



What *romanticized* images shape  
your understanding of  
*history?*

### ALBERT BIERSTADT

(1830–1902)

*California Spring, 1875*

Oil on canvas, 54¼ x 84¼ in.

Presented to the City and County of  
San Francisco by Gordon Blanding

1941.6



Writing to an East Coast audience during his first sojourn west to the Rocky Mountains, in 1859, Bierstadt stated:

*If you can form any idea of the scenery of the Rocky Mountains and of our life in this region, from what I have to write, I shall be very glad; there is indeed enough to write about—a writing lover of nature and Art could not wish for a better subject. I am delighted with the scenery. The mountains are very fine; as seen from the plains they resemble very much the Bernese Alps, one of the finest ranges of mountains in Europe, if not in the world. They are of a granite formation, the same as the Swiss mountains, and their jagged summits, covered with snow and mingling with the clouds, present a scene which every lover of landscape would gaze upon with unqualified delight. As you approach them, the lower hills present themselves more or less clothed with a great variety of trees, among which may be found the cotton-wood, lining the river banks, the aspen, and several species of the fir and the pine, some of them being very beautiful. And such a charming grouping of rocks, so fine in color—more so than any I ever saw. Artists would be delighted with them—were it not for the tormenting swarms of mosquitoes. In the valleys, silvery streams abound, with mossy rocks and an abundance of that finny tribe that we all delight so much to catch, the trout. We see many spots in the scenery that remind us of our New Hampshire or Catskill hills, but when we look up and measure the mighty perpendicular cliffs that rise hundreds of feet aloft, all capped with snow, we then realize that we are among a different class of mountains.*

Albert Bierstadt, "Dear Crayon," July 10, 1859, printed in *The Crayon* (September 1859): page 287.

### Based on the critics' comments, what aspects of Bierstadt's paintings defined his popularity?



Albert Bierstadt's "studio,"  
1872. Stereograph by Eadweard  
Muybridge. The Bancroft Library,  
University of California Berkeley

The striking merit of Bierstadt in his treatment of Yosemite, as of other western landscapes, lies in his power of grasping distances, handling wide spaces, truthfully massing huge objects, and realizing splendid atmospheric effects. The success with which he does this, and so reproduces the noblest aspects of grand scenery, filling the mind of the spectator with the very sentiment of the original, is the proof of his genius. There are others who are more literal, who realize details more carefully, who paint figures and animals better, who finish more smoothly; but none except Church, and he in a different manner, is so happy as Bierstadt in the treatment of the heroic style of landscapes peculiar to America. Some of his smallest oil sketches in Yosemite give a better idea of its vast dimensions than even the superb photographs of Watkins, or the most carefully finished paintings of other artists.

B. P. Avery, "Art Beginnings on the Pacific," Part II, *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* (San Francisco) 1, no. 2 (August 1868): page 114.

As the time for the opening of the Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design approaches, the greatest activity is apparent on the part of the artists in making preparations for the event. Mr. Albert Bierstadt, of the landscape-painters, is at work on one of the largest pictures, probably, which will appear in the exhibition, a view of "The Sacramento Valley in Early Spring." The valley, at the point selected for the picture, is broad, and, with its scattered groves and isolated trees, resembles a grand old park; and this effect is heightened by the alternate patches of wild-flowers which show on the greensward. Every traveller in California has noticed the richness and variety of its floral vegetation in early spring, and in the delineation of this character of the landscape Mr. Bierstadt has given a truthful study. This feature, however, is a minor incident, as the great strength of the work lies in its broad and masterly perspective, and in the passing shower which is drifting over the right foreground. The introduction of this feature gives additional force to the effect of light and shade which appears in masses here and there upon the landscape. In the distance there is a glimpse of the spires of Sacramento, but otherwise the vista is devoid of inhabitants as it was during the period of Spanish occupation.

"New-York Studio Notes," *The Art Journal* (April 1875): page 124.

## What factors contributed to Bierstadt's unprecedented success as an artist?

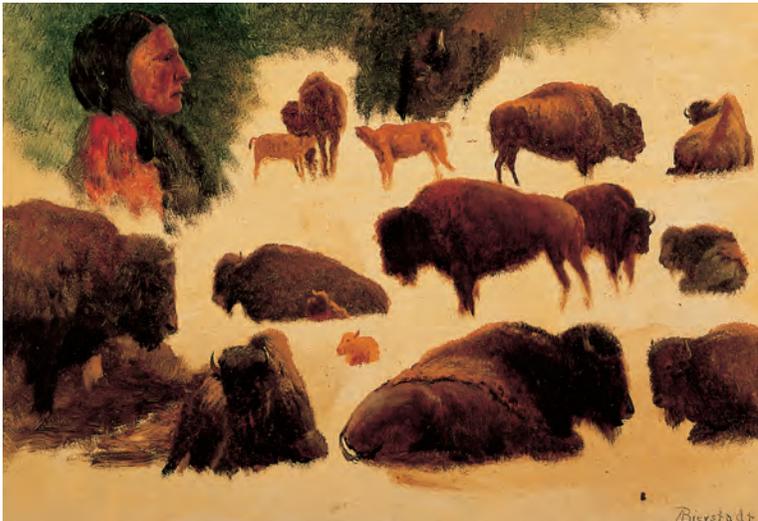
Though a latecomer to the Far West, Bierstadt turned his attention toward the western horizon at exactly the right moment, for by 1859 curiosity about America's distant frontier had reached a fever pitch, thanks in part to the surveyors, journalists, writers, and artists who had begun reporting on the West as early as the 1820s. More important, by 1859 Bierstadt had acquired the personal and professional maturity that would allow him to meet the call for western landscapes grand enough to challenge the European model but distinctive enough to inspire national pride. By the time he departed for the Rockies, he had spent a decade, both at home and abroad, acquiring the requisite skills of his craft. His disciplined application allowed him to travel west with a near-perfect combination of technical expertise, European experience, national enthusiasm, and **marketing savvy**—everything required to turn the western landscape into an iconic image of national definition.

**marketing savvy:** an understanding of the market (the people who will buy products)

**idyllic:** simple, charming, poetic

Because the paintings that resulted from the 1863 trip invariably offer an **idyllic** view of a new golden land, it is easy to forget that Bierstadt and Ludlow journeyed west during the darkest days of the Civil War. Two years

earlier, during the first months of the war, Bierstadt had visited Union troops camped near the Potomac River. . . .



