

Introduction

1. Wall painting with four horses, Vallon-Pont-d'Arc, Ardèche gorge, France. c. 28,000 BCE. Paint on limestone



I stood in front of that exquisite panel with the four horses' heads and . . . I was so overcome that I cried. It was like going into an attic and finding a da Vinci [painting]. Except that this great [artist] was unknown." With these words Jean Clottes, an eminent French authority on prehistoric cave art, described viewing one of the 300 breathtakingly beautiful paintings just discovered in a huge limestone cavern near the Ardèche River in southern France (Marlise Simons, "In a French Cave, Wildlife Scenes from a Long-Gone World," *The New York Times*, January 24, 1995, page C10).

These remarkable animal images, fixed in time and preserved undisturbed in their remote cavern, were created some 30,000 years ago (fig. 1). That such representations were made at all is evidence of a uniquely human trait. And what animals are painted here? When were they painted, and how have they been preserved? Why were the paintings made, and what do they tell us about the people who made them? All these questions—what is depicted, how, when, why—are subjects of art history. And, because *these* magnificent images come from a time before there were written records, they provide the best information available not just about early humans' art but also about their reality.

ART AND REALITY

What is art? And what is reality? Especially today, why should one draw or paint, carve or model, when an image can be captured with a camera? In a nineteenth-century painting, *Interior with Portraits* (fig. 2), by the American artist Thomas LeClerc, two children stand painfully still while a photographer prepares to take their picture. The paintings and sculpture that fill the studio have been shoved aside to make way for a new kind of art—the photograph. As the photographer adjusts the lens of his camera, we see his baggy pants but not his head. Is LeClerc suggesting that the painter's head (brain and eye) is being replaced by the lens

(a kind of mechanical brain and eye) of the camera? Or even that the artist and the camera have become a single recording eye? Or is this painting a witty commentary on the nature of reality? Art history leads us to ask such questions.

LeClerc's painting resembles a snapshot in its record of studio clutter, but LeClerc made subtle changes in what he saw. Using the formal elements of painting—the arrangement of shapes and colors—he focused attention on the children rather than on the interesting and distracting objects that surround them. Light falls on the girl and boy and intensifies the brilliant coral and green of the cloth on the floor. Softer coral shades in the curtain and the upholstered chair



2. Thomas LeClear. *Interior with Portraits*. c. 1865. Oil on canvas, 257/8 x 40 1/2" (65.7 x 102.9 cm). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Museum purchase made possible by the Pauline Edwards Bequest

frame the image, and the repeated colors balance each other. LeClear also reminds us that art is an illusion: the photograph will show the children in a vast landscape with a rug and animal skin, but the painting reveals that the landscape is just a two-dimensional painted backdrop and the rug and animal skin just slightly worn, painted cloth. These observations make us realize that the painting is more than a portrait; it is also a commentary on the artist as a creator of illusions.

Certainly there is more to this painting—and to most paintings—than one first sees. We can simply enjoy *Interior with Portraits* as a record of nineteenth-century America, but we can also study the history of the painting to probe deeper into its significance. Who are the children? Why was their portrait painted? Who owned the painting? The answers to these questions lead us to further doubts about the reality of this seemingly "realistic" work.

Thomas LeClear worked in Buffalo, New York, from 1847 to 1863. The painting, which is now in the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., once belonged to the Sidway family of Buffalo. Family records show that the girl in the painting, Parnell Sidway, died in 1849; the boy, her younger brother James Sidway, died in 1865 while working as a volunteer fire fighter. Evidence suggests that the painting was not made until the 1860s, well after Parnell's death and when James was a grown man—or possibly after his death, too. LeClear moved to New York City in 1863, and the studio seen in the painting may be one he borrowed from his son-in-law there. Another clue to the painting's date is the camera, which is a type that was not used before 1860. The Sidway children, then, could never have posed for this painting. It must, instead, be a memorial portrait, perhaps painted by LeClear from a photograph. In short, this image of "reality" cannot be "real." Art historical research reveals a story entirely different from what observation of the painting alone suggests.

This new knowledge leads us to further speculations on the nature of art. The memorial portrait, with its re-creation of vanished childhood, is a reflection on life and death. In



3. Margaret Bourke-White. *Fort Peck Dam, Montana*. 1936



4. First cover, *Life* magazine, November 23, 1936

this context, the ambiguities we noticed before—the contrast between the reality of the studio and the unreal landscape on the cloth in the background, the juxtaposition between the new medium of photography and the old-fashioned, painted portrait on an easel—take on deeper significance. LeClear seems to be commenting on the tension between nature and art, on art and reality, and on the role of the artist as a recording eye and controlling imagination.

But what about the reality of photographs? Today the camera has become a universal tool for picture making. Even though we know that film can be manipulated and photographs made to "lie," we generally accept that the camera tells the truth. We forget that in a photograph a vibrant, moving, three-dimensional world has been immobilized, reduced to two dimensions, and sometimes recorded in black and white.

