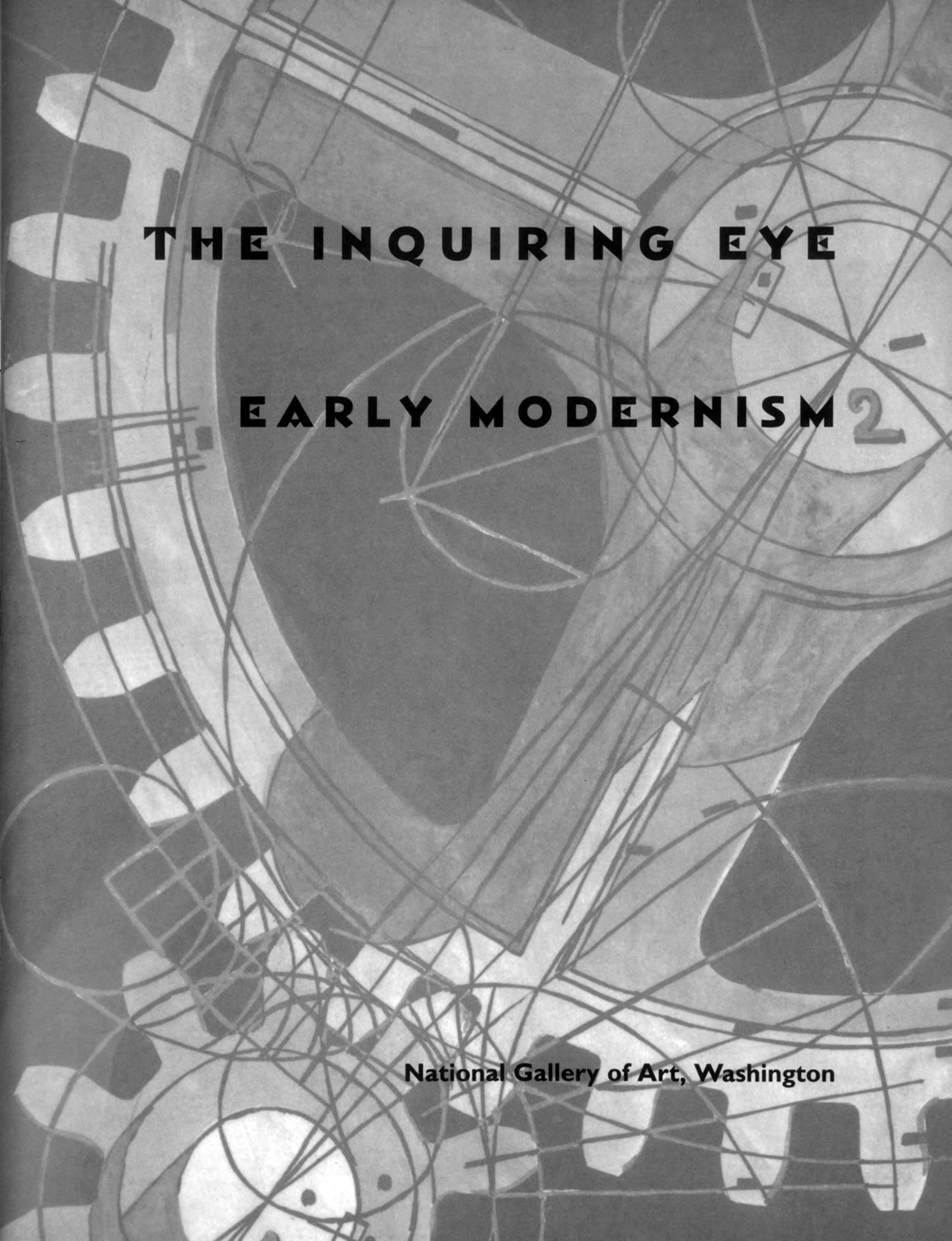
# THE INQUIRING EYE
# EARLY MODERNISM

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



# THE INQUIRING EYE

## EARLY MODERNISM 2

National Gallery of Art, Washington

**GOALS**

**Introduce early twentieth-century European and American art**

**Discuss the historical and cultural context** within which this art was created

**Suggest discussion questions and activities** that teachers can adapt to the needs and interests of their students

**COMPONENTS**

**Modernism at a glance:** key ideas and issues summarized

**Historical context:** background and historical information on the development of European and American art of the period

**Object descriptions:** specific information on the twenty works of art from the National Gallery of Art reproduced in this packet

**Discussion questions and activities:** teaching suggestions for classroom use

**Bibliography:** suggested further reading

**Timeline:** covering key historical, social, and cultural events of the period

**Twenty slides:** the works of art discussed here from the National Gallery of Art collection

**Ten color reproductions:** selected from the twenty works of art

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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**cover:** Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)*, 1913, National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund
**title page:** Francis Picabia, *Machine tournez vite (Machine Turn Quickly)* (detail), 1916/1918, National Gallery of Art, Patrons' Permanent Fund
**frontispiece:** Alberto Giacometti, *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)*, 1935, National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund
**page 8:** Lyonel Feininger, *The Bicycle Race* (detail), 1912, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon
**page 17:** Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Worlds IV*, 1922, National Gallery of Art, Print Purchase Fund (Rosenwald Collection)
**page 38:** René Magritte, *The Blank Signature* (detail), 1965, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

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# MODERNISM AT A GLANCE

**BRAVE NEW WORLD**

In the early twentieth century, technological advances, urbanization, and industrialization dramatically transformed day-to-day existence. The very pace of life was altered thanks to new methods of transportation and communication. In the same period, science and philosophy introduced new concepts that redefined human existence in terms that seriously undermined the stability people had taken for granted in the past. As a result of these far-reaching developments, change became an accepted fact of modern life, bringing with it a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity that became a fundamental part of the human condition.

**THE ROLE OF THE MODERN ARTIST**

Early twentieth-century artists addressed the ambiguity of the modern age by setting personal aesthetic goals related to their interpretation of the ever-changing human experience. By and large having turned their backs on the traditional sources of education and patronage that had supported artists in the past, modern artists stood as outsiders. Less beholden to the established systems of society, they were free to comment on them. Some artists sought to fill what they felt was a void in modern society by working actively to shape a more positive future.

**THE ROOTS OF MODERN ART**

Having dominated Western art throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, French art had a significant influence on most early twentieth-century artistic developments. Most important was the example provided by the avant-garde's gradual emphasis on the picture plane. No longer was the surface of the canvas treated as a neutral, illusionistic window onto another world. Through the experiments of the realists, impressionists, and post-impressionists, the viewer was made increasingly aware of the two-dimensional nature of the canvas and the artist's hand in recording and interpreting a scene.

**EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERN ART**

Like society as a whole, the visual arts changed at an accelerated rate in the early twentieth century. Artists explored new ways of relating to the world through a series of major stylistic trends. The most significant of these was the development of nonrepresentational art—art that did not mirror the natural world. Artists also dissected the processes of making art, rethinking the use of traditional materials and techniques and embracing new ones, such as collage.

# OVERVIEW ESSAY

## BRAVE NEW WORLD

The radical transformation of Western art in the twentieth century can only be understood in the context of parallel changes in the fabric of Western life and thought. Widespread political instability has been a hallmark of the modern era. As the twentieth century began, national alliances were in a constant state of flux. In the newly developing nations of Europe, serious struggles between upstart and established political parties emerged, dramatically shifting the balance of power. Minor skirmishes and civil unrest set the stage for the eventual outbreak of war on the Continent, while in Russia, Mexico, and China, the seeds of revolution were taking root. This overwhelming sense of political uncertainty and conflict would have a profound effect on both art and life in the twentieth century.

Technological and scientific advances also played a dramatic role in transforming everyday existence in the modern world. Among the more significant were the introduction of the first incandescent filament light bulbs in 1879 and Roentgen's discovery of X-rays in 1895. Revolutionary changes in communications and transportation included the invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876; the introduction of the gas-powered automobile in 1893; Marconi's transmission of the first transatlantic radio signals in 1901; and the Wright brothers' first successful powered flight in 1903.

This was also a time when new ideas were challenging the very foundations of Western thought. The publication of Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity* in 1905, for example, had an impact far beyond the boundaries of science. Acknowledging process and change as intrinsic elements of nature and recognizing the universe as four-dimensional (by taking into account the passage of time), Einstein's theory undermined the prevailing Newtonian belief in absolute certainties by emphasizing the relative nature of scientific "truths."

Relativity had far-reaching implications for philosophy as well as science. The French philosopher Henri Bergson believed that change was the basis of reality, which itself was determined by human perceptions of time, memory, and intuition rather than scientific measure. For Friedrich Nietzsche, as well, truth was to be achieved by the individual forming personal standards rather than adopting universal norms. The role of the subconscious was thoroughly investigated by the Viennese psychiatrist Sigmund Freud, and the publication of his findings in 1900 radically transformed society's attitudes toward human behavior.

John Sloan, *The City from Greenwich Village*, 1922, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Helen Farr Sloan

Ultimately, these thinkers offered a conception of existence far different from the one that had stood at the core of the humanist tradition. To be modern was to reject the past, to embrace change, and to accept ambiguity. This new way of thinking exerted a tremendous influence on all aspects of life and offered significant challenges for visual artists, who sought new formal means to express their fascination with

these scientific breakthroughs and to reflect the rapid changes in their world. Studies in human perception and investigations of quantum physics, relativity, and the fourth dimension had revolutionized man's view of the universe and, it was thought, art could—indeed should—reflect a similar world view.

## THE ROLE OF THE MODERN ARTIST

Wassily Kandinsky, *Small Worlds VII*, 1922, National Gallery of Art, Print Purchase Fund (Rosenwald Collection)

Rather than seeking mass acceptance or traditional institutional support many vanguard artists began to crave public misunderstanding, which they viewed as confirmation of their own modernity. Gradually, audiences became conditioned to expect new and shocking ideas from contemporary artists. Although these artists' forays into new aesthetic and intellectual territory continued to create scandal, many critics and patrons rallied to lend support.

Having severed their connections with traditional conservative factions, many artists were in a position to explore their personal concerns and invest them with significance. They also began to focus on what were essentially artistic problems—the exploration of line, color, and form—which were established as valid topics in and of themselves. In addition to dissecting and expanding the traditional aspects of making art, artists explored new materials and methods, redefining how art was produced. As a rebellion against the past, technique itself could convey meaning.

As narrow as the boundaries of this process may seem, art remained, by its very nature, a reflection of universal experience. Many artists maintained faith in the role of art as a means to social progress. For some, the artist's unique position in society gave him or her the status of a prophet. With their special insight, artists were considered capable of leading the population to a better life. Such utopian visions were founded on a belief in the inherent perfectibility of humankind—ironically a concept already seriously undermined by modern philosophy and experience—and lent an alternatively hopeless or heroic aspect to the struggles of the artist. In light of these revolutionary changes, modern art required a new kind of audience. By no means abdicating all responsibility for interpretation, artists nevertheless expected viewers to take a more active role in the process of decoding and understanding art.

## THE ROOTS OF MODERN ART

*. . . a picture—before being a warhorse, a nude woman, or some sort of anecdote—is essentially a surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order.*

Maurice Denis, 1890[1]

Many of the radical elements found in early twentieth-century art originated in nineteenth-century France. As rebellious artists repositioned themselves in relation to society, they no longer considered the imitation of the natural world art's primary goal. Photography, introduced in 1839, played a significant role in this transformation by gradually appropriating art's documentary function. No longer obliged to mirror nature, artists began to recognize the intrinsic value of a painting as an object in its own right, divorced from any anecdotal or representational purpose.

This revolution in subject matter was closely tied to dramatic changes in style. The realist artists of the 1850s and 1860s, among them Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, chose to paint the everyday world rather than traditional biblical or mythological themes. They rendered contemporary subjects with broad brushstrokes and unblended color in a manner that asserted that the works were paintings—two-dimensional surfaces—rather than windows on the world. Impressionist artists, including Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, captured the experience of urban life with thick

Camille Pissarro, *Boulevard des Italiens, Morning, Sunlight*, 1897, National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Collection

paint and loose brushstrokes that made the viewer ever more acutely aware of the act of painting. Post-impressionist artists such as Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh rejected the impressionists' emphasis on recording appearances, concentrating more on the expression of emotion. They helped establish the notion that color could be freed from the role of replicating nature, and function independently and symbolically.

## EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MODERN ART

The gradual process of rejecting nature and exploring the fundamental aspects of art-making undertaken by avant-garde artists in the nineteenth century continued in the work of artists at the turn of the century. Influenced by earlier painters and by the intellectual developments of their own era, these artists offered new analyses of perception that went beyond observing and recording nature. In an ambiguous world without universally accepted truths, the subjective vision of the artist could be as meaningful as fact.

These ideas were expressed through a series of rapidly arising twentieth-century avant-garde positions. Although there is a tendency to see movements such as cubism or surrealism as clearly defined entities, progressing one from another in a straight line, these modernist ideas were expressed through a wide variety of artistic endeavors. A linear method of analyzing developments in modern art reflects a reasonable desire to organize and explain—and, admittedly, such categorizations are often helpful in providing labels with which to identify works, artists, or groups. Nevertheless, regarding the successive positions of the avant-garde as some kind of linear progression can lead to drastic oversimplification, with the inherent risk that ideas, works, careers, or movements that do not conform to the historical model may be disregarded. The full range of styles practiced in a single artistic career may be overlooked (as with Matisse's uncharacteristic paintings of the 1920s), or it may become difficult to evaluate artists such as Horace Pippin, whose work falls outside traditional categories. A linear interpretation may also mistakenly imply that there was some sort of anticipated goal in mind—as though, for example, Manet consciously prefigured cubism in his art. It would be useful to keep this caveat in mind as we begin to explore some of the major stylistic trends in early twentieth-century art.[2]

# SOME MAJOR TRENDS IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART

## NONREPRESENTATIONAL ART

*The colours of nature cannot be reproduced on canvas.*

Piet Mondrian, *Towards the True Vision of Reality*, 1942[3]

*The art of painting new structures out of elements which have not been borrowed from the visual sphere, but have been created entirely by the artist himself, and been endowed by him with fullness of reality. . . . This is pure art.*

Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes: méditations esthétiques*, 1913[4]

František Kupka, *Organization of Graphic Motifs II*, 1912/1913, National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund and Gift of Jan and Meda Mladek

The development of nonrepresentational art was one of the most significant artistic innovations of the twentieth century. Nonrepresentational art is not limited to a single movement or style. Rather, the term is used to describe a complete break with the traditional artistic role of representing the natural world. To complicate the issue, the word *abstract* is often used interchangeably with *nonrepresentational* and *nonobjective*, although each conveys a slightly different meaning. *Abstract* is probably used most frequently, but it is also the most problematic because it actually has two distinct meanings when applied to art. Like *nonrepresentational* and *nonobjective*, it can denote works that do not attempt to reproduce what is visible to the eye. Unlike these terms, however, it can also mean art that simplifies or stylizes forms found in nature, but does not totally eliminate them.

Around 1910, purely nonrepresentational art was introduced independently—but virtually simultaneously—by artists in several countries. Wassily Kandinsky in Germany, František Kupka in France, Piet Mondrian in the Netherlands, Kazimir Malevich in Russia, and Arthur Dove in the United States were among the most influential of these artists. Despite their concentration on the arrangement of nonreferential form and color, many of these artists professed that philosophical and spiritual considerations inspired their artistic endeavors.

## FAUVISM

*Fauvism . . . enabled me to test out my resources. My idea was to place blue, red and green side by side and assemble them in an expressive, constructive way. It was the outcome of an inner compulsion growing more and more insistent, of a deliberate decision.*

Henri Matisse[5]

André Derain, *Mountains at Collioure*, 1905, National Gallery of Art, John Hay Whitney Collection

Works by Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck made a scandalous debut in a 1905 Paris exhibition. Their strident colors and bold handling of paint seemed so savage that the critic Louis Vauxcelles dubbed the artists "fauves" (wild beasts). The fauves formed a loose association that lasted about four years (from 1904 to 1908) and posited no consistent theory. Influenced by the work of the post-impressionists and symbolists, these painters went beyond the late nineteenth-century artists in freeing color from its traditionally descriptive role. In their paintings—primarily landscape—they applied pigment arbitrarily, using color as an expressive end in itself. While their bold palette dominated critical discussions, fauve paintings were also notable for their dramatic brushwork, crude drawing style, and distorted compositions.

## GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Girls from Fehmarn (Fehmarn Mädchen)*, 1913, National Gallery of Art, Ruth and Jacob Kainen Collection, Gift in honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

*One came to understand that art was concerned with the deepest things, that a true revival could not be a matter of form but had to be a spiritual rebirth.* Mysticism *awoke in their souls . . .*

Franz Marc, *Der Blaue Reiter*, 1912[6]

Even more subjective than the fauves, German expressionist artists charged every aspect of their work with emotional intensity, spiritual fervor, and a sense of inner vision. *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), founded in Dresden in 1905, was the first organized group to emerge. Searching for a bridge to a better future, these artists saw society in a moral decline and attempted to revolt against the established order through highly psychological and symbolic—although still representational—works. Another important organization associated with German expressionism was *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), founded in Munich in 1912 by Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky. These artists believed that the emotional and spiritual content of their art could be explored outside the bounds of conventional visual appearance, and they were among the first to experiment with nonrepresentational art.

## CUBISM

*[The cubist painter created] new structures out of elements borrowed not from visual reality, but entirely created by the artist and endowed by him with a powerful reality.*

Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes: méditations esthétiques*, 1913[7]

In an unusual artistic collaboration that began in 1908, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque presided over the destruction of the idealized, single view of objects that had dominated Western painting for centuries. Their *bizarreries cubiques* (bizarre little cubes)[8] offered an analysis of the subject that involved multiple perspectives, reflecting their understanding that the ability to "know" a subject is actually the result of a series of glances. Cubism recognized the interactive process of looking and acknowledged that "seeing" involves abstract concepts rather than just a physical act. Further, cubist paintings reflected the notion of relativism—that no entity exists independently, but can only be understood in simultaneous relationship to every other entity and its surroundings.

These realizations were conveyed by breaking figurative elements into facets, lighting objects arbitrarily, reducing pictorial space to a shallow stage, and eliminating boundaries between figure and ground. By restricting their palettes to earth tones and neutral colors (black, white, and gray), early cubists downplayed the emotional power of color. With its emphasis on the intellectual aspects of art, this style of painting came to be known as analytic cubism. Though the original image became obscured or nearly obliterated in these paintings, the works were not nonrepresentational.

Pablo Picasso, *The Cup of Coffee*, 1912, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

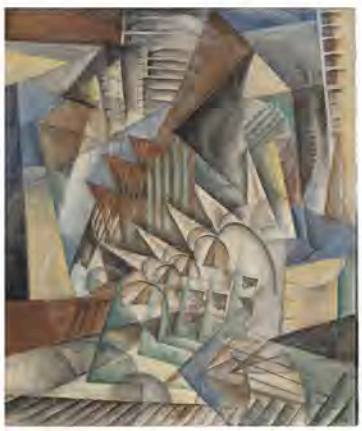
Picasso and Braque began incorporating scraps of paper or actual objects in their work around 1911. The introduction of this "collage" (paste-up) technique was significant, because it called into question the traditional role of the artist as a craftsperson imitating nature, and set up a paradox between the decorative pattern on the paper, the reality of normal usage, and art's illusionistic aspect. Collage represented a crucial transitional

development for Picasso and Braque, and led to a shift in the focus of their work from analytic to synthetic cubism, in which the artists worked backward from abstraction toward representation, constructing recognizable imagery from component nonreferential parts. Subsequently, elements of collage were appropriated by the futurists and dada artists in an effort to defy traditional culture by rejecting craftsmanship and artistic virtuosity.

## FUTURISM

*We declare that the world's splendour has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile, its hood adorned with great pipes like snakes with explosive breath . . . a roaring automobile, which seems to run like a machine-gun, is more beautiful than the* Victory of Samothrace.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Manifesto of Futurism*, 1909[9]



Max Weber, *Rush Hour, New York*, 1915. National Gallery of Art, Gift of the Avalon Foundation

Launched in Italy in 1909, futurism was an organized movement that included writers as well as visual artists. It was named, defined, and given direction by its members, not by critics or historians. The vehemence with which this group rejected the past and embraced the future stemmed in part from the rich, perhaps overwhelming, cultural heritage of their native land. By choosing to publish their first manifesto in a Parisian newspaper, the futurists tacitly acknowledged France, not Italy, as the art capital of the modern world.

Futurist artists such as Boccioni and Severini borrowed heavily from cubism, especially in the faceting of forms. However, instead of producing unemotional, static, and centralized compositions like those of Braque and Picasso, futurists sought to celebrate the speed and energy of the modern world by incorporating the illusion of movement into their works. This was achieved by recording successive positions of objects within the painting in a method influenced by photographers' work with multiple exposures. Strong diagonals were used to communicate a further sense of action. A series of publications and exhibitions spread futurist ideas rapidly and they had a significant influence, especially among artists in Germany and Russia.

## DADA

*I hereby declare that Tzara invented the word Dada on 6th February 1916, at 6 p.m. I was there with my 12 children when Tzara first uttered the word . . . it happened in the Café de la Terrasse in Zurich, and I was wearing a brioche in my left nostril.*

Hans Arp, *Dada au grand air*, 1921[10]

Jean Arp, *Shirt Front and Fork*, 1922. National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

A direct response to World War I, dada was founded in Zurich in 1916 by writers, poets, and artists who had made their way to neutral Switzerland to escape the cataclysm of the war. Extremely negative in outlook, proponents of dada attacked the reason and logic of a civilization they saw as responsible for the war. As a result of these nihilistic and anarchic attitudes, much of the work the group produced was ephemeral in nature. In place of conventional exhibitions, the primary center of activity for the dadaists was the cabaret, where chaotic "evenings" of experimental music and theatrical performances were held. Chance—used to arbitrarily locate forms and arrange compositions—was one of the most important "tools" of the dada artist. It may even have played a role in the selection of the name of the movement, which according to one story was chosen by inserting a penknife randomly among the pages of a dictionary. After the war, the dadaists drifted away from Zurich, mostly returning to their native countries, spreading the ideas of the movement in their wake.

## SURREALISM

*Beautiful as the chance encounter, on an operating table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella.*

Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 1868[11]

René Magritte, *The Blank Signature*, 1965, National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

*Surrealism, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which we propose to express, verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the real process of thought.*

André Breton, *Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924[12]

Surrealism was the most influential movement to emerge between the World Wars. As much a way of life as an artistic enterprise, surrealism was highly organized and relatively long-lived. The movement generated a series of meetings, exhibitions, and publications, most of which were directed by André Breton, who wrote the first surrealist manifesto in 1924.

Surrealist theory shifted attention away from the natural world to the life of the mind as the stimulus and subject for art. Strongly influenced by the ideas of Freud, the surrealists believed that humankind was in desperate need of liberation from the constraints of society and that art could accomplish these changes through the exploration of the unconscious.

No single style dominated the art of the surrealists; rather, what unified their work was its goal of reaching beyond the rational self. To accomplish this, two major ways of exploring the unconscious evolved. The first was automatic writing (automatism), a spontaneous gestural technique through which the artist sought to release the mind from conscious control, allowing images from the unconscious to emerge. The second, inspired by dream images, was the placing of objects in provocative juxtapositions not usually found in nature, in order to disrupt the viewer's sense of reality. Because of the wide variations possible with these approaches, artists working in a variety of styles, techniques, and methods could embrace the surrealist credo.