*Studies of Bison*, Oil on paper, 14 x 19 in. Signed lower right: **ABierstadt**. The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

**undefiled:** pristine, unspoiled

When the Civil War broke out, blood spilled in Eden. The landscape Americans had used to define themselves was irretrievably changed. Many American landscape painters countered this sober reality with images of nature at peace. In his western paintings, Bierstadt offered something more. Distant plains, rugged mountains, and the valleys of California stood apart, untouched by war. Bierstadt's images of such **undefiled** wilderness offered hope and held out the promise of a second chance at Eden.

Nancy K. Anderson, "'Wondrously Full of Invention': The Western Landscapes of Albert Bierstadt," in Nancy K. Anderson and Linda S. Ferber, *Albert Bierstadt: Art & Enterprise* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, Inc., 1990), pages 70–71 and 80–81.

*The Rocky Mountains, Lander's Peak*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 73½ x 120¾ in. Signed lower right: *ABierstadt/1863*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1907. (07.123). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art



**epically:** on a grand scale

**emergent:** just beginning

**orotund:** typically used to describe a manner of speech; full, clear, and strong

**peruse:** consider, view

**magnates:** powerful business people

**Barnum-like:** in the manner of P.T. Barnum, a circus owner known for successfully exploiting public tastes

Bierstadt, together with Frederic E. Church, dominated American landscape painting in the years surrounding the Civil War. Together the two painters transformed Hudson River School painting from humanly scaled images of local scenes into **epically** conceived dramas and in the process brought painting out of the cultural closet and into the marketplace. In response to the rising profitability of the art market at mid-century, Church and Bierstadt virtually reinvented what was referred to at the time as the “Great Picture,” large, operatic productions that fed on the public’s appetite for spectacle. Though these images came wrapped in the twin languages of patriotism and cultural uplift, they represent a new form of painting: commercial in its conception, aggressive in its demands on the audience, and linked to the practices of an **emergent** consumer culture.

Bierstadt’s paintings are dressed for success. They evolved from the hard-edged realism of his Düsseldorf days to the **orotund** dramas of his western landscapes. The Great Pictures, all western in subject matter, were scaled for two settings: the exhibition hall where the public could crowd around a draped and artificially illuminated painting, **peruse** it with the aid of a printed program, and subscribe to the anticipated print series; and the walls of industrial **magnates**, whose lavish domestic interiors could accommodate the 70–80 square feet of canvas that confirmed the patron’s claims to cultural legitimacy. . . .

With an instinct for business every bit as keen as his eye for composition, Bierstadt boldly harnessed the machinery of modern commerce to the promotion of his art. He sidestepped the high-toned National Academy of Design to sponsor private exhibition tours of his canvases, yoking together in **Barnum-like** fashion extensive press coverage, advertising, and other means for attracting large audiences.

Bryan J. Wolf, “How the West Was Hung, or, When I Hear the Word ‘Culture’ I Take Out My Checkbook,” *American Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 1992): pages 433 and 435.

### Consider Bierstadt's influences. How does he employ these influences to produce idealized images of the West?

**rhetoric:** the art of persuasive speech

Beginning in the 1820s, surveyors, accompanied by journalists and (later) photographers, reported on the United States territories west of the Mississippi, fueling a national interest in Manifest Destiny. This ideology supported the romantic belief that the United States was a country destined by natural forces and the character of its people to subdue the North American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts. The **rhetoric** of Manifest Destiny served the interests of those of European heritage, principally English, Dutch, and German, refusing to acknowledge the established communities of other nations and cultures living between the Missouri River and Pacific Ocean. It was a language of empire perfectly suited to the discovery of gold in California in 1848, which set off a westward migration that was unprecedented in American settlement. . . .

*California Spring* is painted from studies made during Bierstadt's third western sojourn, from 1871 to 1873. The artist and his wife, Rosalie, traveled on the recently completed transcontinental railroad, and, upon reaching San Francisco, remained for two years while Bierstadt made short sketching trips into the countryside. In place of the panoramic scenes of the Rocky Mountains and Yosemite that Bierstadt produced in 1860s, here he painted the flat, wide plain of Sacramento River Valley. . . .

Drawing on the tradition of seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes, Bierstadt drops the horizon by inventing a high vantage point, which magnifies the panorama, the spatial depth, and the vast expanse of the sky. This strategy, used by painters such as Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29–1682), throws the emotional drama of the scene into the sky, displacing the narrative stimulus onto the natural elements. A thunderstorm has just passed through the valley, evident in the shadowed foreground and

**suffused:** spread through

the bank of dark cumulus clouds at the left. The sun is breaking through, its golden light coloring the sky and glinting on the river. As in its Dutch counterparts, Bierstadt's painting is **suffused** with an atmospheric light that seems to suggest divine intervention, reinforced by the elevated viewpoint that takes in the entire valley at a glance. The dark foreground places the viewer under the shadow of the storm, but the bright valley anticipates its clearing as the rain and thunderclouds draw aside on the left like a curtain opening on a new act.

The lofty California oak trees provide the visual link between the physical and ideological realms. The monumental trees framing the scene on the right reach from the foreground space occupied by the cows into the sky at the top of the canvas. Their brown and green coloration ties them to the meadow and livestock, while the rounded shape of limbs and leaves rhymes the billowing mountains of storm clouds. . . .

These California oak trees are a double symbol, alluding to both specific place and moral redemption. Bierstadt renders California's Sacramento Valley as another chance for Eden and hope for the future, signified by the glinting gold dome of the recently completed state capital building, which the artist depicts as a barely visible mark on the distant horizon. As the painting's early viewers well knew, the gold on that dome had been discovered a generation earlier in the Sierra Nevada, not far from Sacramento.