Photographs can be powerful works of art. In the 1930s and 1940s people waited as eagerly for the weekly arrival of *Life* magazine, with its photojournalism and photo essays, as people do today for their favorite television program. An extraordinary photographer of that time was Margaret Bourke-White, whose photograph of Peck Dam (fig. 3), used on the cover of the first issue of *Life* in 1936 (fig. 4), made a

dramatic social-political statement about the role of government. In the depths of the economic depression of the 1930s, public works like the dam in the picture, which controlled floods and provided electric power, gave people hope for a better life. Bourke-White's photograph is a symbol of the power of technology and engineering over nature. It seems to equate the monumental grandeur of the dam with the architectural marvels of the past—Egyptian pyramids, the Roman Colosseum, medieval European castles. The arrangement of elements in the image reflects techniques that had been perfected by artists over the centuries: the repetition of simple forms, a steady recession into space, and a dramatic contrast of light and dark. Two red bands with bold white lettering turn the photograph into a handsome piece of **graphic design**, that is, a work in which art and design, typography, and printing are brought together to communicate a message.

Bourke-White's skillful capturing of the powerful dam reminds us that the camera is merely a mechanical tool for making records until an artist puts it to use. Anyone who has ever taken a snapshot of a friend only to find that the finished picture includes unnoticed rubbish and telephone wires will recognize the importance of the human brain's ability to filter and select. But an artist's vision can turn the everyday world into a superior reality—perhaps simply more focused or intense, certainly more imaginative.

We can easily understand a photograph of a dam, the imagery in a painting of a nineteenth-century artist's studio is not too strange to us, and even prehistoric animal paintings in a cave have a haunting familiarity. Other works, however, present a few more challenges. The fifteenth-century painting *The Annunciation*, by Jan van Eyck (fig. 5), is an excellent example of how some artists try to paint more than the eye can see and more than the mind can grasp. We can enjoy the painting for its visual characteristics—the drawing, colors, and arrangement of shapes—but we need the help of art history and information about the painting's cultural context if we want to understand it fully. Jan van Eyck (1390–1441) lived in the wealthy city of Bruges, in what is now Belgium, in the first half of the fifteenth century. The painting seems to be set in Jan van Eyck's own time in a church with stone walls and arches, tile floor, wooden roof, stained-glass windows, and wall paintings. The artist has so carefully recreated the colors and textures of every surface that he convinces us of the truth of his vision. Clearly something strange and wonderful is happening. We see a richly robed youth with splendid multicolored wings interrupting a kneeling young woman's reading. The two figures gesture gracefully upward toward a dove flying down streaks of gold. Golden letters float from their lips, forming the Latin words that mean "Hail, full of grace" and "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord." But only if we know something about the symbols, or **iconography**, of Christian art does the subject of the painting become clear. The scene is the Annunciation, the moment when the angel Gabriel tells the Virgin Mary that she will bear the Son of God, Jesus Christ (recounted in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, Luke 1:26–38). All the details have a meaning. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The white lilies are symbols of Mary. The one stained-glass window of God (flanked by wall paintings of Moses) is



5. Jan van Eyck. *The Annunciation*. c. 1434–36. Oil on canvas, transferred from panel, painted surface 35³/₈ x 13⁷/₈" (90.2 x 34.1 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Andrew W. Mellon Collection 1937.1.39

juxtaposed with the three windows enclosing Mary (representing the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and this contrast suggests that a new era is about to begin. The signs of the zodiac in the floor tiles indicate the traditional date of the Annunciation, March 25. The placement of the figures in a much later architectural setting is quite unreal, however.

Art historians explain that Jan van Eyck not only is representing a miracle but also is illustrating the idea that Mary is the new Christian Church.

Art historians learn all they can about the lives of artists and those close to them. Seeking information about Jan van Eyck, for example, they have investigated his brother Hubert, Jan's wife, Margaret, and his chief patron, the duke of Burgundy. They are also fascinated by painting techniques—in this case the preparation of the wood panel, the original drawing, and the building of the images in transparent oil layers. The history of the painting (its **provenance**) is important too—its transfer from wood panel to canvas, its cleaning and restoration, and its trail of ownership. The painting, given by American financier Andrew W. Mellon to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., was once owned by Tsar Nicholas I of Russia.

In this book we study the history of art around the world from earliest times to the present. Although we treat Western art in the most detail, we also look extensively at the art of other regions. The qualities of a work of art, the artist who made it, the patron who paid for it, the audiences who have viewed it, and the places in which it has been displayed—all are considered in our study of art's history.

ART AND THE IDEA OF BEAUTY

For thousands of years people have sought to create objects of beauty and significance—objects we call art—that did more than simply help them survive.

The concept of beauty, however, has found expression in a variety of **styles**,

or manners of representation. The figure from Galgenburg, Austria, made more than 33,000 years ago, illustrates an **abstract** style (fig. 6). Its maker simplified shapes, eliminated all but the essentials, and emphasized the underlying human forms. An equally abstract vision of woman can be seen in Kitagawa Utamaro's *Woman at the Height of Her Beauty* (fig. 7). This late-eighteenth-century Japanese work, printed in color from a **woodblock**, or image carved out of a block of wood, is the creation of a complex society regulated by convention and ritual. The woman's dress and hairstyle defy the laws of nature. Rich textiles turn her body into a pattern, and pins hold her hair in elaborate shapes. Utamaro renders the patterned silks and carved pins meticulously, but he depicts the woman's face with a few sweeping lines. The elaboration of surface detail to create ornamental effects combined with an effort to capture the essence of form is characteristic of abstract art.