## SOCIAL REALISM

*We, as artists, must take our places in this crisis on the side of growth and civilization, against barbarism and reaction, and help to create a better social order.*

Peter Blume, "The Artist Must Choose," speech delivered at the American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism, New York, 1936[13]

Louis Lozowick, *Corner of Steel Plant*, 1929, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Adele and Lee Lozowick, in honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

The artists referred to as "social realists" embraced representationalism as a critique of modernist art, and consciously rejected the most extreme contemporary styles, seeking to avoid the elitism and inaccessibility they associated with modernist visual language. They believed that a realist style would allow them to reach the broadest possible audience, especially those factions of society not regularly in contact with the art world.

While remaining aesthetically conservative, this return to realism in art eventually was used to express a wide variety of social and political agendas. These ranged from the idea of art in the service of the state embraced by fascist Italy and Germany and the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China, to the notion of art as the agent of social progress among the muralists of the Mexican renaissance and the artists of Depression-era America. The latter artists shared a commitment to social and political activism and sought to create art that called attention to social injustice, especially aspects of the established political and economic system that preyed upon those of the lowest socio-economic levels.

# OBJECT DESCRIPTIONS

# PABLO PICASSO

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
***The Tragedy*, 1903**
Wood
41½ x 27⅛ in. (1.054 x 0.690 m)
National Gallery of Art
Chester Dale Collection

While still in his early twenties, Picasso had mastered a remarkable range of artistic vocabularies. Following a traditional education in his native Spain, and as a youth in Barcelona, he was strongly influenced by the spiritual vision of symbolism and the decorative patterns of art nouveau. A series of trips to Paris beginning in 1900 introduced him to current French avant-garde styles, including impressionism and post-impressionism. However, none of these early experiences fully explain Picasso's blue period, the artist's first truly personal style.

Between 1901 and 1904, Picasso employed a predominantly blue palette. The blue period resulted from the artist's personal synthesis of several styles and ideas to which he had been exposed, and no single factor accounts for the blue tonality that dominates these paintings. The end results are more obvious: the unusual reliance on a single hue allowed Picasso to draw on the expressive power of the color to convey a mood of despair.

The thin, barefoot, frugally clothed figures of the blue period refer unmistakably to physical deprivations, ones that Picasso himself experienced as he struggled to establish himself as an artist. In addition to the cold and hunger of poverty, these works express psychological suffering. The loneliness and unhappiness depicted may reflect the dislocating effects that life in Paris had on Picasso as a young foreigner, but beyond representing a personal reaction, these works convey a sense of spiritual alienation in keeping with the intellectual discontent of the modern age.

*The Tragedy* is one of a number of blue period paintings that capture these somber feelings of melancholy and isolation. There is no specific story to explain it. The man, woman, and child serve as symbols of the misery of human existence. In fact, the ambiguous quality of the work—so laden with meaning, yet beyond literal interpretation—is another of its modern aspects. In an era of few certainties, traditional storytelling may have no longer served a meaningful function.

If the intellectual tone of the work is thoroughly modern, its other aspects are less obviously avant-garde. For example, the figures are carefully drawn. The contours of their bodies are enough to convey a great deal about their states of mind. However, the faces, especially those of the males, are rendered with great detail, in a manner that reflects Picasso's academic training. Fascinated by the new ideas he had encountered in Paris, Picasso also relied on his Spanish roots. The elongated human form used to underscore the sadness of these figures is influenced by the work of El Greco, the most important painter of the sixteenth century to work in Spain. The innate human dignity that these figures maintain in the face of a life of tragedy is characteristic of the paintings of the Spanish baroque artists, such as Diego Velázquez.

# ANDRE DERAIN

André Derain (1880–1954)
***Charing Cross Bridge, London***
1906
Oil on canvas
31⅛ x 39½ in. (0.803 x 1.003 m)
National Gallery of Art
John Hay Whitney Collection

The French artist André Derain is best known for the fauve paintings he produced between 1904 and 1908. His paintings of the English capital, including *Charing Cross Bridge, London,* were made during two visits in 1905 and 1906. These trips were financed by the Parisian dealer Ambroise Vollard, who intended that Derain should replicate the success enjoyed by Claude Monet's 1904 exhibition of paintings of the same city.

Because Derain set off for London with Monet's example directly in mind, it is not surprising that the resulting views of the city were similar to those selected by Monet—something evident in the way that views of the Thames' bridges dominate the London works of both artists. In fact, much fauve subject matter was similar to that of the impressionists: urban and suburban landscapes. It was the expressive color employed by fauve artists that constituted an abrupt break with earlier modernist conventions.

Consciously concerned with being innovative, Derain, along with his friends Henri Matisse and Maurice de Vlaminck, had introduced a bold new painting style to the Parisian art world in 1905. These "fauve" works expressed feelings through vivid color and bold brushwork. Innovative as the style may have been, it drew on the earlier experiments of the post-impressionists and the symbolists. Georges Seurat and his followers among the post-impressionists had rendered light and form through a careful analysis of both the properties of light and the theories of human emotion, primarily relying on individual brushstrokes of unblended color. The symbolists had approached composition through flat areas of colors, not inspired by natural appearances but intended to correspond to states of mind.

These influences are evident in *Charing Cross Bridge, London.* The reflections and ripples on the river's surface are rendered with Seurat-inspired divided strokes whose bold colors stand out with the brilliance of mosaic tiles against the white ground (now faded to off-white). Other areas—most notably the sky, the silhouette of the Houses of Parliament, and other features of the skyline—are painted with broad areas of a single color. The colors have little to do with the actual experience of the scene, but evoke a sense of emotional intensity. The overall effect is typical of the pulsating quality of fauvist compositions: the result of dramatic colors and the harmonies and dissonances they create.

The location itself is rendered quite specifically. Charing Cross Bridge was one of the main railway arteries of the city; puffs of smoke above the trestle suggest the recent passing of a locomotive. In addition to the "postcard" view of the landmarks in the background, Derain recorded commercial activity along the river bank—among the buildings lining the crowded wharf is a portion of the Lion's Brewery. Whereas Monet's views of similar subjects captured atmospheric and temporal effects, Derain searched for more stable qualities in the scene. Some of the tension in the work comes from Derain's struggle to synthesize traditional dedication to the visual subject with a more abstract evocation of emotion. Writing to Vlaminck that same year, Derain said that he looked forward to further purifying "this transposition of nature."[14]

# PABLO PICASSO

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
***Nude Woman*, 1910**
Oil on linen
73¼ x 24 in. (1.873 x 0.610 m)
National Gallery of Art
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

*Nude Woman* is an example of analytic cubism, a style developed by Picasso and Georges Braque over a two-year period between 1908 and 1910. Working side by side, in a rational way, the two artists gradually reduced objects to abstract components—lines, planes, and values. They rejected the traditional notion of a single, frozen, ideal vision of an object, replacing it with a presentation of the object in relationship to space and experienced over time. This approach reflected contemporary intellectual developments that insisted upon the relativism of all experience. Fragmented into geometric shapes, the highly abstracted figures of fully developed analytic cubism virtually merged with the surrounding ground. Despite the high degree of abstraction, these works were still based on external reality.

*Nude Woman* is radical in style but narrowly focused in subject matter. Most cubist paintings recorded the world of the studio and the café, places frequented by Picasso and Braque during the era when cubism evolved. Despite the title, few details of the figure can be identified in the painting. However, Picasso produced a number of preparatory studies for the work that show him progressively abstracting from a nude female figure to achieve the highly abstract form of the finished work. Thus, in preparing this painting, Picasso to some extent recapitulated the evolution of cubist art.

The rhythm of forms in *Nude Woman* relies more on aesthetic considerations internal to the canvas than it is dictated by external information about a female figure. The figure is merely suggested by a scaffold of lines. Lines delineate sections or fragments of form, their boundaries incomplete so that one fragment flows into the next. Within each section there is a subtle shading of tone from dark to light that establishes a shallow sense of depth. The neutral palette of browns, grays, and blacks—typical of analytic cubism—is applied with visible, carefully arranged brushstrokes, reinforcing the flatness of the canvas.

*Nude Woman* is one of Picasso's largest paintings from this period. Its narrow vertical format is unusual, and seems to have been determined by the terms of a commission. In 1909, Picasso agreed to produce a suite of eleven works as part of a decorative program for the library of Hamilton Easter Field, an American painter, critic, and patron. Although Picasso worked on the commission intermittently for several years, it was never completed. Such commissions were rare for modern artists. Having eschewed a system in which a patron (either an individual or an organization) put money "up front" and dictated many of the specifics of the work, modern artists generally produced works for themselves, with a dealer or patron involved only after the work had been executed.

# LYONEL FEININGER

Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956)
***The Bicycle Race*, 1912**
Oil on canvas
31⅛ x 39½ in. (0.803 x 1.003 m)
National Gallery of Art, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

*The Bicycle Race* is a good example of an intermediate stage in Feininger's career when he was working to absorb a variety of emerging artistic ideas—most notably cubism and futurism. Many early twentieth-century artists passed through a similar phase in their work as they sought to come to terms with stylistic and theoretical options made available by the early pioneers of modernism.

Feininger was born in New York City, but spent most of his career in Germany, arriving in 1887 with the intention of following in his parents' footsteps and studying music. Deciding to become a visual artist instead, he established a successful career as a cartoonist and caricaturist, publishing illustrations in Berlin and Paris newspapers and humor magazines for approximately fifteen years. In his late thirties, Feininger decided to devote himself to painting. His first works in this medium were ironic and comic in tone, influenced by the caricatures of his early career. He also produced work that was based on direct observation of nature, in the manner of the impressionists. Having already made several visits to Paris, he returned to that city in 1911 to show six of his paintings in a public exhibition.

The exhibition was a crucial event in Feininger's development as an artist, not because of the reaction to his paintings—there was little—but because it exposed him to the work of the cubists who effectively made a group debut in the same show. Although he had known nothing of cubism before the exhibition, Feininger later reported that he felt as though it was something he had been striving toward for years.

After his exposure to cubism, Feininger worked increasingly from his imagination, searching for a way to record his intuitive understanding of the natural world. *The Bicycle Race* is an early example of his new approach. While the influence of cubism in *The Bicycle Race* is evident in the flattened space and the division of forms into faceted planes, the work also reflects Feininger's exposure to futurism, especially in the painting's sense of movement. (Feininger must have seen the futurist exhibition that had been in Paris and Berlin in 1912.) The subject of the race is appropriate for conveying the speed made possible by the technological innovations of the modern age, something the futurists regularly celebrated in their work.

Feininger distills the natural rhythms and curves of the cyclists' bodies into a series of sharp angles that transforms them into racing machines, but never disintegrates form to the degree that Picasso and Braque did. Combined with the frames of the bicycles, the cyclists form the strong diagonals typical of the futurist method of representing energy and speed. The crush of cyclists, differentiated only by the color of their costumes and wheels of their bicycles, thrusts forward through a dense ground of neutral color.

# WASSILY KANDINSKY

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944)
***Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)***
1913
Oil on linen
55⅜ x 47¼ in. (1.407 x 1.197 m)
National Gallery of Art
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Kandinsky came to painting fairly late in life; he was thirty in 1896 when he left his native Russia to study art in Munich. He would eventually gain renown as a pioneer of abstract painting. In fact, along with Kupka and Mondrian he is often recognized as the first artist to produce a nonrepresentational work. Whether or not this is true, it is important to acknowledge Kandinsky's role as an early practitioner and theoretician of abstract art. For him, as for most of his fellow abstract artists, bold experimentation with color and line was not a sufficient goal. As Kandinsky explained in his 1912 essay, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he sought to achieve a spiritual reality through his paintings.

Regarded as central to the development of Kandinsky's art, the *Improvisations* form a group of thirty-six works painted between 1909 and 1913. The title of the series immediately identifies the works with a spontaneity of execution and level of abstraction usually associated with music rather than the visual arts. Such connections were important to Kandinsky as he sought to establish a new path for his art; however, they do not suffice to explain the works. For example, upon first inspection, the lyrical forms of *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* may appear as if they are nonrepresentational and were worked directly on the canvas. However, like most of the paintings Kandinsky produced in the years immediately prior to World War I, the work contains symbolic forms. Nor was its execution as spontaneous as the look of the painting might suggest, for two related drawings have been identified, and pencil marks on the canvas offer another indication of careful planning.