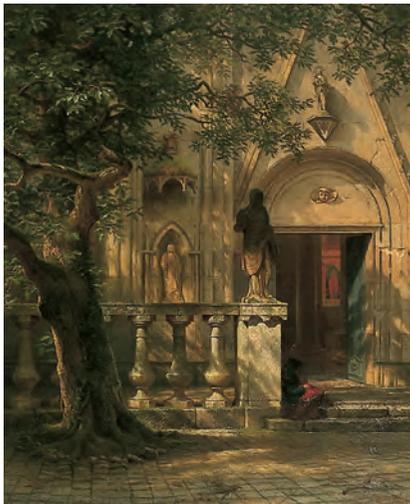
Daniell Cornell, "Albert Bierstadt, *California Spring: Another Chance for Eden*," in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young*, (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), pages 125 and 127–128.

## About the Artist

**Albert Bierstadt** (1830–1902) is best known for capturing majestic western landscapes with his paintings of awe-inspiring mountain ranges, vast canyons, and tumbling waterfalls. The sheer physical beauty of the newly explored West is evident in his paintings. Born in



*Nassau Harbor*, ca. 1877. Oil on paper mounted on paperboard, 14¾ x 20 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, Mildred Anna Williams Collection, 1961.22



*Sunlight and Shadow*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 39 x 32½ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.10

Germany in 1830, Albert Bierstadt moved to Massachusetts when he was a year old. He demonstrated an early interest in art and at the age of twenty-one had his first exhibit at the New England Art Union in Boston. After spending several years studying in Germany at the German Art Academy in Düsseldorf, Bierstadt returned to the United States.

A great adventurer with a pioneering spirit, Bierstadt joined Frederick W. Lander's Military Expeditionary force, traveling west on the overland wagon route from Saint Joseph, Missouri, to the Pacific Coast. This was one of numerous western trips he would take during his life, including a winter spent in the snow in Yosemite Valley and a trip to the Farallones Islands, off of San Francisco, documenting marine life there. Bierstadt slept under the open sky, rode a pony, and traveled by covered wagon, carrying a Bowie knife in his belt. During this surveying trip he carried his oil paints, pencils, and sketching paper, creating hundreds of sketches along the way. When he returned to New York he used his sketches to paint the rugged terrain, including enormous mountains, canyons, and rivers, which he enlarged to fit his vision of a grand and dominant natural world.



Watkins Yosemite Art Gallery, San Francisco.  
*Albert Bierstadt*, c. 1873. Cabinet card.  
Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center,  
Fremont, Ohio

Bierstadt's expansive paintings of the Rocky Mountains, Colorado, and Yosemite Valley were created on large canvases ranging in size from seven to fifteen feet wide. He was enormously successful, his audiences and patrons eager to learn about the West. His paintings sold from \$5,000 to \$25,000, very large sums during this time period. Bierstadt continued a lifelong devotion to his painting, receiving numerous awards and honors in the United States and in Europe.

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the influence of travel on this artist?
2. Write about how the concepts of "Eden" and "Manifest Destiny" are reflected in *California Spring*.
3. Why does this artist portray landscape without signs of civilization, such as human life or buildings?
4. What elements of symbolism and Dutch landscape painting are shown in this image?



When was the last time you used your

**IMAGINATION?**

### ELIHU VEDDER

(1836–1923)

*The Sphinx of the Seashore*, 1879

Oil on canvas, 16 x 27 $\frac{7}{8}$  in.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D.

Rockefeller 3rd

1979.7.102



*My idea in the sphinx was the haplessness of man before the immutable laws of nature.*

Vedder to an admirer, September 7, 1884, quoted in Marjorie Reich, "The Imagination of Elihu Vedder—as Revealed in His Book Illustrations," *American Journal* (May 1974): page 40.

**occult:** hidden or secret,  
beyond human understanding  
**desultory:** disconnected

*I am not a mystic, or very learned in **occult** matters. I have read much in a **desultory** manner and have thought much, and so it comes that I take short flights or wade out into the sea of mystery which surrounds us, but soon getting beyond my depth, return, I must confess with a sense of relief, to the solid ground of common sense; and yet it delights me to tamper and potter with the unknowable, and I have a strong tendency to see in things more than meets the eye.*

From John R. Moffitt, "The Historical Significance of Elihu Vedder's *The Lair or the Sea Serpent*," *Notes in the History of Art* (Summer 2007): page 41.

### In relation to *The Sphinx of the Seashore*, what do you think are the most relevant facts from the comments below?

#### “VEDDERESQUE.”

Mr. Vedder's palette is as individual as his subjects. With all his dainty, melting, deepening tints, there are daring combinations that scarcely any one but this fearless colorist would dream of attempting. There are Egyptian and Turkish and Arabian skies of the intense blue one must indeed see to realize, and against this blue are great masses of rich red sandstone, cool gray granite or rolling yellow deserts. . . .

For his methods, as I have said, they are purely “Vedderesque!” He starts to paint a lily, and behold! about the lily floats a score of exquisite suggestions that his mind seizes and his genius depicts in mist or cloud or spirit-form!

For his models, if for instance, he were making a figure of Mercy, he would not pose his model as Mercy and make a literal sketch of her, but he would so use her that she would aid in the development of the idea. It is seldom, perhaps never, that he sits down before his easel for the delineation of an already “cut and dried” conception. At that time, the conception is only in embryo; as he works, on a floating cloud, a rising vapor, a land curve, a seabird, a sail, an unfolding petal or a ray of sunshine, will become a transforming suggestion.

Theo. Tracy, “Vedderesque,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug 22, 1892, page 2.

#### THE EXCAVATION OF THE GREAT SPHINX

The last occasion on which the Great Sphinx was cleared down to the level on which the paws rest was in honour of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The ever-drifting sands had, however, reburied it almost to the throat when Professor Maspero, during his last year of office at Boulak, began again the work of disinterment. This work has now been going on, somewhat intermittently, for more than twelve months, and is at the present time in active progress under the direction of Professor Maspero's successor, M. Grébaud. A tramway has been laid down from the Sphinx to the edge of the Pyramid plateau. . . . Along this tramway light trucks convey the sand to the point at which their contents are discharged, the trucks being loaded by Arabs of both sexes and all ages, who carry the sand upon their heads in large flat baskets, ascending and descending all day long from the exactions below to the tramway above and vice versa. The means look curiously inadequate, but the results are astonishing. Already the entire forepart of the great stone monster is laid bare, and already the huge chest, the paws, the space between the paws, the altar in front of them, and the platform upon which they rest, are once more open to the light of day.