Two of the other works we have looked at so far—LeClerc's *Interior with Portraits* and Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation*—exemplify a contrasting style known as **realism**. Realistic art, even if it represents an imagined or supernatural subject, has a surface reality; the artists appear, with greater or lesser accuracy, to be recording exactly what they see. Realistic art, as we have noted, can carry complex messages and be open to individual interpretation.

Realism and abstraction represent opposite approaches to the representation of beauty. In a third style, called **idealism**, artists aim to represent things not as they are but as they ought to be. In ancient Greece and Rome artists made intense observations of the world around them and then subjected



6. Human figure, found at Galgenburg, Austria, c. 31,000 BCE. Stone, height 3" (7.4 cm). Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna



7. Kitagawa Utamaro. *Woman at the Height of Her Beauty*. Mid-1790s. Color woodblock print, 15 1/8 x 10" (38.5 x 25.5 cm). Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence
William Bridges Thayer Memorial



8. Attributed to Aulos, son of Alexas. Gem with Apollo and Cassandra. 40–20 BCE. Gold with engraved carnelian, ring $1\frac{3}{8} \times 1$ " (3.4 x 2.5 cm), gem $1\frac{3}{16} \times \frac{3}{4}$ " (1.9 x 2.1 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: Acquired through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Everitt (F93-22)

Apollo fell in love with Cassandra, and although she rejected him he gave her a potent gift—the ability to foretell the future, symbolized by the raven. To show his disappointment, the frustrated Apollo added a spiteful twist to his gift—no one would believe Cassandra's prophetic warnings. Today, doom-sayers are still called Cassandras, and ravens are associated with prophecy.

their observations to mathematical analysis to define what they considered to be perfect forms. Emphasizing human rationality, they eliminated accidents of nature and sought balance and harmony in their work. Their sculpture and painting established ideals that have inspired Western art ever since. The term *Classical*, which refers to the period in ancient Greek history when this type of idealism emerged, has come to be used broadly (and with a lowercase c) as a synonym for the peak of perfection in any period.

Classical idealism can pervade even the smallest works of art. About 2,000 years ago a Roman gem cutter known as Aulos added the opulence of imperial Rome to the ideals of Classical Greece when he engraved a deep-red, precious stone with the figures of the tragic princess Cassandra and the Greek god Apollo (fig. 8). Cassandra sleeps by rocky cliffs and a twisting laurel tree that suggest the dramatic natural setting of Delphi, Greece, a site sacred to Apollo. The god leans on the laurel tree, also sacred to him, with his cloak draped loosely and gracefully behind him. Apollo and Cassandra have the strong athletic bodies and regular facial features that charac-

terize Classical art, and their graceful poses and elegant drapery seem at the same time ideally perfect and perfectly natural. These beautiful figures and their story of frustrated love were not meant to be seen in a museum (a *museum* literally is the home of Apollo's Muses, the goddesses of learning and the arts). The carved gem was set in a gold finger ring and would have been constantly before its wearer's eyes. This sculpture reminds us that exceptional art can come in any size and material and can be intended for daily personal use as well as for special, occasional contemplation.

The flawless perfection of Classical idealism could be dramatically modified by artists more concerned with emotions than pure form. The calm of Cassandra and Apollo contrasts with the melodramatic representation of a story from the ancient Greek legend of the Trojan War. The priest Laocoön (fig. 9), who attempted to warn the Trojans against the Greeks, was strangled along with his two sons by serpents. Heroic and tragic, Laocoön represents a good man destroyed by forces beyond his control. His features twist in agony, and the muscles of his superhuman torso and arms extend and knot as he struggles. This sculpture, then at least sixteen centuries old, was rediscovered in Rome in the 1500s, and it inspired artists such as Michelangelo to develop a heroic style. Through the centuries people have returned again and again to the ideals of Classical art. In the United States official sculpture and architecture often copy Classical forms, and even the National Museum of American Art is housed in a Greek-style building.

How different from this ideal of physical beauty the perception and representation of spiritual beauty can be. A fifteenth-century bronze sculpture from India represents Punitavati, a beautiful and generous woman who was deeply devoted to the Hindu god Shiva (fig. 10). Abandoned by her greedy husband because she gave food to beggars, Punitavati offered her beauty to Shiva. Shiva accepted her offering, turning her into an emaciated, fanged hag. According to legend, Punitavati, with clanging cymbals, provides the music for Shiva as he dances the cosmic dance of destruction and creation that keeps the universe in motion. To the followers of Shiva, Punitavati became a saint called Karaikkalammai-yar. The bronze sculpture, although it depicts the saint's hideous appearance, is nevertheless beautiful both in its formal qualities and in its message of generosity and sacrifice.

