and especially about the world of fashion and cosmetics which she finds at the same time fascinating and repulsive. For instance, she goes shopping for expensive brands and then leaves the bags in the gallery for the viewers to see. She is also using a lot of rather ridiculous objects to make us understand the basic absurdity of the mass media and their messages about how we should look like and what we should like.

Daniel Buren is the most popular conceptual artist in Europe today. In the 1960s he decided to give up painting by abandoning the notion of creativity. He made the choice of always using the same design, a strip pattern, and only changes the colors. The idea was that the same pattern put in an always different location would always produce a different artwork. The pattern + the background would always be different and original. Buren's installation then, are only based on the use of the pattern with varying colors and situations. Recently, Buren decided to expand his choice of patterns to create larger and larger environment. In 2002, he even used the whole space of Paris' Museum of Modern Art for a huge installation looking like a maze.

Sherrie Levine invented the notion of 'appropriation'. She is using the works of other famous artists for her own purpose. The installation Hobbyhorse, for instance, is a pun on the original meaning of Dada. The Dada movement of the 1920s was an anti-art movement, and Levine transforms the notion by transforming it into repeated artworks (beautifully crafted hobbyhorse-like objects) in an art space (a museum). Similarly, with the object titled Buddha, she transforms the idea of the 'ready-made' (anything can be an artwork if the artist decided it to be) into a 'traditional' artwork, something made with the traditional material of art: bronze.

In his installations, **Allan McCollum** challenged some of the traditional notions of Art. For most people, an artwork is something in a frame hanging on the wall. An artwork is also something rare. So McCollum, just to show that art is never that simple, will make a very large number of framed objects on a wall or create thousands of unique objects, every one slightly different from the other, that are in fact very cheap.

Philippe Parreno is using the world of TV and blockbuster movies for his installation. They are always very funny and using elements and objects from famous movies as in *No More Reality* (Batman's Return). Parreno shows that the world alluded to by the American Pop artists of the 1960s can still be used for challenging effects: the absurdity of the figures and environment of this artist challenges the viewer into a state of dream-like enjoyment that, hopefully, will make us think about the choices of modern popular culture that are not always innocent.

The two Swiss artists **Peter Fischli and David Weiss** believe that objects that have been used by people retain part of the memory of those people. Their installations are living manifestations of these things that have been used and handled by many hands over many years. Because these objects are often quite old and worn-out, their environments often look like assemblage of garbage, but the feeling is often extremely touching, as if they were making us touch the past of these things and the people who used them. They were so convinced of these feelings that they eventually produced on the most enjoyable artwork of these past decades *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*).

Land art

Land art implies artworks, usually on a large scale, and installed in a specific location. The term 'site-specific' is then used to express that this particular artwork was designed for a particular location, the integration of the artwork with its surroundings being essential. Nature is then an important part of Land art. By extension, artworks in galleries using parts of nature, like leaves, earth or stones, are also considered to belong to the trend of Land art.

The first artist in the 20th century to create site-specific artworks was Constantin Brancusi. The Gate of the Kiss, loosely based on his sculpture titled *The Kiss*, was designed to frame a specific landscape, and thus could not be placed anywhere else. Similarly, *Table of Silence*, a round table surrounded by round stools, echoes the circle of trees within which it was placed.

Many Land artists of the second half of the 20th century came from the Minimalist movement. Behind these huge artworks, criticism of the art market and criticism of the museum as an artificial place can often be found.

Walter de Maria brought into a gallery something that could not be moved, could not be sold or bought and was not worth anything. He also brought into an urban setting a large piece of nature. If the concept is more important than the artwork as an object, Walter de Maria made disappearing artworks, like his *Vertical Earth Kilometer*, a 1000-meter long metal rod driven into the ground: the artwork is there but cannot be seen. His most famous work is *The Lightning Field*: 400 metal rods in a vast field bringing thunder unto them. This work brings elements art had never tried to manifest (except in painting representations that have nothing to do with reality). In this work, de Maria uses space and weather to create one of the most powerful works of the 20th century.

Robert Smithson was the first artist for whom the term Land art was used. His most famous work is the *Spiral Jetty* that sums up all his ideas about art:

- it cannot be moved, sold or bought;
- it is far away so that the involvement of the viewer is complete (not like in the museum, where the viewers are always distracted and not focused);
- it is unlike traditional art which is supposed to always remain the same, this work is changing all the time, because it is made of natural material in a natural environment, and it will eventually completely disappear (today, the *Spiral Jetty* is completely under water).