“The Excavation of the Great Sphinx,” *The Times* (London), January 7, 1887, page 4, column C.

### How does the historical record of excavating the Sphinx affect your interpretation of the work?

Though Napoleon's military operations in Egypt ended in fiasco, the tremendous results obtained in scarcely three years by the galaxy of scholars, artists, and specialists who accompanied his expedition aroused an intense fascination with Egypt. This passion not only caused a lasting interest in this land, which was led into a new era by Mohammed Aly; it also stimulated the work of pioneers of archaeology, even before Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphs in 1822. But at Giza, Napoleon's scholars undertook only limited work. . . .

The first pioneers who attempted to clear the Sphinx needed a great deal of passion and perhaps a dose of foolhardiness; they risked not only their



The Sphinx and the Pyramid of Khephren, circa 1880: Gizeh (Egypt). Photo by Roger Viollet Collection/Getty Images

workers' lives but their own as well. In 1817, Giovanni Caviglia worked for the [British] consul Henry Salt, a great collector, as many excavators were at the time. . . . This was the first time since antiquity that part of the animal's body, covered by a casing of limestone blocks, had been brought to light again. The trench, which was sixty-five feet deep, was funnel-shaped, and although the sides were held in place by a system of planks, they continually threatened to collapse and to swallow up the workmen. . . .

**prodigious:** enormous, huge

Auguste Mariette engaged in **prodigious** activity, clearing many sites in Egypt for the first time in the modern era. In 1853 and 1858 he turned to the Sphinx, encountering the same difficulties as his predecessors. . . .

**prosaic:** ordinary, dull

Gaston Maspero, Mariette's successor as director of the recently-created Antiquities Service, resumed work in 1885–86. Aside from his interest in penetrating what he considered the "mysteries" of the Sphinx, a more **prosaic** goal motivated him: to offer those tourists, already numerous in Egypt, who did not venture beyond Cairo an added attraction at the feet of the pyramids. To complete his work, he started a public subscription, but it proved insufficient; nonetheless, managed to clear once more what Caviglia and Mariette had already **exhumed**. But again we have only hasty notes and not a single detailed report on the excavations. Picture postcards from the turn of the twentieth century, when photography was becoming popular, permit us a glimpse of the site as it appeared at the time. The history of the excavations conducted during the nineteenth century reflects an often undervalued fact: in thirty or forty years, a partially cleared sector can be covered anew by shifting soil and wind-blown sand.

**exhumed:** unearthed, revealed

Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Sphinx: History of a Monument* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pages 17–20.

### What historical references does the art historian cite and how does she relate the work back to the artist's own interests?

When Elihu Vedder (1836–1923) was profiled in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1887, he was already well known as an illustrator and painter of haunting, symbolist pictures set in imaginative landscapes. As the *Atlantic* article noted: “[Vedder] dreams, but seldom forgets himself. There is calculation and method in his loftiest flights. The mysteries of life, the unknown and the **preternatural**, symbols and **allegories**, themes grand and terrible, allure him, and he undertakes to translate into intelligible form and color the unsubstantial pictures of the mind.” Although Vedder’s visionary works were few in number compared to the more marketable landscapes and figure paintings he painted throughout his career, it was through his unsettling and **enigmatic** “pictures of the mind” that he made his mark. . . .

**preternatural:** out of the ordinary, supernatural

**allegories:** stories in which objects, people, or events are symbolic of another meaning

**enigmatic:** mysterious, confusing, or perplexing

The painting draws on an idea of the sphinx that would have been familiar to nineteenth-century viewers from Greek mythology. The Egyptian sphinx was the living image of the sun god, who guarded the approach to the palaces

of the dead. The Greeks related the Egyptian word “sphinx” to their verb “sphingein,” to strangle, constrict, bind tight, or throttle. In Greek myth, the winged creature—who was half-woman, half-lion—stopped travelers on the road to Thebes and demanded that they answer her riddle. Those who failed (as they all did with the exception of Oedipus) were strangled. Through the interweaving of the Egyptian and Greek traditions, the sphinx came to be understood as a dangerous guardian of the secrets of life, often associated with powerful natural forces. . . .



*The Questioner of the Sphinx*, 1863.  
Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 42¼ in.  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.  
Bequest of Mrs. Martin Brimmer, 06.2430

**evocative:** summoning or calling forth a mental image

Even without the Egyptian desert setting Vedder found so **evocative**, *The Sphinx of the Seashore* carries forward his exploration of the dark and desolate. Here Vedder’s sphinx is a living creature rather than a figure

in stone. Like the sphinx of Greek mythology, she has the head and breasts of a woman and the lower body of a lion. She reclines with one front paw stretched before her while the other rests on a human skull. Other skulls and bones surround her, some partially submerged in the muddy sand. The beach is littered with shells, strange, curving driftwood, and traces of a recent shipwreck such as cable rings, anchor flukes, wooden debris, and a scattering of the treasures once on board. . . .



*The Lair of the Sea Serpent*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 21 x 36 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Thomas G. Appelton

**encroach ominously:** move closer in a dangerous or threatening way

*The Sphinx of the Seashore* and *The Inevitable Fate* engage Vedder's evolving understanding of the sphinx as keeper of destructive forces. In *The Sphinx of the Seashore*, the dark waters of the sea that are merely hinted at on the horizon in *The Questioner of the Sphinx* **encroach ominously** on the desolate shore. By the time Vedder drew *The Inevitable Fate*, the destructive forces of nature had been further distilled into the figure of the sphinx herself, who, even without the approaching tide, was mistress of the barren landscape. No longer the mysterious remnant of a lost culture, Vedders' dynamic, living sphinx emerges as an exotic, sexualized creature who presides over the unraveling of civilization. Vedder imaginatively combines actual knowledge and the associations carried by the sphinx with his own haunting vision, as he did in his most compelling works. When asked to explain his enigmatic pictures, Vedder replied: "I have intended to hold the mirror up to nature, only in this case nature is the little world of my imagination in which I wander sometimes, and I have tried to give my impression on first meeting these strange beings in my wandering there. So I must use my painting as a mirror and only reflect without explaining. If the scene appears extraordinary, all I can say is that it would be strange if it were not."