*Sea Battle*, the secondary title of this work, offers an important clue to the subject, although it is not intended to tie the painting to a conventional narrative. The two sailing vessels locked in combat at the center of the canvas serve as abstract emblems, typical of the veiled images Kandinsky came to prefer. Their battle takes place as giant waves destroy the towers of a city above and to the left. Similar symbols are repeated in Kandinsky's paintings from this period, and refer to an apocalyptic destruction that the artist associated with a cleansing necessary for the spiritual regeneration of humanity.

Kandinsky relied on color as well as symbols to convey meaning. He believed that colors were capable of eliciting specific responses in the viewer—green, for example, implied self-satisfaction. Together, the effect of the symbols and colors could guide the viewer toward a more profound understanding of the painting and deeper awareness of an inner reality. Kandinsky's expectations for his art were predicated on his belief that the artist held a privileged position in society, destined to lead people to think and see in a new way.

# MARSDEN HARTLEY

Marsden Hartley (1877–1943)
***The Aero*, 1914**
Oil on canvas
39½ x 32 in. (1.003 x 0.812 m)
National Gallery of Art
Andrew W. Mellon Fund

One of the circle of American modern artists associated with the influential patron and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz, Marsden Hartley had his first one-person exhibition at Stieglitz' 291 Gallery in 1909. Stieglitz' gallery was one of the few places in New York that exhibited the most progressive painting by Americans and Europeans. It was there that Hartley, like many other American artists of the era, was exposed to avant-garde work such as Picasso's analytic cubist paintings, shown in 1911. With financial support from Stieglitz, Hartley was able to make two trips to Europe between 1912 and 1915. These trips brought him face to face with not only the art but also the artists of European modernism. Typical of American artists who traveled in Europe during this period, he made his first stop Paris, where, in 1912, he gained a greater awareness of post-impressionism, fauvism, and cubism—styles he had already encountered in New York. However, unlike most of his fellow Americans in Paris, Hartley regularly sought the company of German artists who shared his affinity for the mystical. Familiar with Wassily Kandinsky's influential essay, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Hartley eventually met Kandinsky and other expressionist artists during a trip to Germany in 1913.

Hartley's desire to express personal feelings in his art ran counter to cubism's highly intellectualized approach, and the example of German expressionism provided him with a more intuitive approach. Ultimately, during a second visit to Germany in 1914–1915, he forged a personal style combining the tightly structured arrangement of forms borrowed from synthetic cubism with the dramatic color and loose brushwork of expressionism.

This second trip coincided with first the threat and then the reality of war. Reacting to World War I as both heroic and tragic, Hartley produced a group of paintings sometimes referred to as war motifs. Partly inspired by German military insignia, these works offer a symbolic vision of the war.

In *The Aero*, overlapping symbols of the German military (in this specific case, semaphores or special flags used for directing biplanes and dirigibles, referring to the conquest of the air) are locked into a tightly knit arrangement of forms reminiscent of synthetic cubism. The emotional impact of the work derives from its flat areas of intense color—especially the red form that floats free of the other interlocking forms. The simple wooden frame, painted by the artist, continues the design of the canvas and serves as both an extension of and an emphatic boundary for the painting. It allowed Hartley to create a more complete environment for the canvas.

The hardships of living in war-torn Germany necessitated Hartley's return to the United States in late 1915. Like many of his generation, he eventually retreated from his early experiments with abstraction, and returned to painting more naturalistic scenes.

# PIET MONDRIAN

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944)
***Diamond Painting in Red, Yellow, and Blue***, c. 1921/1925
Canvas on hardboard
diamond: 56¼ x 56 in.
(1.428 x 1.423 m)
National Gallery of Art, Gift of
Herbert and Nannette Rothschild

Mondrian was one of the most radical of the nonrepresentational painters to emerge in the early twentieth century. His mature canvases are composed of the basic elements of painting—color and line. Mondrian arrived at this style through a careful progression from realism to highly abstracted forms to total nonrepresentation.

Mondrian began painting landscapes in his native Holland. Under the influence of Dutch artists who had absorbed the ideas of the French symbolists and post-impressionists, he slowly distilled landscape to its essentials. Arriving in Paris in 1911, Mondrian was drawn to cubism, although he continued to focus his attention on nature. Eventually, Mondrian would criticize the cubists for failing to paint nonrepresentational works—for not taking their artistic experiments to their logical conclusion. Mondrian himself began producing works devoid of naturalistic references in 1913–1914. In stripping away what he considered to be superfluous elements from his imagery, he had eliminated all curved lines by 1914, and by 1921 had completed the gradual transformation to his radically abstract mature paintings. These works are constructed of horizontal and vertical black lines arranged as an irregular grid filled with white, gray, and the primary colors (red, yellow, and blue). With the advantage of hindsight, it is easy to think of Mondrian resolutely marching toward this carefully ordered style from the earliest days of his career. The process seems all the more extraordinary when we realize that, for Mondrian, the final goal did not reveal itself for decades.

Mondrian had purified his art to an elemental vocabulary yet found remarkable freedom within the constraints of his system. For what concerned him was not merely line and color, but the relationship established between these elements. By controlling the visual strength of the color (through the size and placement of the color areas), and the width and position of the line, it was possible, through delicate manipulations, to form a stable composition that hovered visually on the surface of the canvas with no differentiation between foreground and background.

The vast majority of Mondrian's mature works involve canvases that are traditionally oriented squares or rectangles. However, in approximately sixteen compositions, he tilted a square canvas forty-five degrees on its axis to create the diamond format found in this example. As a result, he challenged himself to achieve the same stable grid of his more conventionally oriented works in an inherently dynamic format. Mondrian reworked this canvas at least four times, adjusting the relative weights and balances of lines and color areas, a fact that underscores his careful calculations in arranging the elements of his paintings.

Despite this attention to the formal aspects of painting, it is inappropriate to view Mondrian as an artist committed to achieving only aesthetic harmony. His concerns were much more extensive. Like Kandinsky, Mondrian was a utopian modernist who believed in the ongoing spiritual progress of humankind, and the role the artist could play in that process.

# FERNAND LEGER

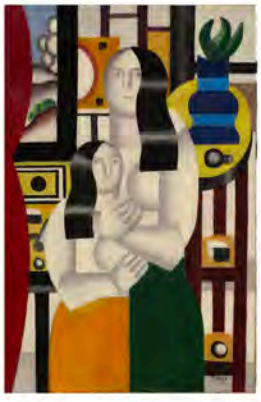
Fernand Léger (1881–1955)
***Two Women,*** 1922
Oil on canvas
35¼ x 23 in. (0.908 x 0.584 m)
National Gallery of Art
Gift (Partial) of Richard S. Zeisler
in honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the National Gallery of Art

Léger's calm, monumental women occupy an interior setting rendered to imply mechanized precision. This figurative painting acknowledges the classical tradition and reflects what became known as the "call to order"—a summons heard by numerous French artists in the post-World War I era. These artists sought to reestablish links to a cultural heritage that they felt had been lost in the frenzy of artistic innovation prior to the war. Most, like Léger, had worked in a style related to cubism in the prewar period, and while cubist influences remained in their postwar paintings, they embraced classicism—specifically the stable, formal French classicism of David and Poussin—in an attempt to reattach themselves to a sense of tradition and with that a renewed sense of national pride.

As is evident in *Two Women,* Léger's paintings of the 1920s were more than a mere recycling of classicism; they represent attempts to be at once modern and timeless, expressing an idealized vision of the modern world. Léger's firm belief in the possibility of the betterment of mankind and the role art could play in that process qualifies him as a utopian modernist. For Léger, this utopianism was tied to a faith in modern industry and its machines, and was expressed through his art in a bold, clean style and simplified forms. Classicism reinforced these characteristics and provided a further sense of objectivity and universality.

*Two Women* is one of several paintings of women Léger executed during the mid-1920s that embody traditional views of women. They are assigned to domestic spaces, symbols of leisure, rather than involved in the processes of industry vital to the new order that Léger seemed to champion. The two women are virtually mirror images of one another, their bodies reduced to simple volumes inspired by modern mechanical forms, classical idealization, and cubist analysis. The only significant difference between the two figures is in their size, which may be intended to communicate a difference in age. Their impassive faces help to establish the mood of the piece. The interior setting is decorated in the stark postwar style advocated by Léger's friend Charles Jeanneret (the painter and architect later known as Le Corbusier). The careful balance maintained among the black verticals and horizontals that predominate in the background reflects the influence of Mondrian. The varying influences serve as a reminder of the role of Paris as a crossroad for the art world in the 1920s.

Léger's *Two Women* is most certainly a sum of its parts, each element carefully considered in relationship to every other. The way in which the work is linked with tradition, yet firmly established in the modern idiom, can be demonstrated by the single element that runs the length of the painting at the left. This simple double curve is an abstracted image of a curtain, a framing device sometimes used in traditional paintings to establish what is already implicit in naturalistic works—that the canvas acts as a window. In this instance, the appearance of the curtain only serves to intensify our awareness that the image on the canvas is of a new world created by the artist, not a reflection of our own world.



# KATHE KOLLWITZ

Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945)
***The People (Das Volk)***
1922/1923
Woodcut, touched with white gouache, on japan paper [trial proof]
image: 14⅛ x 11⁹⁄₁₆ in.
(0.360 x 0.300 m)
sheet: 14¾ x 14¼ in.
(0.375 x 0.363 m)
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

Kollwitz lived in a time marked by significant change in the social status of women. Women were still denied admittance to official art schools when she undertook the study of art in the 1880s, but in 1919 she became the first woman elected to a professorship at the Prussian Academy of Arts. Kollwitz is often associated with her fellow German artists who worked in an expressionist style at the beginning of the century, and, in her attempt to convey a psychological reality rather than a faithful rendering of natural appearance, her art is in keeping with expressionist art. But her work differs from that of her artistic contemporaries in its strong social agenda and its concern with the suffering of the common people.

Having abandoned painting in the early 1890s, Kollwitz devoted her mature career almost completely to the graphic arts. Convinced that her art should serve the needs of the people rather than a small elite of art connoisseurs, she chose printmaking (and relatively inexpensive, multiple images) as the medium likely to reach the broadest possible audience. Although she developed superb technical skills in a variety of printmaking techniques—including etching, lithography, and woodcut—she sought to work in the most straightforward manner possible to focus attention on her message and avoid aesthetic distractions. To this end she largely rejected color because she feared it would beautify her works and detract from the stark power of her subjects.

The sharp, forceful imagery possible with Kollwitz' bold use of ink and paper is evident in *The People*, the seventh and final woodcut in a series entitled *War*. Instead of depicting a scene of combat, each image in the series conveys the emotional toll that war extracts from those on the homefront. The composition of *The People* is tight and compact, with no open space to relieve the sense of threat that pervades the print. The wood has been gouged, leaving deliberately crude marks to describe the anguished, fearful faces crowded across the top of the sheet. Much of the remainder of the print is covered with a field of virtually undifferentiated black ink. While this area can be read as hair and clothing, its dark intensity adds to the somber mood of the work. Typical of the prominence given to images of women in Kollwitz' work, the print is dominated by the central figure of a woman who shelters a child in the folds of her cloak. The child's face, peering out behind the woman's bony, work-worn hand, is the only image in the lower half of the print. Despite the woman's intent to protect the child, the vulnerability of the entire group is evident. Kollwitz' message of social injustice is simplified in order to achieve maximum emotional impact; at the same time, the lack of detail or specific setting helps to establish the universality of the theme.

Kollwitz differed from most modernist figures in that she did not deliberately celebrate innovation or originality in style or technique. Her overriding concern with the social function of art also set her apart from the modernist cultivation of individual artistic freedom.