Some works of art defy simple categories, and artists may go to extraordinary lengths to represent their visions. The art critic Robert Hughes called James Hampton's (1909–1964) *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly* (fig. 11) "the finest piece of visionary art produced by an American." Yet this fabulous creation is composed of discarded furniture, flashbulbs, and all sorts of trash tacked together and wrapped in aluminum and gold foil and purple paper. The primacy of painting, especially oil painting, is gone. Hampton's inspiration, whether divine or not, knows no bounds. He worked as a janitor to support himself while, in a rented garage, he built his monument to Jesus. In rising tiers, thrones and altars are prepared for Jesus and Moses, the New Testament at the right, the Old Testament at the left. Everything is labeled and described, but Hampton invented his own language and writing system to express his vision. Although his language is still not fully



9. Hagesandros, Polydoros, and Athanadoros of Rhodes. *Laocoön and His Sons*, perhaps the original of the 2nd or 1st century BCE or a Roman copy of the 1st century CE. Marble, height 8' (2.44 m). Musei Vaticani, Museo Pio Clementino, Cortile Ottaviano, Rome



10. *Punitavati* (*Karaikkalammai*), Shiva saint, from Karaikkal, India. 15th century. Bronze, height 16 1/4" (41.3 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
Purchase: Nelson Trust (33-533)

understood, its major source is the Bible, especially the Book of Revelation. On one of many placards he wrote his artist's credo: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

These different ideas of art and beauty remind us that as viewers we enter into an agreement with artists, who, in turn, make special demands on us. We re-create works of art for ourselves as we bring to them our own experiences. Without our participation they are only hunks of stone or metal or pieces of paper or canvas covered with ink or colored paints. Artistic styles change with time and place. From extreme realism at one end of the spectrum to entirely non-representational art at the other, artists have worked with varying degrees of realism, idealism, and abstraction. The challenge for the student of art history is to discover not only how but why these changes have occurred and ultimately what of significance can be learned from them, what meaning they carry.

ARTISTS

We have focused so far on works of art. What of the artists who make the art? Biologists have pointed out that human beings are mammals with very large brains and that these large brains demand stimulation. Curious, active, inventive humans constantly look, taste, smell, and listen. They invent fine arts, fine food, fine perfume, and fine music. They play games, invent rituals,



11. James Hampton. *Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations' Millennium General Assembly*. c. 1950-64. Gold and silver aluminum foil, colored Kraft paper, and plastic sheets over wood, paperboard, and glass, 10'6" x 27' x 14'6" (3.2 x 8.23 x 4.42 m). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

and speculate on the nature of things, on the nature of life. They constantly communicate with each other, and some of them even try to communicate with the past and future.

We have seen that some artists try to record the world as they see it, and they attempt to educate or convince their viewers with straightforward stories or elaborate symbols.

Others create works of art inspired by an inner vision. Like the twentieth-century American Georgia O'Keeffe (fig. 12) they attempt to express in images what cannot be expressed in words. An organized religion such as Christianity or Buddhism may motivate them, but the artists may also divorce themselves from any social group and attempt to record personal visions or intense mystical experiences. These inner visions may spring from entirely secular insights, and the artist's motivation or intention may be quite different from the public perception of her or his art.

Originally, artists were considered artisans, or craftspeople. The master (and sometimes the mistress) of a workshop was the controlling intellect, the organizer, and the inspiration for others. Utamaro's color woodblock prints, for example, were the product of a team effort. In the workshop Utamaro drew and painted pictures for his assistants to transfer to individual blocks of wood. They carved the lines and color areas, covered the surface with ink or colors, then transferred the image to paper. Since ancient times artists have worked in teams to produce great buildings, paintings, and stained glass. The same spirit is evident today in the complex glassworks of American Dale Chihuly. His team of artist-craftspeople is skilled in the ancient art of glass-making, but Chihuly remains the controlling mind and imagination. Once created, his pieces are transformed whenever they are assembled. Thus each work takes on a new life in accordance with the mind, eye, and hand of each owner-patron. Made in the 1990s, *Violet Persian Set with Red Lip Wraps* (fig. 13) has twenty separate pieces whose relationship to each other is determined by the imagination of the assembler. Like a fragile sea creature of the endangered coral reefs, the glass is vulnerable to thoughtless depredation, yet it is timeless in its reminder of primeval life. The purple captures light, color, and movement for a weary second. Artists, artisans, and patrons unite in an ever-changing individual yet communal act of creation.

About 600 years ago, artists in western Europe, especially in Italy, began to think of themselves as divinely inspired creative geniuses rather than as team workers. Painters like Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591–1666) took the evangelist Luke as their model, guide, and protector—their patron saint. People believed that Saint Luke had painted a portrait of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child. In Guercino's painting *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin* (fig. 14), the saint still holds his palette and brushes while an angel holds the painting on the easel. A book, a quill pen, and an inkpot decorated with a statue of an ox (a symbol for Luke) rest on a table behind the saint, reminders that he wrote one of the Gospels of the New Testament. The message Guercino conveys is that Saint Luke is a divinely inspired and endowed artist and that all artists share in this inspiration through their association with their patron saint.

Even the most inspired artists had to learn their trade through study or years of **apprenticeship** to a master. In his painting *The Drawing Lesson* (fig. 15), Dutch artist Jan Steen (1626–1679) takes us into an artist's studio where an apprentice watches his master teaching a young woman. The woman has been drawing from a sculpture because women then were not permitted to work from live nude models.