*Bed of the Torrent Mugnone, Near Florence*, 1864. Oil on hardboard, 6 5/8 x 16 1/4 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.100

Amanda Glesmann, "Elihu Vedder, *The Sphinx of the Seashore*: Desolate Landscapes of the Mind" in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), pages 183–187.

## About the Artist

**Elihu Vedder** (1836–1923) spent much of his childhood in New York. His father was a dentist who wanted his son to be a merchant or a dentist, threatening to cut him off if he became an artist. Eventually, Vedder's father agreed to give his son "a quarter's worth of lessons in drawing." While studying art, he supported himself by creating comics, sketches for magazines, and diagrams for dumbbell exercise advertisements. Vedder's father eventually moved to Cuba to work, and Vedder visited him, much impressed by the contrast of life between New York and Cuba. When he was twenty-two, Vedder traveled to Paris and Italy to study art, often wandering the mountains and villages, sketching and painting.

Vedder arrived back in the United States as the Civil War was ravaging the country. Unable to join the army due to an injured left

hand, Vedder continued to paint. He is known for using landscape scenes as a background for the unexpected, such as a sphinx or a shipwrecked sailing vessel. Mythology, symbolism, **surrealism**, and fantasy are all elements in Vedder's paintings, as is evident in *The Sphinx of the Seashore*. Vedder consistently referenced themes such as ruin, isolation, waste, and tragedy throughout his career. In 1865 he was elected to the National Academy of Design and became a member of the Society of American Artists.

Living once again in Italy, Vedder found it necessary to balance his commissioned paintings and his personal work. He continued to paint the dreamscape of his "inner soul" using allegory and distorted reality, while at the same time sketching and painting Italian towns and country villages, which artworks



Elihu Vedder in his studio, 1899, Rome. Courtesy of the Elihu Vedder papers 1804–1969, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

he sold to support his family. Toward the end of his life Vedder painted murals. His work can be found today on the walls of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. These five traditional paintings are entitled *Government*, *Anarchy*, *Corrupt Legislation*, *Good Administration*, and *Peace and Prosperity*. Viewing his work is a powerful experience, leaving one to wonder about the artist's visions and imagination.

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



Finished study for *Corrupt Legislation*, 1896. Oil on canvas mounted on wood, 25 x 49 in. Williams College Museum of Art, Massachusetts, gift of Miss Anita Vedder



Finished study for *Good Administration*, 1896. Oil on canvas mounted on wood, 25 x 49 in. Williams College Museum of Art, Massachusetts, gift of Miss Anita Vedder

**surrealism—interpretation that is based in the subconscious or dreams**

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Vedder use symbols and mythology in this image?
2. Why is Vedder considered a "visionary" American painter?
3. If you were to choose symbols that depicted images from your mind, what would those symbols be?



How has art raised your **AWARENESS** of  
**SOCIAL ISSUES?**

**DIEGO RIVERA**

(1886–1957)

*Two Women and a Child*, 1926

Oil canvas, 29¼ x 31½ in.

Gift of Albert M. Bender  
to the California Palace of  
the Legion of Honor  
1926.122



*Mexican muralism—for the first time in the history of monumental painting—ceased to use gods, kings, chiefs of state, heroic generals, etc., as central heroes . . . Mexican mural painting made the masses the hero of monumental art.*

From Kevin Muller, "Diego Rivera, *Two Women and a Child*: A Mural in Miniature," in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), page 326.

*My homecoming [from Europe] produced an aesthetic exhilaration which it is impossible to describe. It was as if I were being born anew, born into a new world. All the colors I saw appeared to be heightened; they were clearer, richer, finer, and more full of light. The dark tones had a depth they had never had in Europe. I was in the very center of the plastic world, where forms and colors existed in absolute purity. In everything I saw a potential masterpiece—the crowds, the markets, the festivals, the marching battalions, the workingmen in the shops and fields—in every glowing face, in every luminous child. . . .*

*. . . From then on, I worked confidently and contentedly. Gone was the doubt and inner conflict that had tormented me in Europe.*

Diego Rivera, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography*, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), page 124.

### What do Rivera's comments about fresco painting reveal about his mission as an artist?

#### ART STUDENTS HEAR RIVERA Mural Painter Speaks on Mills Campus

**seers:** persons who foretell the future

The art students of Mills College found themselves classed as **seers** charged with the anticipation of the needs and desires of a generation by Diego Rivera, artist, who was a guest and speaker on the campus recently.

Speaking in French, his translator being Mrs. Sidney Joseph of San Francisco, Rivera said "the mission of an artist is that of a seer who anticipates the needs and desires of a generation. Such a man wishes a permanent medium for his work and seeks out materials which will withstand the attacks of time. Such permanent material is the lime and sand used in **frescoes**.

**frescoes:** paintings created on a surface of plaster, especially while the plaster is still moist

"A painter of frescoes must be a combination of architect, sculptor, and painter. Murals are the most permanent and excellent form of painting as they are less susceptible than other media to the ravages of time."

Art, declared the speaker, cannot be written or talked about to any extent, as it has a language of its own and a message that makes its appeal through the eye not the ear.

*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 8, 1931, page 9.



*Allegory of California / Alegoría de California*. 1930–1931.  
Fresco. City Club of San Francisco, Pacific Stock Exchange Tower

### How do you think *Two Women and a Child* relates to the political context described by Anthony Lee?

**expropriate:** to take or transfer property from the owner, especially for public use

**Bolsheviks:** members of the Russian Communist Party

When [San Francisco patron Albert] Bender made contact with Rivera in 1926, cultural and political relations between Mexico and the United States were eroding. Mexico's president, General Plutarco Calles, became intensely hostile to American investment in his country and threatened to **expropriate** American factories, mining and oil sites, and landholdings. One observer has estimated the vastness of these investments in the mid-1920s: 97 percent of the mining sites, 50 percent of the oil industry, and 20 percent of the country's real estate were American-owned. The American presence prevented any sustained recovery on Mexico's part after the revolution and kept the country, with its huge debts and paltry per capita income, in near-servitude to northern industrialists. Calles's threat carried more weight in 1926 than in past years because he had reputedly aligned himself, at least philosophically, with the **Bolsheviks**. Dwight Morrow was sent into this volatile scene as the United States's ambassador to Mexico in November 1927. His orders were familiar ones for this post: stabilize Mexican-

American relations and secure U.S. industrial holdings in the country. His method, however, was unusual, for to pursue American interests, he worked with Mexico's main cultural administrator, José Vasconcelos, and courted Diego Rivera.