# HENRI MATISSE

Henri Matisse (1869–1954)
***Pianist and Checker Players***
1924
Oil on canvas
29 x 36⅛ in. (0.737 x 0.924 m)
National Gallery of Art, Collection of
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

*Pianist and Checker Players* dates from a period in Matisse's career that was once largely ignored because the works were viewed as primarily personal and decorative in their intent. Because they seemed far from the avant-garde sensibility that had dominated Matisse's early career, especially the bold fauve experiments of 1904–1910, they were easily dismissed from serious consideration. It is true that in the 1920s Matisse achieved a distance, both aesthetically and geographically, from the Parisian avant-garde; his career at that time was dominated by frequent, lengthy stays in Nice on the French Riviera where he redefined his art through highly personal themes.

For the most part, the works produced during these years were set in the seaside hotel rooms and apartments where Matisse passed his time in Nice. The lush interior spaces and spectacular outdoor views became the focus of his ongoing investigation of form and pattern infused with the intense colors of the Mediterranean setting. These rooms clearly operated as a refuge for the artist, and, as a result, the paintings convey a sense of complete calm and security typical of the pleasurable qualities that Matisse's audience came to expect.

*Pianist and Checker Players* is set in the Nice apartment Matisse rented beginning in 1921. The woman shown seated at the upright piano is Henriette Darricarrère, a model who worked for Matisse for seven years beginning in 1920, and who appears frequently in the paintings of those years. Barely in her twenties and studying dance when Matisse met her, the model was encouraged by the artist to continue with both ballet and piano lessons. The boys at the table, absorbed in a game of checkers, are Henriette's brothers.

Although the work does not include a conventional self-portrait, Matisse's presence in the room is strongly felt. He was a talented violinist often described as having skills equal to those of a professional musician. Here his violins are suspended from the armoire in the back corner of the room, above the empty armchair. Some of the artist's paintings and drawings hang on the wall, framing a reduced-size cast of Michelangelo's *Slave* (a sculpture that appears in several of Matisse's works). The colored dots that enliven Matisse's image of the plain white base of the sculpture, although a small detail, serve as a significant reminder of how much the scene is ultimately subject to the control of Matisse and no mere recording of the room's contents.

The proliferation of patterns that dominate the composition—including the flowered wall-coverings, striped tablecloth, oriental carpet, and diamond-shaped floor tiles—add a touch of exoticism to the domestic setting. Matisse met the challenge of balancing such disparate visual elements without losing the structure of the painting by employing several perspectives. The piano, chairs, bureau, and even the floor are seen from different angles. The warm glow of the complementary tones of yellow and red further contribute to the harmonious sense of order that suffuses the work.

# JOAN MIRO

Joan Miró (1893–1983)
***Head of a Catalan Peasant***
1924
Oil on canvas
57½ x 45 in. (1.460 x 1.142 m)
National Gallery of Art
Gift of the Collectors Committee

*Head of a Catalan Peasant* is at once ancient and modern in both style and subject. As such, it is an important example not only of how Miró positioned himself historically, but also more generally of how modern artists sometimes consciously drew from the past in seeking to formulate a new and different present.

This work belongs to an important group of paintings Miró produced between 1922–1924 that address the closely linked themes of his family farm and peasant life in his native Catalonia. In these paintings, Miró evolved with remarkable speed from the highly detailed, realistic style of his works of 1922 to the abstract language of signs found here. Between 1924 and 1925 he painted four versions of this subject, throughout which a radical distillation of signs takes place as the series unfolds. Considered to be either the second or third work in the series, this example is extreme in its simplicity, relying on just a few symbols to address its subject.

The peasant wears a red knit cap, or *barettina,* a symbol of Catalan nationalism. Three other features define the head—two dots for eyes at either side and wavy lines for a beard below. These four elements are linked by two thin intersecting lines. While this is the reading encouraged by Miró's title, it is also possible to see the image as a stick figure with a hat for a head standing on a single leg, hands outstretched, in a plowed field. On a different level, the portrait of the farmer can be seen to be suggested through an abstracted landscape defined by a field divided into four quadrants, standing for the points of the compass; seed holes and furrows—evidence of the farmer's labors; and a rainbow, raindrops, and a star in the sky above. One reading is not necessarily intended to take precedence over another; in fact, the alternatives enrich the subject by making the peasant literally one with his land.

Abandoning the idea of a fixed truth and accepting the mutability of existence were characteristics of Miró's art that made the surrealists eager to embrace it.

The highly abstract style of the work is part of a language of signs that Miró evolved around the time of the painting, yet it consciously embraces both the sort of symbols employed in "primitive" art and the sense of whimsy associated with the images of children. These stylistic qualities are the result of his visits to Paris where he absorbed the most advanced artistic ideas of the moment. They were viewed by Miró's surrealist colleagues as appropriate for art of the inner mind.

With a keen sense of his Catalan heritage (having been born in Barcelona, capital of the Catalonia region of Spain), Miró specifically addresses his roots through the agrarian subject of the painting, despite the international influences on his style. By celebrating the Catalan peasant, he not only draws on his own personal experience of summers spent on a family farm in the Catalan village of Montroig, but also employs an image used widely in intellectual circles to champion Catalonia's historical and contemporary contributions.

# CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI

Constantin Brancusi
(1876–1957)
***Bird in Space,*** 1925
Marble, stone, and wood
71⅛ x 5⅛ x 6⅛ in.
(1.819 x 0.137 x 0.162 m)
National Gallery of Art, Gift of
Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer

More than just an abstract image of a bird, the delicately balanced, upwardly thrusting form of *Bird in Space* addresses the essence of flight itself. In order to accomplish this, Brancusi explored the idea of "bird" and its relationship to the space that surrounds it.

The elegant form of the work evolved in a series of stages, beginning in 1910–1912, with a group of sculptures named for *Maiastra,* a supernatural flying divinity of folktales from Brancusi's native Romania. These early works, although abstracted from nature, described the distinct masses of the bird's form: beak, head, neck, breast, legs, talons. Over the next decade, the artist returned to the subject on several occasions, gradually compressing the separate parts of the bird into a single form flowing vertically from stylized feet. He also eliminated the more specific reference from the title. This process of purifying and idealizing nature was typical of Brancusi's manner of working during this decade, and he applied it to other subjects, although, as in the case of his birds, never deserting the figure completely.

*Bird in Space* reflects the major influences of Brancusi's career: the peasant art of Romania, tribal sculpture from Africa, and twentieth-century technology. They are evident in his approach to the subject, his treatment of form, and his use of material. His interest in the folktales and craft traditions of Romania grew out of his personal experience, but also reflected a fascination with "primitive" art shared by many artists who, like Brancusi, were working in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century. The simple abstract forms found in many nontraditional objects, especially those from Africa, were widely studied among the avant-garde during this period and directly influenced Brancusi's own development. Yet he also embraced the streamlined shapes of the machine without abandoning nature for the scientific. Hence the conceptual bent of much folk and non-Western art encounters a quintessentially modern reduction of form in Brancusi's *Bird in Space.*

Peasant crafts and tribal carvings also served as models for Brancusi's approach to materials. During the nineteenth century, Western sculptors left the actual execution of material to studio assistants, separating the conception of the work from its execution. Brancusi was among the sculptors who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, reacted against this approach, choosing to be directly responsible for transforming raw material into art. Yet the flawless, highly polished surfaces of his marbles and bronzes do not appear handcrafted. Although laboriously executed by hand, Brancusi's marble bird achieves the regularity of the machine-made. The sleek, aerodynamic shape, which recalls the silhouette of a bird, is intended to give form to the abstract notion of flight.

For Brancusi, the form itself was of greatest significance. He prized the traditional sculptural materials of marble and bronze for their ability to achieve highly reflective surfaces. By interacting with the environment, the skin of the sculpture became an expressive envelope. One way to look at the base of the work with its hierarchy of materials—wood, stone, and then marble—is as a transition between the mundane physical world and the spiritual realm.

# PABLO PICASSO

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
***Guitar*, 1926**
Collage of wallpaper, carpet tacks, nail, paper, string, and charcoal on wood
51¼ x 38⅛ in. (1.300 x 0.970 m)
National Gallery of Art
Chester Dale Fund

*Guitar* is an example of collage, a technique developed by Picasso and Georges Braque around 1911. The term *collage*, derived from the French word *coller* (to glue), refers to art made by gluing commonplace materials such as newspaper, rope, wood veneer, printed, colored, and textured papers, and photographs to a paper or canvas support. The sheets of drawing paper and strip of wallpaper border in this work are examples of collage. The term is also applied more broadly to include a variety of nontraditional materials, not all of which are literally glued into a work of art, such as the nails and string in *Guitar*.

For Picasso and Braque, the collage process served as an important step in developing a new way of working with form following their analytic cubist experiments (see Picasso's *Nude Woman*). In collage, the intellectual procedure involved in producing an analytic cubist work was essentially reversed. Instead of beginning with a natural object that, through a process of analysis, was fragmented into abstract components, an image was constructed or synthesized from geometric elements. Color was reintroduced by the artist more to create illusion than to arouse emotional response in the viewers. These lessons were translated into painted works, to which the term *synthetic cubism* is applied.

This work offers a legible but not conventionally naturalistic image of a guitar hanging on a wall. The body of the guitar is established by two full sheets of paper. Its depth is suggested by the difference in color of the two sheets and the way they overlap. A few geometric charcoal marks are used to indicate the tuning pegs, frets, and sound hole. Over the illusionary sound hole, ordinary twine has been stretched between nails that are pounded into the wooden support of the work. These three-dimensional elements obscure the boundaries between art and reality. For example, the pieces of twine are real, but are only read as guitar strings because of their placement in the work.

The image of the guitar hangs "suspended" by another actual nail on a painted board. Wood is a traditional support that was regularly used by painters of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (Picasso himself used wood as the support for some of his early paintings, including *The Tragedy* of 1903.) In *Guitar*, however, the artist calls the viewer's attention to the dual function of the wood; more than the "invisible" support for the image, the wood with its very visible grain functions as a piece of wall. Such multilayered references to reality and illusion are typical of the irony with which cubists questioned the conventional means of art.

Produced in 1926, *Guitar* was part of a brief revival of Picasso's earlier work with collage. In the 1920s, Picasso worked in a variety of styles and techniques, his output no longer dominated by a single idea. He felt free to pick and choose among the various developments of his own career, while at the same time absorbing new artistic ideas as they were introduced. The surrealists were among those who influenced Picasso and in turn were influenced by him. While *Guitar* is not conventionally surrealist, the surrealists felt an affinity for this sort of work because of the potential for multiple readings.

# YVES TANGUY

Yves Tanguy (1900–1955)
***The Look of Amber,*** 1929
Oil on canvas
39⅜ x 31⅛ x ⅛ in.
(1.000 x 0.810 x 0.023 m)
National Gallery of Art
Chester Dale Fund

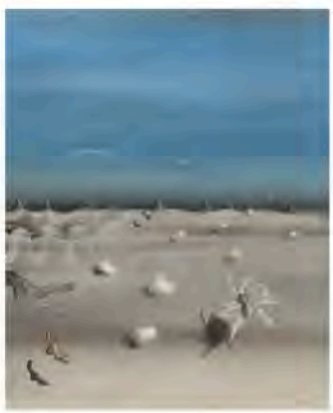
In 1923, after seeing a work by Giorgio de Chirico in a gallery window, the Parisian-born Tanguy made an abrupt decision to become a painter. Seeking no formal instruction, he began to work in oils and, with remarkable speed, achieved a mature style that remained steadfastly consistent throughout his career.

The major elements of this style are all present in *The Look of Amber:* precisely painted yet ultimately unidentifiable forms set within a barren landscape of infinite depth. The painting reflects the distinct version of surrealism that Tanguy adopted. André Breton, the founder and theorist of surrealism, became Tanguy's friend in 1925, and with his blessing Tanguy joined the movement. Tanguy had previously read some of the earliest surrealist literature and was fascinated by the idea of exploring the subconscious through art.