12. Georgia O'Keeffe.
Portrait of a Day, First Day.
1924. Oil on canvas,
35 x 18" (89 x 45.8 cm).
Spencer Museum of Art,
University of Kansas,
Lawrence
Gift of the Georgia O'Keeffe
Foundation

The year before she painted *Portrait of a Day, First Day*, O'Keeffe wrote, "One day seven years ago [I] found myself saying to myself—I can't live where I want to—I can't go where I want to—I can't even say what I want to— School and things that painters have taught me even keep me from painting as I want to. I decided I was a very stupid fool not to at least paint as I wanted to and say what I wanted to when I painted as that seemed to be the only thing I could do that didn't concern anybody but myself—that was nobody's business but my own. . . I found that I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way—things that I had no words for. Some of the wise men say it is not painting, some of them say it is" (cited in *Alfred Stieglitz Presents One Hundred Pictures: Oils, Watercolors, Pastels, Drawings by Georgia O'Keeffe, American*, The Anderson Galleries, New York, exhibition brochure, January 29–February 10, 1923).



13. Dale Chihuly. *Violet Persian Set with Red Lip Wraps*.
1990. Glass, 26 x 30 x 25" (66 x 76.2 x 63.5 cm). Spencer
Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence
Peter T. Bohan Acquisition Fund



14. Guercino. *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin*. 1652–53. Oil on canvas, 7'3" x 5'11" (2.21 x 1.81 m). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri Purchase (F83-55)



15. Jan Steen. *The Drawing Lesson*. 1665. Oil on wood, 19³/₈ x 16¹/₄" (49.3 x 41 cm). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California

Plaster reproductions hang on the wall and stand on the shelf, and a carved boy-angel has been suspended from the ceiling in front of a large tapestry. The painter holds his own palette, and we see his painting set on an easel in the background. Like Thomas LeClear's painting of the photographer's studio, *The Drawing Lesson* is a valuable record of an artist's equipment and workplace, including such things as the musical instruments, furniture, glass, ceramics, and basketry used in the seventeenth century.

The painting is more than a realistic **genre painting** (scene from daily life) or **still life** (an arrangement of objects). *The Drawing Lesson* is also an **allegory**, or symbolic representation of the arts. The objects in the studio symbolize painting, sculpture, and music. The sculpture of the ox on the shelf is more than a bookend; as we have already seen, it symbolizes Saint Luke, the painters' patron saint. The basket in the foreground holds not only the woman's fur muff but also a laurel wreath, a symbol of Apollo and the classical tribute for excellence.

ARTISTS AND ART HISTORY

Artists draw on their predecessors in ways that make each work a very personal history of art. They build on the works of the past, either inspired by or reacting against them, but always challenging them with their new creations. The influence of Jan Steen's genre painting, for example, can be seen in Thomas LeClear's *Interior with Portraits*, and Guercino's *Saint Luke* is based on an earlier **icon**—or miraculous image—he had seen in his local church. In his 1980–1990 *Vaquero* (Cowboy), Luis Jiménez revitalizes a sculptural form with roots in antiquity, the equestrian monument, or statue of a horse and rider (fig. 16).



16. Luis Jiménez. *Vaquero*. Modeled 1980, cast 1990. Cast fiberglass and epoxy, height 16'6" (5.03 m). National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

This white-hatted, gun-slinging bronco buster whoops it up in front of the stately, classical colonnade of the Old Patent Building (now the National Museum of American Art, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Archives of American Art). The Old Patent Office was designed in 1836 and finished in 1867. One of the finest Neoclassical buildings in the United States and the site of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural ball, it was supposed to be destroyed for a parking lot when it was acquired by the Smithsonian in 1958.

Vaquero also reflects Jimenez's Mexican and Texan heritage and his place in a tradition of Hispanic American art that draws on many sources, including the art of the Maya, Aztec, and other great Native American civilizations, the African culture of the Caribbean Islands, and the transplanted art of Spain and Portugal.

Equestrian statues have traditionally been stately symbols of power and authority, with the rider's command over the animal emblematic of human control over lesser beings, nature, and the passions. Jimenez's bucking bronco turns this tradition, or at least the horse, on its head. Rather than a stately symbol of human control, he gives us a horse and cowboy united in a single exuberant and dynamic force. Located in front of the National Museum of American Art, the work can be seen as a witty satire on Washington, D.C.'s bronze monuments to soldiers. At the same time, it reminds us that real *vaqueros* included hard-working African Americans and Hispanic Americans who had little in common with the cowboys of popular fiction.

In his work, Jimenez has abandoned traditional bronze and marble for fiberglass. He first models a sculpture in a plastic paste called plasticine on a steel armature; then he makes a fiberglass mold, from which he casts the final sculpture, also in fiberglass. The materials and processes are the same as those used to make many automobile bodies, and as with automobiles, the process allows an artist to make several "originals." After a sculpture is assembled and polished, it is sprayed with the kind of acrylic urethane used to coat the outside of jet airplanes. Jimenez applies colors with an airbrush and coats the finished sculpture with three more layers of acrylic urethane to protect the color and emphasize its distinctive, sleek, gleaming surface. *Vaquero* is true public, popular art. It appeals to every kind of audience from the rancher to the connoisseur.