Anthony W. Lee, *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), page 51.



Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo at the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, 1930. Image courtesy of the New York Times Picture Library

### What symbolic meaning do you see in Rivera's composition?

**Renaissance:** the revival of letters and art in Europe, marking the transition from medieval to modern history.

**medieval:** belonging to the Middle Ages, which is the period of European history between antiquity and the Renaissance

**pre-Columbian:** literally meaning before Christopher Columbus, referring to the history of the Americas before European contact



*Kneeling Female*, Jalisco, Mexico, 200 B.C.–A.D. 300. Ceramic (Amica Grey), 15½ x 9¼ x 8¼ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, lent by the Land Collection. L1994.3.14

**proletarian:** relating to the working class, especially in Marxist rhetoric

**conception:** a concept, idea, plan, or design

At the end of his extended stay in Europe, Diego Rivera traveled to Italy to study the art of the **Renaissance**. There he was particularly impressed with the mural art of Paolo Uccello, the Lorenzetti, Raphael, and Michelangelo, which he viewed as a kind of “art for the masses.” Rivera saw the Renaissance murals as “visual books” for the illiterate, which were intended to function in a fashion similar to that of **medieval** cathedral façades. When Rivera returned to Mexico, he was determined to create a Mexican Renaissance with his own murals, with the intention that they too would be art for the masses. High on his proselytizing agenda was the revitalization of interest in respect for the Mexican Indians. While in Italy, Rivera had examined **pre-Columbian** and Early Colonial Mexican manuscripts in Italian collections, and he continued to study the records and remains of pre-Columbian civilizations that were available to him in Mexico, continually incorporating the fruits of his studies into his murals.

Rivera's interest in pre-Columbian civilizations was personal as well as artistic and political. He was one of the first individuals to develop a sizable collection (sixty thousand objects) of pre-Columbian artifacts, often driving himself to the brink of bankruptcy in order to purchase a prized “*idolo*.”

Betty Ann Brown, “The Past Idealized: Diego Rivera's Use of Pre-Columbian Imagery,” in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective* (Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 1986), page 139.

The year 1930 was crucial in the career of Diego Rivera for it was then that he began the first of his seven murals in the United States, all but one inspired by the country's industrial society. . . .

While this experience was fundamental to Rivera's career from an artistic perspective, it created a conflict between his artistic goals and his political convictions. In the United States, Rivera found himself in a context very different from that in the Soviet Union, where he had first laid the theoretical foundations for his concept of **proletarian** art. This opportunity to create an art for the proletariat had been made possible by capitalist patrons, and he knew that they would expect him to interpret the realities of an industrial society in a way that would be inconsistent with his own radical views. This situation and its resolution would have far-reaching effects on his work and his theoretical definition of proletarian art.

Rivera's stay in the Soviet Union from late 1927 to early 1928 had decisively influenced his **conception** of what constituted a truly proletarian art, primarily through his contact with members of the group *Octobre*. . . . *Octobre* advocated a public art capable of providing an alternative to both Socialist Realism and the art of the Soviet avant-garde. *Octobre* considered

**elitist:** believing that certain persons, classes, or groups deserve favored treatment

**Socialist Realists:** proponents of a style of art which promotes the goals of socialism and communism

the avant-garde **elitist** since their art was based on a formal, abstract language that was inaccessible to the masses, and they criticized the **Socialist Realists** for being on the one hand propagandists and on the other academicists. *Octobre* advocated the creation of an art form that would be at the service of the masses (both workers and peasants) in the international class struggle. This goal would be achieved on several levels: the production of political messages in the various artistic media, the reorganization of communal life through the creation of innovative architecture and industrial design, and the establishment of new forms of public spectacle and new methods of art education. The artist, then, should be a militant, a leader at the head of the revolutionary proletariat, creating the ideological conditions necessary for the construction of a new mode of life.

Alicia Azuela, "Rivera and the Concept of Proletarian Art," in *Diego Rivera: A Retrospective* (Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 1986), page 125.

**patron:** one who supports the arts financially



*Mother and Child*, 1926. Oil on canvas. Mills College Art Gallery, Gift of A.S. Lavenson

While completing his mural commissions in Mexico, Rivera also painted a number of easel paintings, including *Two Women and a Child* (1926), which was acquired by the San Francisco businessman and art **patron** Albert M. Bender the year it was painted. Bender's interest in Rivera may have been inspired by two contemporary San Francisco artists, the sculptor Ralph Stackpole and the painter Ray Boynton, who had traveled to Mexico to see Rivera's recent work and returned with such vivid descriptions that they sparked the interest of local art patrons. Unfortunately, because Rivera's murals adorned walls of buildings in Mexico, few of his paintings were to be seen in San Francisco. Thus in 1926 Bender purchased a number of easel paintings from the artist, including *Two Women and a Child*. Bender's acquisition of this painting fit his program of cultivating a regional art scene in San Francisco since, although Rivera was a Mexican artist, California has always had strong historical, cultural, and artistic ties with Mexico. Bender's purchases also enabled him to see examples of Rivera's mural style without actually traveling to Mexico.

The subject of *Two Women and a Child* corresponds to Rivera's declared interest in representing the working-class people of Mexico. Two women, one cradling an infant, sit across from each other in a moment of subdued conversation. The woman to the left, dressed in a pale purple dress, sits crosslegged and turns her back to the viewer. This posture focuses our attention on the two braids of thick black hair that cascade down her back and on the tiny hand of the child she cradles on her lap. The woman



Detail of Holy Family from *The Nativity of Jesus Christ* by Giotto di Bondone. © Alinari Archives/CORBIS

**symbolic:** of, pertaining to, or expressed by a symbol or symbols

**physiognomies:** faces or features considered as revealing character or disposition

**referents:** objects or concepts to which reference is made

**determinate:** definitely limited or fixed; specific; distinct

**didactic:** intended to instruct

**tendentious:** having a proposed aim

opposite her, wearing a pale blue skirt and blouse, sits facing the viewer with her legs tucked beneath her and her hands clasped in her lap. She looks intently and attentively in the direction of the other woman. The sparse setting consists of a mat, an ambiguous blue and white background, and an unadorned ceramic bowl in which the artist signed his name and dated the painting. The women's warm brown skin, jet black hair, broad faces, peasant-style clothing, and the spartan setting are all intended to invoke a scene of rural Mexico. . . .