As did many of his fellow surrealists, Tanguy experimented with automatic drawing—one of the most widely used methods developed by the artists to break through the control of rational consciousness in order to plumb the images of the inner mind. Problematic in both theory and execution, automatic drawing was nonetheless accepted by the surrealists as a legitimate means of delving beneath the surface of the conscious self. Tanguy brought some of the forms he developed in this manner—for example, the kernellike shape in the lower left corner—to a more highly finished state than did many of his colleagues. As a result, the objects take on a naturalism that belies their source in fantasy.

These elements occupy a world that is at once familiar and alien, and is made no less ambiguous by the title of the work. A landscape setting is established by a crisp horizon line and colors indicating ground and sky. Carefully graded, these background colors also help to fix the appearance of depth in the painting. But the viewer's easy acceptance of perspectival space is called into question by other aspects of the work. The snakelike elements that appear at the left side of the painting, just below the horizon line, are clearly rendered at the edge of the canvas, but fade quickly as they move toward the center. Another example of Tanguy's experiments with automatic technique, these forms dissipate as the loaded brush is emptied and the paint source is exhausted. One tends to read this group as floating on the surface of the canvas. As a result, the sense of recession into space established by other aspects of the work is confused.

Such disjunctions are at the core of surrealist thought. Tanguy reinforces the sense of disquiet conveyed in the painting by establishing an environment ruled by its own natural laws. The kernels and wisps inhabiting this airless land hover just above the ground, each casting a distinct shadow, their apparent weight seemingly unrelated to the height at which they levitate. The muted colors, careful modeling, and use of varnish give the painting an "old master" appearance that serves to make concrete the unreal aspects of the image.



# GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986)
***Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV***, 1930
Oil on canvas
40 x 30 in. (1.016 x 0.762 m)
National Gallery of Art
Alfred Stieglitz Collection
Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe

A pioneer of modernism in the United States, Georgia O'Keeffe was among the first American artists to work with a strongly reductive visual language. She produced essentially nonrepresentational paintings and drawings in the late 1910s. While this work paralleled the contemporary experiments of Kandinsky and other European artists, O'Keeffe actively sought her own voice, rather than producing work that she considered merely derivative of the Europeans. One crucial early influence was the art educator Arthur Wesley Dow, whose teachings combined oriental ideas about composition based on form and color with an attitude toward nature as a source of spiritual inspiration, rather than subject matter for art.

During the 1920s, having retreated from total abstraction, O'Keeffe produced a series of large-format paintings of flowers. In this period she divided her time between winters in Manhattan and summers at the family estate of her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, at Lake George in upstate New York. Her paintings from this period reflect the dramatic contrast between the two environments—urban and rural—in which she found herself. She painted the skyscrapers of the city, but also chose to depict farm buildings and the natural world.

She enlarged her flowers within the picture frame in part to force people in the city to take notice: "Paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it—I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers."[15] She painted many flowers in this manner: hollyhocks, red poppies, calla lilies, and irises, along with the jacks-in-the-pulpit. Magnified and abstracted, the flowers are presented as detached from their original settings, becoming symbols of the whole of nature.

The jack-in-the-pulpit series succinctly demonstrates O'Keeffe's process of abstracting from nature. The example here is the fourth in a series of six works, which begins with a realistic, almost botanical, record of the full flower. With each succeeding painting in the series, the center of the flower is brought closer to the viewer as the image becomes increasingly abstract, providing a dramatic sense of the energy and beauty of nature. Despite the crisp, almost anonymous handling of the paint, the rich colors endow the image with a sensual quality.

O'Keeffe emphatically refused to interpret her paintings, perhaps preferring that they stand for themselves. To some extent, she rejected interpretive criticism because she resented the tendency to discuss her work as feminine, as though biology alone had determined it. She commented: "The men liked to put me down as the best woman painter. I think I'm one of the best painters."[16]

# DIEGO RIVERA

Diego Rivera (1886–1957)
***Zapata,*** 1932
Lithograph
image: 16¼ x 13⅜ in.
(0.413 x 0.335 m)
sheet: 21⅞ x 15¾ in.
(0.556 x 0.400 m)
National Gallery of Art
Rosenwald Collection

For artists who intend to advance a social agenda through their art, the medium through which they communicate with their audience is critical. Historically, printmaking has been the medium of choice for such artists—including Goya, Daumier, and Kollwitz—because the multiple images facilitate wide distribution at relatively low cost. The fact that prints are often dismissed as "popular" art—inherently less important than painting or sculpture—is part of its egalitarian appeal.

Diego Rivera's artistic goals had much in common with those of socially concerned printmakers. However, during his mature career Rivera chose to devote himself to mural painting. Along with other Mexican painters of his day, Rivera believed that by covering the walls of public buildings he could bring his art to a broad audience, making painting available to more than an intellectual and economic elite. Printmaking was a secondary concern for Rivera; he produced perhaps a dozen prints, and they were often related to previously executed mural works.

Indeed, the lithograph *Zapata* was based on Rivera's mural for the Palacio de Cortes in Cuernavaca, commissioned in 1929 by the United States ambassador to Mexico, Dwight W. Morrow, as a gift to the Mexican people. It was completed in 1930. Typical of the vast scale of Rivera's murals, the eight-part cycle covers three walls of an exterior loggia and offers a sweeping view of regional history. Beginning with the Spanish conquest in 1521, the program concludes with the image of Emiliano Zapata leading the 1911 revolt for land reform later reproduced in the print. The mural cycle thus operates as a visual equivalent of a history text, helping to establish a national consciousness for the Mexican people. Both the realistic style of the work and its location were designed to make the mural as accessible as possible.

The style of this print is close to that of the mural. Although Rivera had lived in Europe for fifteen years and experienced the revolution of modern art firsthand, he thought of himself as rejecting modernism in his mature work, denying foreign influence and celebrating the indigenous cultural heritage of Mexico. While it is true that his mature style was significantly influenced by pre-Columbian sculptural forms, European influences were still in evidence. The Renaissance frescoes he had seen on a 1920 trip to Italy were, in actuality, the single most important precedent for his murals, and their calm classicism pervaded his style. Some remnants of cubism remain as well, as in the sharply tilted perspective and shallow space of *Zapata.*

The victorious general is shown at the head of a group of peasant-soldiers who, despite their primitive weapons, including tools and bows and arrows, have triumphed over the rich landowner at their feet. Regardless of the few details in the work, the contrast between the landowner's boots and the sandals of Zapata and his followers underscores the artist's revolutionary concerns. With its strong didactic content and consciously classical style, Rivera's work challenges the conventional definitions of modernism.

# RENE MAGRITTE

René Magritte (1898–1967)
***La condition humaine*, 1933**
Oil on canvas
39⅜ x 31⅞ x ⅜ in.
(1.000 x 0.810 x 0.016 m)
National Gallery of Art
Gift of the Collectors Committee

A surrealist, Magritte spent most of his career in his homeland of Belgium, removed from the Parisian center of the movement. Unlike the other surrealists, he did not pursue technical innovations or seek to flout social conventions. Magritte had little formal training, but as a young man became familiar with early modernist styles including cubism and futurism. His approach to art was dramatically transformed in the mid-1920s when he saw a reproduction of a painting by Giorgio de Chirico. As a result of this experience, he began to develop his own version of the style of painting sometimes called "magic realism." These works present ordinary scenes that have been subtly transformed by some manipulation of reality, sometimes through unusual juxtapositions, distortions of scale, or disregard for the laws of nature.

*La condition humaine* (The Human Condition) depicts an easel, placed before a window, on which sits an unframed painting of a landscape. The image on the easel seems to be a continuation of the landscape visible through the window, yet it partially blocks the view through the window. The elements in the scene appear so mundane and are rendered in such a matter-of-fact style that we are paradoxically led to question exactly what we see in the painting. Our rational assumption is that the "painting within the painting" is of the view out the window, so that if we moved the easel aside, the landscape would appear as it does in the painting on the easel. However, we are unable to test that assumption.

In Western art since the Renaissance, a painting was compared to a window onto an ideal world. Through a suspension of disbelief, the information provided through that "window" was accepted. The theme of a painting within a painting was also a familiar one in Western tradition. However, by combining these traditions and presenting them in conflict as he does here, Magritte created a tension between physical reality and artistic illusion.

While we know the entire painting to be an illusion, our experience leads us to differentiate between the painting, and the painting within the painting. Hence our reaction is that the imagery of the room, easel, and landscape are "real," while we are willing to question the reality of the "painting." We wonder what will be revealed if the easel is taken away. Thus, we are forced to confront not just our acceptance of illusionism in art, but also our assumptions about how we interact with the world and how rationality dominates our lives. Magritte's concern with these issues is underscored by the title of the work, *La condition humaine*. It possesses the ambiguous poetry typical of Magritte's titles, which were usually assigned after the paintings were completed, and were sometimes contributed by Magritte's friends among the surrealists.

Themes similar to those of *La condition humaine* were addressed in many of Magritte's works. He did not see painting as an end in itself, but used visual images as a way to offer philosophical insights into the problems of existence.

# ALBERTO GIACOMETTI

Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966)
***The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)***
1935
Bronze, blond patina
60¼ x 12⅞ x 11¾ in.
(1.530 x 0.326 x 0.298 m)
National Gallery of Art
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

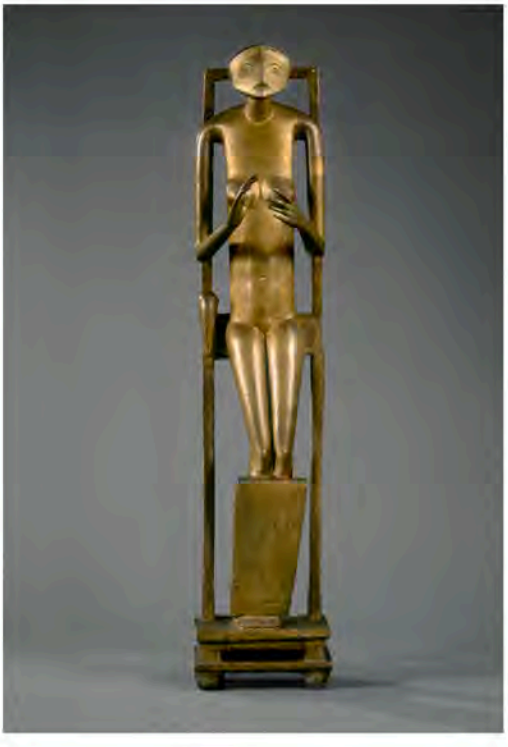
Giacometti emerged as a major sculptor of the surrealist movement during the years 1930–1935. Swiss-born, he settled in Paris in 1922. Influenced by surrealism, he gave up the model and worked from memory, producing objects that were born in his imagination and, in keeping with surrealist theory, were intended to be glimpses into the subconscious mind.

*The Invisible Object* can be considered the climax of Giacometti's surrealist period. It differs from his earlier surrealist works in the rejection of more symbolic objects for the stylized figure of a tall, thin, nude woman. Although almost life-size, her attenuated form is simplified into geometric parts, a tendency most evident in her conical breasts, tubular arms, and rectangular torso.

The figure is framed by a high-backed chair with a sharply tilted seat, against which she perches, half-sitting, half-standing. The straight lines of this framing device contrast with the curved shapes of the woman's body. The figure is further enclosed by a panel in front of the lower legs. Such cagelike forms appeared in earlier Giacometti works and bring a surrealist sense of disquiet, of unexplained confinement, to the figure. These elements also provide Giacometti with the opportunity to explore—in a manner that traditional sculpture did not—the relationship of solids to voids.

Several aspects of the sculpture were influenced by objects from non-Western cultures. The slender, rigid figure is similar to Egyptian sculpture that Giacometti had sketched at the Louvre, but the most direct influence was exerted by Oceanic funerary statues that Giacometti could have seen at the Basel Ethnological Museum. In fact, the bird head fixed to the seat at the right of the figure may be a Polynesian death symbol. Such nontraditional sources had been exploited by Western artists since the late nineteenth century, to infuse their work with a mysterious exoticism.