When artists appropriate and transform images from the past the way Jimenez appropriated the equestrian form, they enrich the aesthetic vocabulary of the arts in general. *Vaquero* resonates through the ages with associations to cultures distant in time and place that give it added meaning. This kind of aesthetic free-for-all encourages artistic diversity and discourages the imposition of a single correct or canonical (approved) approach or point of view. In the jargon of our time, no medium is *privileged*, and no group of artists is *marginalized*.

ART AND SOCIETY

The visual arts are among the most sophisticated forms of human communication, at once shaping and shaped by the social context in which they find expression. Artists are often interpreters of their times. They can also be enlisted to serve social ends in forms that range from heavy-handed propaganda to the more subtle persuasiveness of Margaret Bourke-White's photographs for *Life* magazine. From the priests and priestesses in ancient Egypt to the representatives of various faiths today, religious leaders have understood the value of the visual arts in educating people about doctrine and in reinforcing their faith. Especially beginning in the eleventh century in western Europe, architecture and sculpture provided settings for elaborate rites and inspiring and instructive art. At the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in north-



17. *Pórtico de la Gloria*. Photograph by Joan Myers. 1988

Tradition required that pilgrims to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela place their fingers in the tendrils of the carved Tree of Jesse as they asked Saint James's blessing on arrival in the church. Millions of fingers have worn away the carving, leaving a rich patina of age. The twelfth-century sculpture still inspires twentieth-century artists such as photographer Joan Myers.

western Spain, which shelters the tomb of Saint James, the marble of the central portal has been polished and the twelfth-century sculpture have been worn down by the touch of pilgrims' fingers (fig. 17).

Marxist art historians once saw art as an expression of great social forces rather than of individual genius, but most people now agree that neither history and economics nor philosophy and religion alone can account for the art of a Rembrandt or Michelangelo. The same applies to extraordinary "ordinary" people, too, who have created powerful art to satisfy their own inner need to communicate ideas. In Lucas, Kansas, in 1905, Samuel Perry Dinsmoor, a visionary populist, began building his Garden of Eden (fig. 18). By 1927 he had surrounded his home with twenty-nine concrete trees ranging from 8 to 40 feet high. He filled the branches with figures that told the biblical story of the Creation and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden under the ever-present—and electrified—Eye of God. Adam and Eve succumb to the serpent; Cain strikes down Abel. Evil and death enter the world as creatures attack each other. In Dinsmoor's modern world, people defend themselves through their right to vote. Under the protection of the Goddess of Liberty draped in an American flag, a man and woman literally cut down big business with a saw labeled "ballot." Dinsmoor communicated his ideas forcefully and directly through haunting imagery. At dusk his electric



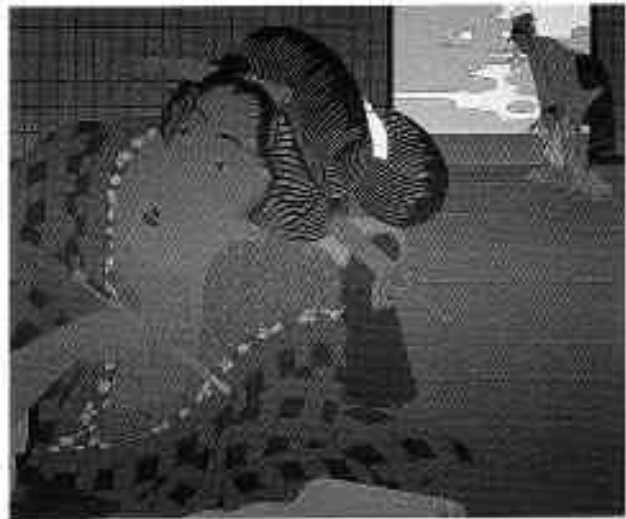
18. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor. *Goddess of Liberty and the Destruction of the Trusts by the Ballot*. Garden of Eden, Lucas, Kansas. 1905–32. Painted concrete and cement, over-lifesize

light bulbs—his repeated “Ever-Seeing Eye of God”—illuminate the concrete and cement figures with an unearthly glow.

Not all art with social impact is public on the scale of a pilgrimage church or a half-acre concrete Garden of Eden. Artists like Roger Shimomura turn painting and prints into powerful statements. American citizens of Japanese ancestry were forcibly confined in internment camps during World War II. Shimomura based his 1978 painting *Diary* (fig. 19) on his grandmother’s record of the family’s experience in an internment camp in Idaho. Shimomura painted his grandmother writing while he (the toddler) and his mother stand by an open door—a door that opens on a barbed-wire-enclosed compound. In his painting Shimomura has combined two formal traditions, the Japanese art of color woodblock prints (see fig. 7) and American Pop Art to create a personal style that expresses his own dual culture as it makes a powerful political statement.