. . . by painting *Two Women and a Child* to look like a fresco, Rivera gave these women a historical weight that corresponded with his vision of the significance of the laboring peasantry in world history. Unlike Giotto's fresco, Rivera's painting lacks a narrative, and therefore the theme of his painting is largely **symbolic**. To this end, the women appear as generic types, lacking individualized **physiognomies** or clothes. They also are larger than life. They occupy nearly the entire compositional space and, because no other objects or scale **referents** are visible (other than the small, unadorned bowl in the right foreground), they dominate the canvas in truly monumental fashion. By forcing us to focus on these figures, Rivera makes us aware of the pyramidal massing of their seated bodies, which, when combined with Rivera's technique of modeling the figures with broad strokes, imparts a solidity that anchors each of them to the earth. As a result, these women appear as iconic Earth Mother types who possess within them the natural processes of creation and nourishment, a theme underscored by the infant in the woman's lap and the empty bowl in the foreground.

Kevin Muller, "Diego Rivera, *Two Women and a Child*: A Mural in Miniature," in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), page 326–329.

[Rivera's] "populist modernism" . . . also functioned as a form of "epic modernity," that instead of just relating already resolved stories, called for new political choices at **determinate** historical crossroads in order to advance various causes yet to be fully defined or definitively told. This artistic operation of requiring active viewer involvement to make sense of the artwork—and in this case of history—is more a modernist strategy than a populist one. The populist relation to the spectator is generally one that presents "resolved" stories that generally enforce viewer passivity. Put another way, "alternative modernism" initiates a dialogue with the viewer, while straight populism has a largely **didactic** or **tendentious** relationship with the viewer.

David Craven, *Diego Rivera: As Epic Modernist* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1997), page 59.

## About the Artist

Famous for crafting legends about his family history, **Diego Rivera** (1886–1957) claimed that an indigenous woman found him as an infant and raised him for the first two years of his life. In reality, Rivera's parents suffered the loss of three infants before the birth of Diego and his twin brother, José. At age eleven, Rivera enrolled in the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts in Mexico City. In 1907 Rivera moved to Europe, studying first in Madrid and then in Paris, where he met Pablo Picasso and began to experiment with the fragmented perspective of cubism.

In 1918 Rivera clarified his artistic goals. Seeking to communicate with the “common man,” he rejected cubism, preferring to paint murals



**Jacques Lipchitz** (*Portrait of a Young Man*). Paris 1914. Oil on canvas, 25% x 21% in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of T. Gatesby Jones

that could bring art to the people. His interest in mural painting grew during a 1920 trip to Italy, where he studied the work of Renaissance masters such as Michelangelo, Giotto, and Piero della Francesca.

In 1921 Rivera returned to Mexico, where he and several other artists started the Mexican Muralist movement. In addition to modernism and pre-Columbian art, Rivera's mature artistic style was influenced by his political involvement with the Mexican Communist Party, which he joined in 1922.

Accompanied by his second wife, Frida Kahlo, Rivera traveled to San Francisco in 1930. The government initially blocked the artist's entry into the United States due to his Communist affiliation. Albert M. Bender, who purchased *Two Women and a Child*, interceded on the artist's behalf. During his visit, Rivera painted murals for the Pacific Stock Exchange and the San Francisco Art Institute. In 1932, Rivera traveled to Detroit. The murals at the Detroit Institute of Arts are among the finest created by Rivera. Yet none of the American commissions received as much media attention as the murals created for the lobby of Rockefeller Center in New York City. Upon noticing the head of Lenin in the composi-



**Diego Rivera**, ca. 1930, Courtesy of John Weatherwax papers relating to Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, 1928–1988, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

tion, Nelson and John D. Rockefeller demanded that the detail be painted out. Rivera refused, leaving New York without completing the mural, which was ultimately destroyed.

Returning to Mexico, Rivera continued to work for the next twenty-four years. While Rivera's affiliation with the Communist Party led some to define his work as Social Realism, his style is uniquely his own. Drawing on the spatial collapse of cubism, the proportion of Italian Renaissance frescoes, and the iconography of pre-Columbian cultures, Rivera created an artistic vocabulary that allowed him to achieve his ultimate objective: communicating with the masses.

Emily K. Doman Jennings, Museum Educator,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the composition of *Two Women and a Child* promote “active viewer involvement” as described by David Craven?
2. What artistic traditions influenced Rivera's work? How do you see these influences represented in *Two Women and a Child*?
3. In what ways did Rivera's political beliefs shape his concerns as an artist?
4. Do you think Rivera represents the two women in the painting as heroes of “monumental art”? Incorporate details from the painting to support your opinion.



How do **communal**  
activities inform your **identity**?

### GRANT WOOD

(1891–1942)

*Dinner for Threshers*, 1934

Oil on hardboard panel,  
20 x 80 in.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D.  
Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.105



*The farmer is not articulate. Self-expression through literature and art belong not the set of relationships with which he is familiar (those with weather, tools, and growing things), but to more socialized systems. He is almost wholly preoccupied with his struggle against the elements, with the fundamental things of life. . . .*

*But the very fact that the farmer is not himself vocal makes him the richest kind of material for the writer and the artist. He needs interpretation. Serious, sympathetic handling of farmer-material offers a great field for the careful worker. The life of the farmer, engaged in a constant conflict with natural forces, is essentially dramatic. . . .*

*Occasionally I have been accused of being a flag-waver for my own part of the country. I do believe in the Middle West—in its people and in its art, and in the future of both—and this with no **derogation** to other sections. I believe in the Middle West in spite of abundant knowledge of its faults. Your true regionalist is not a mere eulogist; he may even be a severe critic. I believe in the **regional movement** in art and letters.*

**derogation:** a disparaging or belittling

**regional movement:** a movement taking place in a particular area

Grant Wood, *Revolt Against the City*, (Iowa City: Clio Press, 1935), pages 233–234.