The masklike face, with its staring eyes and gaping mouth, adds to the ritualistic quality conveyed by the woman's simple, frontal pose and her elegant yet enigmatic gesture. Her long fingers enclose an empty space as they grasp the "invisible object" of the title. This object remains unknowable in the most profound surrealist sense. Thus, it brings to the sculpture a sense of uncertainty and isolation that persisted in Giacometti's later work.



# HORACE PIPPIN

Horace Pippin (1888–1946)
***Interior,* 1944**
Oil on canvas
24⅛ x 29¾ in. (0.613 x 0.756 m)
National Gallery of Art
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Meyer P. Potamkin in honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

Horace Pippin was a self-taught artist, generally categorized as an American "naive" painter. Although he was befriended by artists N. C. Wyeth and Romare Bearden and art collectors such as Albert C. Barnes, who attempted to provide Pippin with instruction and exposure to works by Matisse and Cézanne, Pippin declared, "To me it seems impossible for another to teach one of art."[17] Throughout his life, he held true to his idiosyncratic vision. Painting seemed to be primarily a catalyst for communicating memories of his childhood, his experiences as an infantryman in France during World War I, and his religious beliefs.

Pippin recounted in his autobiography that his first success as an artist was winning a magazine contest at the age of ten; the prize was a box of crayons and a watercolor set. However, he did not begin to produce works of art regularly until 1925, six years after his discharge from the U.S. Army with the French Croix de Guerre. Pippin's right arm was stiff and virtually useless from a war injury, but he still could create works of art by balancing a white hot poker in his right arm while moving a board beneath the hot tip with his left hand. As the pain receded in his paralyzed arm, he abandoned wood burning for oil painting.

*Interior* portrays a domestic scene probably drawn from Pippin's childhood in Goshen, New York. Three figures occupy a spare room. Engrossed in his or her activities, each faces a different direction; there is no communication. Instead of a feeling of isolation, however, an atmosphere of cozy serenity is conveyed by the contrast between the snow on the sill silhouetting the outer darkness with the woman who leisurely smokes her pipe while waiting for the pot to boil. The bright patterns of color in the rugs, quilt, tablecloth, and kerchief enliven the scene. Pippin was a sophisticated colorist, effectively playing warm and cool grays against chalky white, pure black, and molten red.

The splayed walls and tilted floor in Pippin's composition create the illusion of spatial recession, while objects such as the pail and coffee pot are rendered without modeling. Romare Bearden recalled that Pippin had insisted that his paintings were entirely realistic and depicted things exactly as he had seen them. Bearden commented, "This struck me as rather odd, because what I found most engaging in Pippin's work was precisely his distortions away from photographic realism. . . . [His paintings] had less to do with objective reality than with the conception which Pippin already had in mind. . . . He developed concerns out of the sensibilities contingent with art, not out of just a description of the actual world."[18]

# ISAMU NOGUCHI

Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988)
***Untitled,*** 1945
Wood, painted
50 x 19 x 9¼ in.
(1.270 x 0.482 x 0.235 m)
National Gallery of Art, Gift (Partial and Promised) of Robert P. and Arlene R. Kogod in honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

Born in Los Angeles, Isamu Noguchi was the son of a Japanese poet and an American teacher. Having lived twelve of his first fourteen years in Japan, Noguchi returned to the United States for his high school education. Although many aspects of his mature career were shaped by his dual cultural heritage, his initial training as a sculptor was not only decidedly Western in orientation, but also conventional in outlook. In 1922, he was apprenticed briefly to Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor of the Mount Rushmore memorial, and at the age of twenty-one he was elected to the conservative National Sculpture Society, where he regularly showed his work.

The traditional bent of Noguchi's early career reflects the strength of conservative ideas with regard to the medium of sculpture in the early part of the century, especially in America. This can be partly attributed to the comparatively large expense involved in making sculpture, which tied the sculptor to traditional patronage long after the painter had effectively severed this connection. As a result, sculpture lagged behind painting in stylistic and technical innovation.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Noguchi sought a variety of opportunities that greatly expanded his knowledge of techniques. In 1927, he went to Paris and served for a short time as studio assistant to Constantin Brancusi. This experience brought Noguchi into contact with the notion of direct carving, and he began to share Brancusi's sensitivity to natural materials. In 1930, Noguchi set off on a trip to the Orient where he sought training in traditional media: the study of ink-brush painting in China and pottery in Japan. By the mid-1930s, having settled in New York, Noguchi gradually shifted the focus of his sculpture from representation to abstraction.

Noguchi matured as a sculptor in the mid-1940s, around the time he produced *Untitled.* Like many of Noguchi's sculptures of this period, it is a complex arrangement of voids and solids whose surrealist-inspired anthropomorphic forms evoke a standing figure. This example can also be read as a family—father, mother, and child. Like most American artists, Noguchi was not governed entirely by surrealist theory and method, but he adopted some of surrealism's formal characteristics and a general interest in the unconscious. The bone-like figures inhabiting Yves Tanguy's paintings were especially influential for Noguchi.

The sense of things familiar, yet not fully comprehended, is another quality that Noguchi's work shared with the surrealists. Because of this quality of ambiguity, the viewer is not able to take complete control of the work, intellectually speaking. The distance established between the viewer and the work gives the sculpture a ritual presence. Like a totem, the sculpture is fascinating yet ultimately unapproachable.


Magritte

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

## GENERAL

**1.** You may want to display all the reproductions in the classroom for several days before initiating discussion so that students can develop personal responses.

Remind students that slides and reproductions often do not reflect the true color, size, and texture of the original works of art. If possible, bring your class to the National Gallery of Art or a local museum or gallery to experience works of art firsthand.

**2.** Display the timeline in the classroom, and discuss historical events in the period 1900–1940 with students. Familiarize students with general cultural trends and locate the working years of the artists discussed in this packet on the timeline.

**3.** Ask students which images in this packet look "modern" to them and why. Discuss what it means to be "modern" and decide on a definition of the term.

**4.** Have students categorize the reproductions according to theme, such as alienation, violence, or fantasy.

Ask students to decide what type of music would be appropriate for each theme.

Have students choose two images from this packet that work well as a pair, comparing them in terms of similar subjects, themes, styles, colors, or forms. Repeat the activity contrasting opposites.

**5.** Arrange the reproductions from most realistic to most abstract. Use the "Major Trends" chapter in this packet to determine which images best represent terms such as *nonobjective*, *abstract*, etc. Talk about the fact that some works do not fit easily into a single category and why.

**6.** Have students examine all the reproductions that show people. Discuss in each case how the artist treated the human body, e.g., elongating the limbs, reducing parts to geometric shapes, emphasizing facial features.

Have students think of a title and caption or write a short dialogue for each figurative work.

**7.** Discuss how twentieth-century artists look at nature. Compare the paintings by Magritte and O'Keeffe and ask: Which seems more natural? Why?

## ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Lyonel Feininger, *The Bicycle Race*

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV*

Henri Matisse, *Pianist and Checker Players*

Piet Mondrian, *Diamond Painting in Red, Yellow, and Blue*

Pablo Picasso, *Nude Woman*

Horace Pippin, *Interior*

### *Discussion Questions*

**1.** List the elements (line, color, shape, texture, value, and space) and principles (rhythm, movement, balance, proportion, variety, emphasis, and unity) of design. Ask students to find examples of each design element and principle.

**2.** Discuss with students how lines can define space, create movement and direction, express agitation or calm.

Have students point out contour lines, directional lines, and lines that form patterns.

**3.** Define and point out on a color wheel the terms *primary, secondary, tertiary,* and *analogous.* With students, examine the six works listed here in terms of color.

Ask students to select a painting that features mainly primary colors and discuss why an artist would choose to work in those colors. Select a work limited to analogous colors and discuss the same question. Look at Matisse's *Pianist and Checker Players* and discuss the artist's use of color.

**4.** Distinguish between shapes as *geometric* (regular, mathematically defined) or *organic* (irregular, free-form). Point out, or ask students to find and draw, geometric and organic shapes in the classroom.

Look for examples of geometric and organic shapes in the works listed here. Compare Mondrian's *Diamond Painting* with O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV.*

**5.** Discuss the ways in which artists create a sense of depth and space. For example, compare Mondrian's *Diamond Painting* and Matisse's *Pianist and Checker Players* in terms of a sense of space.

**6.** Define *balance* as *formal* (symmetrical) or *informal* (asymmetrical), and demonstrate the the difference on the chalkboard.

Have students determine the types of balance found in the six works listed here.

Ask students: Why do you think informal balance is preferred in the twentieth century? How do artists achieve balance without symmetry?

### *Activities*

**Beginning**

Look at the way that repeated shapes and lines create patterns in the works by Matisse and Feininger. Have students make potato or styrofoam prints to create decorative, rhythmic patterns.

Cut various shapes out of colored felt. Explain to students the terms *symmetry* and *asymmetry,* and have them experiment with these two types of balance, arranging the shapes on a felt board to experiment with balanced and unbalanced pictures.

**Intermediate**

Define and demonstrate proportion and scale, using O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV.* Have students look at a natural object and sketch a large detailed drawing of it. Then have them use a grid to enlarge the scale of a detail of the object, and complete a watercolor of the detail.

Have students gather objects representing different kinds of textures. Let them experiment with different techniques for representing these textures in paint.

**Advanced**

Using Picasso's *Nude Woman* as an example, have students photograph an object from every angle with a Polaroid camera, and then compile the photographs into a single image. Or have them take a large-size reproduction of a person, cut it into small pieces, and reassemble it to create a new image of the figure.

Ask students to select an object to work from, and have them represent the object twice in a collage—first using only organic shapes, and second using only geometric shapes.

## EXPRESSIVE USE OF COLOR AND FORM

Constantin Brancusi, *Bird in Space*

André Derain, *Charing Cross Bridge, London*

Marsden Hartley, *The Aero*

Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)*

Pablo Picasso, *Nude Woman*

Pablo Picasso, *The Tragedy*

### *Discussion Questions*

**1.** Discuss with students how color can be descriptive, symbolic, and suggestive of a mood or emotion.

Ask the following questions: What color is grass? The sky? The sun? (Is grass always green? When is the sky not blue? Is the sun really yellow?) Name three colors that look peaceful next to each other and three colors that "fight" each other. Does everyone agree on the choices, or is color symbolism subjective? Ask students to identify personal color symbols.

Discuss *Charing Cross Bridge, London* by Derain with students: What colors are the buildings in the background? What reasons might the artist have had for choosing these colors? (Symbolic? Descriptive?) What emotions does this scene express, or how would you describe the mood of this painting? (Seething? Tranquil? Cheerful?)

**2.** Have students list and demonstrate the movements and sounds suggested by the paintings *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* by Kandinsky and *The Aero* by Hartley.

Ask students: How can a work of art suggest sound? Which colors and shapes are the loudest? The softest?

**3.** Using Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, discuss with students how a sculpture defines and occupies space. Have students identify art materials and found objects that can be used to make a sculpture. Explain traditional sculpture-making techniques and materials (modeling, carving, casting; wood, metal, stone). Note that Brancusi used traditional techniques and materials, combining three materials in an abstract form.

Ask students: How did Brancusi use form expressively rather than descriptively? How does an abstract form better represent a concept, such as flight, than a specific object, such as a bird? What other titles besides *Bird in Space* would be appropriate for this sculpture?

### *Activities*

**Beginning**

Ask students to make a painting using different shades of one color or analogous colors (colors that are next to each other on the color wheel). Have them select a subject that is appropriate for the colors they choose.

Have students mime loud and soft sounds. Then ask students to cut out of colored paper shapes that are equivalent to loud and soft sounds. Have them combine their sounds into a mural.

**Intermediate**

Ask students to select an animal that they associate with a particular quality, e.g., the otter and playfulness. Provide photographs or sketches, and have students create a clay sculpture of the animal emphasizing that quality, treating the form of the animal expressively.

**Advanced**

Explain to students that Kandinsky experienced *synesthesia*—sensations of color stimulated by sounds, especially music—which led him to develop personal meanings for different colors. Have students listen carefully to a recording of music, such as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* or Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and design a stage set, basing the colors, forms, scale, and objects included on elements in the music.