ARTISTS AND PATRONS

Rare, valuable, beautiful, and strange things appeal to human curiosity. People who are not artists “use” art, too. They have collected special objects since prehistoric times when people buried the dead with necklaces of fox teeth. Collections of “curiosities” were passed along from one generation to the next, gaining luster or mysterious power with age. Art enhanced the owners’ prestige, created an aura of power and importance, and impressed others. Many collectors truly



19. Roger Shimomura. *Diary* (Minidoka Series #3) 1978. Acrylic on canvas, 4'11 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 6'1 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (1.52 x 1.83 m). Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence



20. *Christine Presenting Her Book to the Queen of France*. 1410–15. Tempera and gold on vellum, image approx. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (14 x 17 cm). The British Library, London MS. Harley 4431, folio 3

love works of art. When collectors study diligently, they become scholars; when their expertise turns to questions of refined evaluation, they become what we call **connoisseurs**.

The patrons of art constitute a very special kind of audience for the artist. Patrons provide economic support for art and vicariously participate in its creation. In earlier periods artists depended on the patronage of individuals and the institutions they represented. An early-fifteenth-century painting shows the French writer Christine de Pisan presenting her work to the queen of France (fig. 20). Christine was a patron, too, for she hired painters and scribes to copy, illustrate, and decorate her books. She especially admired the painting of a woman artist named Anastaise, considering her work unsurpassed in the city of Paris, which she believed had the world’s best painters of miniatures.

When a free market developed for art works, artists became entrepreneurs. In a painting by the seventeenth-



21. Gillis van Tilborch. *Cabinet d'Amateur with a Painter*. c. 1660–70. Oil on canvas, 38 1/4 x 51" (97.15 x 129.54 cm). Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence



22. James McNeill Whistler. *Harmony in Blue and Gold*. The Peacock Room, northeast corner, from a house owned by Frederick Leyland, London. 1876–77. Oil paint and metal leaf on canvas, leather, and wood, 13'11 7/8" x 33'2" x 19'11 1/2" (4.26 x 10.11 x 6.83 m). Freer Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (04.61)

century Flemish painter Gillis van Tilborch, an artist and an art dealer display their wares to patrons, who examine the treasures brought before them (fig. 21). Paintings cover the walls, and sculpture and precious objects stand on the table and floor. The painting provides a fascinating catalog of the fine arts of the seventeenth century and the taste of seventeenth-century connoisseurs.

Relations between artists and patrons are not always so congenial as Tilborch portrayed them. Patrons can change their minds about a commission or purchase or fail to pay their bills. Such conflicts can have simple beginnings and unexpected results. In the late nineteenth century the Liverpool shipping magnate Frederick Leyland asked James McNeill Whistler, an American painter living in London, what color to paint the shutters in the dining room where he planned to hang Whistler's painting *The Princess from the Land of Porcelain*. The room had been decorated with expensive embossed and gilded leather and finely crafted shelves to show off Leyland's Asian porcelain collection. Whistler was inspired by the Japanese theme of his own painting as well as the porcelain, and he was also caught up in the wave of enthusiasm for Japanese art sweeping Europe. He painted the window shutters with splendid turquoise, blue, and gold peacocks. Then, while Leyland was away, he painted the entire room (fig. 22), replacing the gilded leather on the walls with turquoise peacock feathers. Leyland was shocked and angry when he saw the results. Whistler, however, memorialized the confrontation with a painting of a pair of fighting peacocks on one wall of the room. One of the peacocks represents the outraged artist, and the other, standing on a pile of coins, represents the incensed patron. The Peacock Room, which Whistler called *Harmony in Blue and Gold*, is an extraordinary example of total design, and Leyland did not change it. The American collector Henry Freer, who sought to unite the aesthetics of East and West, later acquired the room and donated it on his death to

a museum in the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., where it can now be appreciated by all. Today museums are the primary collectors and preservers of art.

THE KEEPERS OF ART: MUSEUMS

From time immemorial people have gathered together objects that they considered to be precious, objects that were made of valuable material or that conveyed the idea of power and prestige. The curators, or keepers of such collections, assisted patrons in obtaining the best pieces. The idea of what is best and what is worth collecting and preserving varies from one generation to another. Yesterday's popular magazine (see fig. 4) is today's example of fine photography and graphic design.

An art museum can be thought of in two ways: as a scholarly research institute where curators care for and study their collections and teach new scholar-curators, and as a public institution dedicated to exhibiting and explaining the collections. The first university art museum in the United States was established in 1832 at Yale University. Today museums with important research and educational functions are to be found in many universities and colleges, and museums with good collections are widespread. One does not have to live in a major population center to experience wonderful art. Of the twenty-six works illustrated in this chapter, eleven are located near the author in Kansas and Missouri, and four of these are in a single university museum. No one would assert that Kansas is the art capital of the world; the point is that encounters with the real objects are not out of most people's range. And no matter how faithful the quality of reproductions in a book or a slide or a monitor showing an image from a CD-ROM, there is no substitute for a "live interview" with an actual work of art or architecture.

