

## Characteristics of Contemporary American Art

### Trends in Contemporary Art

#### Surrealism

- Art allowing the viewer to interpret from the unconscious and subconscious mind.
- Artists of this movement were influenced by Dada and Freud, and the poet Andre Breton.
- Artist tried to create from a subconscious or dreamlike state of imagery.
- Common sense was not a concern. Surrealism is a state of stepping beyond realism.

#### Abstract Expressionism

- Focus was on the characteristics of action and color.
- The use of “fields” of color to represent simplistic images invoking deep contemplation.
- Pouring or staining the canvas, as Pollock or Frankenthaler, combined the ideas of ‘chance’ and ‘control.’ As if the paintings are a “controlled accident” of color and thought.
- After World War II, these large-scale abstract paintings drew the attention of the art world away from France and to New York.

#### Cubism

- The middle ground between the representation of an object and its abstraction.
- Artists creating Analytic Cubism would represent an object in a “shattered” form.
- Artists creating in Synthetic Cubism would take an object and “synthesize” its parts into flattened shapes, bold colors and geometric lines. Paper, cardboard, or newsprint was often used within the paintings.

#### Pop Art

- A celebration of consumerism in reaction to the war years.
- Advertising, comic strips, popular entertainment were depicted as art forms and reproduced in art forms.
- Everyday objects such as paperclips, pencils, and spoons were depicted as art forms. Many times these forms were reproduced in larger-than-life sculptures.

Vocabulary: Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Cubism, Abstract, Social Realism, Activism, Social Protest, Pop Art, consumerism, Minimalism, Photo Realism.

#### Book Reference:

Coleman, J. (ed.), (1971). Kentucky: A pictorial history. University Press of Kentucky.\*

Barton, K., Levstik, L. (2001). *Doing History: Investigating with children in elementary and middle school*. Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates: New Jersey.

Bohm-Duchen, M., Cook, J. (1991). *Understanding modern Art*. Usbourne: England.

Johnston, R. (2002). *The making of America: The history of the United States from 1492 to the present*. National Geographic Society: Washington, D.C. \*

Srickland, C. (1992). *The annotated Mona Lisa: A crash course in art history from prehistoric to post-modern*. Andrews and McMeel: Missouri.

Wood, R. (2003). *Great Inventions*. Barnes and Noble Books: New York. \*

#### Web site references:

##### The Library of Congress \*

This vast amount of information on this web site can be quite over overwhelming. Start out in the *Family and Kids* section on the homepage, or type *The Learning Page* in the search box. Information on Appalachian studies, industrialization, and contemporary events in history are also within this site. It will be well worth your while to browse all the sections of this site when you get a chance.

<http://www.loc.gov>

##### The Smithsonian Institution \*

Access to all the Smithsonian museums and galleries can begin with this site. Typing in a key word or name into the search box will gather a varied collection of primary source documents, exhibits, and educational resources.

<http://www.ssi.org>

##### The National Museum of American History \*

This is a wonderful resource about government, economics, geography, culture, and historical perspective. Many exhibits are based thematically (i.e. the changes of transportation throughout history, or how the use of the clock has influenced historical changes over the years).

<http://.org>

##### The National Gallery of Art

Within this site are art images, exhibits, as well as, educational and interactive educational resources.

<http://www.nga.gov>

##### The National Geographic Society

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com>

##### The Kentucky Environmental Timeline \*

<http://www.kyeqc.net/thirty/time/yeartime.html>

Kentuckiana Digital Library \*  
<http://kdl.kyvl.org>

\*This resource was used to collect information for the timelines within this unit.