Have students do a series of drawings of their bedroom in colored pencils or markers. The first drawing to be done at school, from memory; the second drawn at home, as realistically as possible. For the third, ask students to depict their bedrooms expressively, using line, color, and scale to emphasize or diminish objects of greater or lesser importance.

## ABSTRACTION

Constantin Brancusi, *Bird in Space*

Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)*

Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan Peasant*

Piet Mondrian, *Diamond Painting in Red, Yellow, and Blue*

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV*

Pablo Picasso, *Guitar*

## *Discussion Questions*

**1.** Explain the following terms: *abstract*—art that simplifies or refines natural appearance, but does not eliminate it; *nonrepresentational*—art that portrays nothing of the natural world.

Ask students to identify works in this teaching packet that could be defined as abstract or nonrepresentational and to explain their choices.

**2.** Compare and contrast *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV* by O'Keeffe with *Guitar* by Picasso. Which is more abstract? Which is more realistic? Why? How did O'Keeffe and Picasso suggest real objects without representing them naturalistically?

**3.** Ask students: How did the artist develop abstraction in each of the works listed here?

**4.** Ask students to look closely at both *Head of a Catalan Peasant* by Miró and *Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle)* by Kandinsky. Can they relate various elements in the images to their respective titles?

**5.** Kandinsky stated that he meant his *Improvisations* to appear spontaneous (although he often drew the image onto the canvas before painting it). Play selections of jazz music and discuss with students how jazz and Kandinsky's painting are related.

Contrast *Improvisation 31* with Mondrian's *Diamond Painting* in terms of spontaneous versus planned painting. How do the two artists' different approaches affect the final form?

**6.** Picasso said that art is never totally removed from the experience of nature. Even Mondrian felt that his work was rooted in the structure of the cosmos. Ask students to look at *Guitar* by Picasso and *Diamond Painting* by Mondrian and discuss the works in terms of those two statements.

Ask students to discuss whether there can be any art that is completely nonrepresentational. Why or why not?

## *Activities*

**Beginning**

Ask students to choose a realistic photograph, photocopy the print, and find basic shapes in it, e.g., triangles, squares, circles. Then have them trace the shapes on the photocopy and create a picture using only the shapes, eliminating details.

**Intermediate**

Ask students to create new shapes from their imagination—shapes that do not describe any object. Then have them assemble those shapes or lines to create an image that is nonrepresentational.

Have students use pastels or colored chalk to create an improvisation from a familiar scene, such as a sports event, dance, or shopping trip. They should attempt to describe the activity in a free manner, capturing its feeling or spirit.

**Advanced**

Discuss and demonstrate how seeing something from an unusual point of view or at an uncharacteristic scale can make it appear abstract. Using O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV* as an example, have students create a picture that abstracts an ordinary object by representing it from an atypical angle or in an enlarged size.

Ask students to select a concept, such as justice, time, or joy, and make a paper or clay sculpture to express that idea. Do they find it easier to use an abstract or a representational form? If possible, show students photographs of the two Vietnam War memorials, the abstract wall by Maya Ying Lin and the realistic sculpture of soldiers by Frederick Hart, and discuss the implications and controversy surrounding each.

## DREAMS AND FANTASY

Alberto Giacometti, *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)*

René Magritte, *La condition humaine*

Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan Peasant*

Isamu Noguchi, *Untitled*

Yves Tanguy, *The Look of Amber*

## *Discussion Questions*

**1.** Ask students to discuss their understanding of *surrealism* and decide upon a definition. Then ask them how the five works listed here illustrate their definition.

**2.** Using the following quote, discuss the idea of being "free from the exercise of reason."

***surrealism**, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which we propose to express, verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the real process of thought. It is the dictation of thought, free from the exercise of reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupation.*

André Breton, *Surrealist Manifesto*, 1924

Ask students: How do artists register their thoughts and imagination? Can you think of occasions for which it might be more useful to use your imagination than strict logic?

**3.** The surrealists used automatic writing to reveal their subconscious ideas, and drew inspiration from dream images. Discuss how "unconscious" doodles can reveal one's preoccupations.

**4.** Surrealists were interested in the juxtaposition of dissimilar objects or ideas, described by the writer Comte de Lautréamont as "beautiful as the chance encounter, on an operating table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella." Discuss this interest in terms of *La condition humaine* by Magritte.

## *Activities*

### Beginning

Have students select an ordinary object—such as a pencil sharpener, a ruler, a pair of scissors, etc.—to trace or outline onto a piece of paper. Have them complete the drawing by anthropomorphizing the object and creating a surreal environment for it.

Have students create a story linking the five images in the works listed here and then illustrate their stories.

### Intermediate

Have students research the poems and writings of surrealist literary figures, such as Hugo Ball and Guillaume Apollinaire. Divide the class into groups, and have each group perform a different poem, including devising costumes, props, and sound.

Ask students to make an automatic drawing by closing their eyes while drawing. After a few minutes, let students look at their drawings and complete the images.

### Advanced

Have students recall a dream in which disparate things were juxtaposed and nonsensical. Have students write down their dreams in stream-of-consciousness prose, and then select three of the written ideas or images to illustrate.

Have students build pinhole cameras, and take pictures exploiting the camera's lack of depth-of-field to create surreal scenes. Or have them take photographs with a Polaroid camera. As the images develop, have students make marks on the emulsion with a pencil or pointed instrument. When the image is fixed, use indelible markers or paint to decorate the photograph.

## ART AND THE MACHINE AGE

Constantin Brancusi, *Bird in Space*

Lyonel Feininger, *The Bicycle Race*

Alberto Giacometti, *The Invisible Object (Hands Holding the Void)*

Fernand Léger, *Two Women*

### *Discussion Questions*

**1.** Discuss with students how innovations in technology ushered in the twentieth century. Using the timeline, have students select events or inventions that still have an impact on their lives today.

Have students try to arrange the four works listed here in chronological order, considering the style and subject, and then go over the actual dates for each work. Discuss ways in which new technology inspired and changed visual expression.

**2.** Ask students to find images in this packet that refer to machines. Have them defend their choices by explaining how the images reflect machines—is it the subject, style, or both?

Look for works that emphasize speed or suggest mechanical movement, have streamlined forms, appear mass-produced, or suggest industrial materials.

**3.** Compare early twentieth-century views of technology with those of today. Discuss this statement from *The Manifesto of Futurist Painters*, written in 1910:

*Comrades, we tell you now that the triumphant progress of science makes profound changes in humanity inevitable, changes which are hacking an abyss between those docile slaves of past tradition and us free moderns, who are confident in the radiant splendour of our time.*

Ask students: What was the popular or prevailing view of technology in the early decades of the twentieth century? Have students defend their ideas by selecting images from this packet that support their view. Then ask: How is technology seen today?

Ask students: Are you optimistic about the potential impact of technology on society? Why? What are your concerns?

**4.** Compare Léger's *Two Women* and Giacometti's *The Invisible Object* in terms of the relationship between human beings and a mechanized environment. Discuss some of the ways in which technology has affected our living and working environments.

### *Activities*

**Beginning**

Use Feininger's *The Bicycle Race* to discuss how the rhythm of repeated diagonals and circular lines creates a sense of movement. Ask students to draw their favorite sport in action, stressing movement by using repeated lines.

Have students cut out images from magazines that relate to technology. Have them make a collage with the images, creating a landscape or environment.

**Intermediate**

Ask students to design an object, such as a desk or a car, in a modern style. Then have students mount an advertising campaign to sell their product.

Have students collect items of scrap metal or junk. As a class, construct a sculpture that has the appearance of a machine.

**Advanced**

Have students research poems and literature that are inspired by technology. Assign students to select something they consider a technological wonder from today, and compose a brief poem or essay about it.

Rent a video or film that reflects attitudes toward technology, such as *Modern Times* or *Metropolis*. After viewing it, discuss how the film conveys particular attitudes. If possible, have students use 16mm film or videotape to create their own film on the Machine Age.

## ART AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Käthe Kollwitz, *The People (Das Volk)*

Pablo Picasso, *The Tragedy*

Diego Rivera, *Zapata*

### *Discussion Questions*

**1.** Explain to students that Käthe Kollwitz and Diego Rivera saw their art as a vehicle for social change. Discuss the circumstances and historical events that are illustrated by *The People* and *Zapata*.

Ask how the artists' choice of artistic medium—prints—relates to their concern for disseminating a message of reform. Have students relate an event or issue that they feel strongly about. Ask students what they think would be the best medium today to bring attention to this issue, e.g., television, newspapers, comic books, the Internet. Why?

**2.** Have students examine Picasso's *The Tragedy* and Rivera's *Zapata* and discuss what might be the story behind each image, pointing out the narrative elements.

Discuss a current event or issue. How could its essential aspects be conveyed in a visual image?

**3.** Analyze the three images listed here in terms of style. Discuss why social realist artists chose a representational style. Point out to students that realism is an elastic term—some images may seem more realistic than others.

Ask students: Which of these images seem more descriptive, or "realistic" in a lifelike sense? What are some of the abstract elements?

**4.** Compare Kollwitz' *The People* with Picasso's *The Tragedy*. Ask students how each artist visually conveys the theme of despair. Consider facial expressions, body language, colors, shapes, and the artistic media used.

Ask students: What is the artist's attitude toward the individuals depicted? (Sympathetic? Critical? Angry?) How can you tell?

### *Activities*

**Beginning**

Using the three images cited here, have students role-play the figures presented. How do body language and facial expression convey meaning? What might these characters say if they could speak?

Have students use collage materials from newspapers and magazines to make an image that focuses on a current social issue. Choose images that suggest the sights, sounds, and character of the event or issue.

**Intermediate**

Ask students to write a short poem or essay, using as their point of departure one of the three works in this section. Have them consider how they can find verbal equivalents to color and form, e.g., the cold, blue tones and taut, isolated figures of Picasso's *The Tragedy*.

**Advanced**

Have students research one of the three artists—Pablo Picasso, Käthe Kollwitz, or Diego Rivera—and answer the following questions: How does the picture in this packet relate to their other works of art from this time period? How does their art reflect who they were as people, where they came from, and what they encountered in their world politically, socially, and culturally?

Ask students to choose a current social problem and to think of someone who is affected by the problem. Have them design a poster of that individual in a pose and setting that expresses the personal impact of that problem. If possible, silkscreen or use another printing process to mass-produce the posters, and exhibit them in the school hallways.

# ENDNOTES

1. Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, 2d ed. (New York, 1991), 14.

2. The eight categories of early twentieth-century art discussed in this packet represent many art movements of the period, but not the entire roster. Other Western movements, such as orphism, *De Stijl*, constructivism, and suprematism, are not discussed.

3. Peter Vergo, introduction to *Abstraction: Towards a New Art: Painting 1910–1920* [exh. cat., The Tate Gallery] (London, 1980), 9.

4. Ian Crofton, *A Dictionary of Art Quotations* (New York, 1989), 52.

5. Jean Leymarie, *Fauves and Fauvism* (Geneva, 1987), 61.

6. Frederick S. Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision: The Art of Franz Marc as German Expressionism* (New York, 1979), 66.

7. George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe: 1880–1940* (Baltimore, Md., 1978), 241.

8. Hamilton 1978, 238.

9. Hamilton 1978, 279.

10. Crofton 1989, 48.

11. Hughes 1991, 221.

12. Hamilton 1978, 389.

13. Matthew Baigell, ed., *Artists Against War and Fascism* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1986), 102. The use of this quote by Peter Blume, which succinctly conveys the viewpoint of social realist artists in the West, is not intended to imply that Blume's own art fits the category of social realism. His work would more accurately be called surrealist.

14. Jane Lee, *Derain* (New York, 1990), 24.

15. Abraham A. Davidson, *Early American Modernist Painting: 1910–1935* (New York, 1981), 204.

16. Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (New York, 1990), 284.

17. Selden Rodman, *Horace Pippin: A Negro Painter in America* (New York, 1947), 4.

18. Romare Bearden, preface to *Horace Pippin* [exh. cat., The Phillips Collection] (Washington, 1976).

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