The display of art is a major challenge for curators. Art must be put on public view in a way that ensures its safety



23. *The Water and Moon Kuan-yin Bodhisattva*. Northern Sung or Liao dynasty, 11th–12th century. Wood with paint, height 7'11" (2.41 m). Mural painting, 14th century; wooden screens, 17th century. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
Purchase: Nelson Trust (34.10)

and also enhances its qualities and clarifies its significance. The installation of Chinese sculpture at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City (fig. 23) and at the Seattle Art Museum (fig. 24) illustrate two imaginative approaches to this challenge.

A polychromed and gilded wooden bodhisattva, or enlightened being, in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art sits majestically in front of a mural painting of the Buddha. The sculpture and painting are exceptional in their own right, and together they form a magnificent ensemble, placed in a re-created temple setting with screens from the seventeenth century. The curators successfully established an environment that recalls the religious context of the art, subtly emphasizes its importance, and provides it with a measure of security.

The Seattle Art Museum had different problems to solve. Their carved-stone Chinese tomb figures had stood outdoors in a park for years. Weather-beaten and moss-covered, they had been almost ignored. The new Seattle Art Museum, designed by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown and finished in 1991, had a monumental stairwell that united the museum interior with the steep city street outside. The figures were cleaned, restored, and placed on the stairs like welcoming guardians for the galleries above. Set under colorful festive arches, they provide a monumental and semi-



24. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown. Stair Hall with Ming dynasty tomb figures, Seattle Art Museum. 1986–91

serious contrast to the witty, theatrical, and “irreverent” architecture—the museum coffee shop interrupts their stately procession—and serve as an appropriate symbol for a city that prides itself as a link between East and West.

“I KNOW WHAT I LIKE”

Our involvement with art may be casual or intense, naive or sophisticated. At first we may simply react instinctively to a painting or building or photograph, but this level of “feeling” about art—“I know what I like”—can never be fully satisfying.

Opinions as to what constitutes a work of art change over time. Impressionist paintings of the late nineteenth century, now among the most avidly sought and widely collected, were laughed at when first displayed. They seemed rough and unfinished—merely “impressions”—rather than the careful depictions of nature people then expected to see. Impressionist painters like Claude Monet in his *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris* (fig. 25) tried to capture in paint on canvas the reflected light that registers as color in human eyes. Rather than carefully drawing forms he knew to exist—the branches and leaves of trees, dark-clothed figures—he recorded immediate visual sensations with flecks of color. The rough texture provides a two-dimensional interest that is quite independent of the painting’s subject. The mind’s eye



25. Claude Monet. *Boulevard des Capucines, Paris*. 1873–74. Oil on canvas, 31 1/4 x 23 1/4" (79.4 x 59.1 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri
Purchase: the Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation Acquisition Fund (F72-35)



26. Vincent van Gogh. *Sunflowers*. 1888. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4" (92.1 x 73 cm). The National Gallery, London

interprets the array of colors as the solid forms of nature, suddenly perceiving the coral daubs in the lower right, for example, as a balloon man. When the critic Louis Leroy reviewed this painting the first time it was exhibited, he sneered: "Only, be so good as to tell me what those innumerable black tongue-lickings in the lower part of the picture represent?" (*Le Charivari*, April 25, 1874). Today we easily see a street in early spring filled with horse-drawn cabs and strolling men and women. In this magical moment the long-dead artist and the live viewers join to re-create nineteenth-century Paris.

Art history, in contrast to art criticism, combines the formal analysis of works of art—concentrating mainly on the visual elements in the work of art—with the study of the works' broad historical context. Art historians draw on biography to learn about artists' lives, social history to understand the economic and political forces shaping artists, their patrons, and their public, and the history of ideas to gain an understanding of the intellectual currents influencing artists' work. They also study the history of other arts—including music, drama, literature—to gain a richer sense of the context of the visual arts. Every sculpture or painting presents a challenge. Even a glowing painting like Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (fig. 26), of 1888, to which we may react with spontaneous enthusiasm, forces us to think about art, as well as feel and admire it.

Our first reaction is that *Sunflowers* is a joyous, colorful

painting of a simple subject. But this is far more than a bunch of flowers in a simple pot in a sunlit room. Art history makes us search for more. The surface of the painting is richly built up—van Gogh laid on the thick oil paint with careful calculation. The brilliant yellow ground that looks flat in a reproduction in fact resembles a tightly woven basket or textile, so deliberately and carefully placed are the small brushstrokes. The space is suggested simply—by two horizontal stripes, two bands of gold different in intensity and separated by just the slightest blue line, the color of maximum contrast. Here, in fact, there is no space, no setting; we imagine a table, a sun-filled room. But did van Gogh see a pot of flowers on a windowsill, against the blazing, shimmering heat and light of the true sun? Van Gogh had a troubled life, and that knowledge makes us reflect on the possible meaning of the painting to him—for the painting, despite its brightness, reflects something ominous, a foreboding of the artist's loneliness and despair to come.

As viewers we participate in the re-creation of a work of art, and its meaning changes from individual to individual, from era to era. Once we welcome the arts into our life, we have a ready source of sustenance and challenge that grows, changes, mellows, and enriches our daily experience. No matter how much we study or read about art and artists, eventually we return to the contemplation of the work itself, for art is the tangible evidence of the ever-questing human spirit.