Michael Heizer wants to remember the huge realizations of mankind in the past: the pyramids, the lines on the ground in Peru and, especially, the large tumuli built by North America Native Americans many centuries ago. In *Effigy Tumuli*, he made extremely large and slightly geometrical representations of water animals that can only be seen from the sky, thus imitating monumental works made by ancient civilizations. His most famous work, *Complex I*, is also about commemorating those ancient worlds but also convey some common ideas of all the Land artists:

- it cannot be moved, sold or bought;
- it is far away so that the involvement of the viewer is complete (not like in the museum, where the viewers are always distracted and not focused);

James Turrel is the most poetic of these artists. Nature is an essential part of his work and especially the sky seen as a source of light and endless patterns. In *Skyscape*, an opening in the ceiling of a pavilion, he makes a contrasting setting between the artificial light of the inside with the sky appearing in the opening: the colors shown by the sky are thus given an intensity that makes them look entirely solid. In his most ambitious (and unfinished) project, *Roden Crater*, Turrel is shaping the inside of a volcano to be the setting where the sky can be looked at from an entirely new perspective.

Richard Long, famous British artist, is making art by walking. He decides on maps the walk he is going to make and documents the whole thing by showing maps, photography and objects he gathered during this time.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude are the wrapping artists. They wrap and circumscribe nature and city landmarks to show them in an entirely new light. Their environmental projects are always on a huge scale: wrapping coastlines, islands and entire landscapes to try to make a human impact on the natural world without harming that environment. In their more famous city projects, they try to renew our perception of the city environment by putting the most famous monuments and buildings under wrap. The idea is basically the same: making ourselves aware of our environment again by making it look different for a while.

Nancy Holt is renewing the idea of site-specific art by forcing us to look at the landscape in a new way. To do that, she actually uses an old idea, to frame the landscape in a particular way. Traditional landscape artists are doing that by basically lying to us, they want us to believe that the framed

space they give us is real when it is only a batch of oil paint on a canvas. Nancy Holt uses real landscape in framing devices to do something Christo and Jeanne-Claude are trying to do also: making us see again what surrounds us.

Andy Goldsworthy decided to use nature as both the tool and the subject of his artworks. He uses only natural things found in nature to rearrange them in interesting new combinations: tree branches, leaves, stones, water and earth are his only tools and they are showing nothing else but tree branches, leaves, stones, water and earth. He is also fascinated by the constantly changing quality of nature and his artworks are designed to decay, transform and disappear, just like anything in nature.

Media art

John Cage, a musician, was instrumental in creating the idea of performance. He composed open-ended pieces of music in which accidents and sounds not controlled by the musician always happen (for instance, by “preparing” pianos, i.e. putting things inside the piano that would stop the strings to react normally).

The idea of open-ended performance was then taken by the choreographer **Merce Cunningham** who created shows where the dancers are free to do anything they want with already prepared props and within a certain time frame.

Both artists were working in the Black Mountain College in New York in the 1950s; many contemporary artists went to the college and created entirely new ways of creating art.

A student of John Cage, the Korean **Nam June Paik** is the first to use video in art. His installation using video screens are today considered classics of Media art. His performance with prepared pianos, instrument which he would then use in installations, was strongly influenced by John Cage. Later on, he explored the relationship between nature and culture: what is natural in man’s behavior and comes from our upbringing. The action of the media on our lives is also of interest to him.

Jenny Holzer experimented with computer art and 3D installations. She is now famous for using electronic public display to broadcast messages about our lives in a consumer and mass media society.

Peter Weibl, **Lynn Hershman**, **Ulrike Gabriel** and, more famous than the other, **Jeffrey Shaw** are among the first important artists to experiment with computers and virtual reality.

Gary Hill and **Marcel Odenbach** use video installation to talk about the body and how it also creates some aspects of our psyche.

Tony Oursler uses video installation to question the way we interact among humans, using especially messages that create fear in the viewer: our facial expression. To do so, he films using a video camera the facial expressions of actor he puts in rather painful situation. Then he builds rag dolls of different sizes that he puts in an installation with furniture. Finally, he projects the faces of his actors on the white faces

of the dolls, creating thus living characters usually striking fear in the viewer.

Bill Viola is still today one of the most innovative Video artists alive. He uses video camera to create films projected in large scale installation. The films he made are in themselves independent creations on various topics, but their impact is always multiplied with the settings he chose.

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