*I lived in Paris a couple of years myself and grew a very spectacular beard that didn't match my face or my hair, and read **Mencken** and was convinced that the Middle West was inhibited and barren. But I came back because I learned that French painting is very fine for French people and not necessarily for us, and because I started to analyze what it was I really knew. I found out. It's Iowa. . . .*

**Mencken:** an American journalist, essayist, magazine editor, and satirist.

*[Dinner for Threshers] was painted with my paint and my brushes on my own time. It is of and by me and readers have no right to force upon me their families, their clothing, their hens, or their screen doors.*

From Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*: The Regionalist Renaissance," in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), pages 338–341.

### Taking into account the words italicized below, how would you characterize the author's comments?

[Italics added]

Although [Wood] traveled abroad in the years 1920, 1923–24, 1926, and 1928, he always returned to his home in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and he remained largely *untouched* and *uninfluenced* by modern art styles. He is said to have tried to paint a few abstract canvases in 1924 and, after his trip in 1926, he **provisionally** discovered material for art in commonplace objects. On his last and most significant visit abroad, Wood journeyed to Munich to execute a stained-glass window that had been commissioned for the Cedar Rapids Memorial Building and City Hall, in memory of the veterans of World War I. While in Munich, he responded to the sharp, realistic detail and to the glazing techniques of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German paintings, which he studied in the Alte Pinakothek. Wood also saw several paintings of Otto Dix, the contemporary German realist, and felt that Dix's style could be adapted for American use. Altogether, Wood left Munich with a new respect for smooth, tautly defined forms and for a less **expressionistic** handling of the paint brush. Quite possibly, he also became increasingly preoccupied with the idea of revealing through art one's sense of national heritage or at least one's national awareness. . . .

**provisionally:** temporarily

**expressionistic:** a style of art that expresses symbolism and intense emotion

**hayseed:** an unsophisticated rural-dweller

**buffoon:** fool

Clearly, [Wood] loved the land, but he did not necessarily love all that occurred on it. Possibly, his landscapes are not the love poems they seem to be. Wood was *neither a provincial hayseed nor a buffoon*. He must have been aware of the number of farm foreclosures during 1931 and 1932, which ran as high as 25 percent in some areas of the state. He must also have been conscious of the false local pride that afflicts many rural areas in

the best, and certainly in the worst, of times. His concern for Middle Western subjects did "not proceed from a 'booster spirit' for any particular locality," he said. As one looks at his immaculately groomed, cartoon-like landscapes, one almost expects *continued on inside left flap*



*Death on the Ridge Road*, 1935. Oil on Masonite panel, 32 x 39 in. Williams College Museum of Art, Gift of Cole Porter, 47.1.3

Porky Pig to bounce out of the shrubbery. Thus, it is possible that Wood knowingly allowed his landscapes to accord with the lowan image of the land and ignored the current realities. The paintings look too neat to be taken *seriously*.

**fathom:** understand thoroughly

**American Scene movement:** dating from 1931–1940, an artistic movement reacting against European Modernism and seeking to create a uniquely American, realist style.

**emanated:** proceeded or flowed

Wood's attitudes toward the development of American art are much easier to **fathom** than his paintings, since his feelings are in fact representative of the entire **American Scene movement**. Like others seeking an American cultural expression, he opposed an art that merely reflected foreign styles or that **emanated** from a single part of the country: "A national expression cannot be built upon the activity of a few solitary individuals or be isolated in a few tourist-ridden localities or tourist centers." But unlike Benton, he did not seek an American style. The time was not ripe for such an occurrence. Rather, a first step lay "in the development of regional art centers and competition among them." Subsequently, the fusion of regional expressions would produce a genuine American art, Wood believed. He and his contemporaries were, in effect, carrying on the basic research necessary for such a development. He further believed that a breakthrough would occur in the Middle West, because this region was not already "covered with palette scrapings" and because its people had the strength of character to break the European mold that gripped art in the East.

Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s*  
(New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), pages 109 and 111.

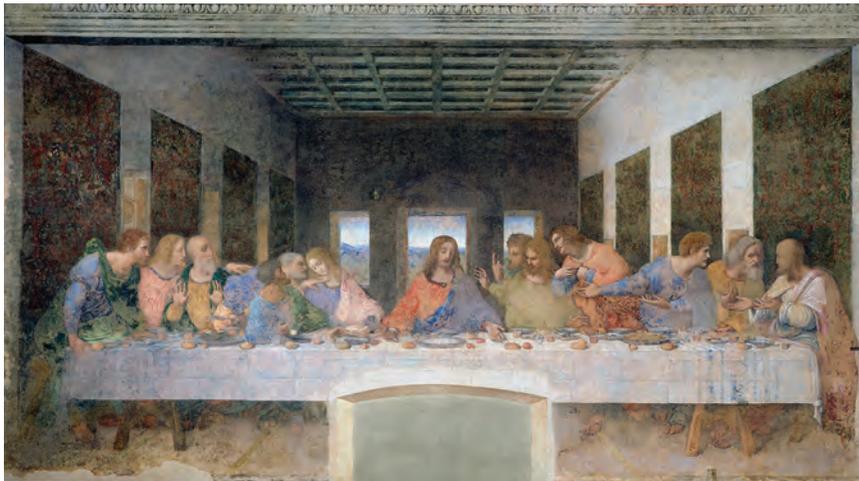
### In what light does the curator portray both the art and the artist? How does this contrast with the historian's comments?

*Dinner for Threshers* was inspired by Wood's 1933 visit to the "Johnson Farm" outside Cedar Rapids during the annual threshing ritual, one of the most important economic and social events for farming families. In late July or early August, neighboring farmers joined in a communal "threshing ring" to harvest the winter oat or wheat crop. Harvester machines cut and bound the crop, which was then fed into a threshing machine to separate the grain kernels from the straw stalks and chaff. While men and boys worked in the fields, women and girls worked in the kitchen, preparing dinner for the threshing crew. Taking this dinner as his primary subject, Wood created at least three **meticulous** studies for the final **tripartite composition**.

**meticulous:** extremely careful

**tripartite composition:** a composition in three parts

However, internal evidence reveals that *Dinner for Threshers* is set in the past, not in the 1930s. Few Depression-era farms still relied exclusively on windmills, horses, kerosene lamps, hand pumps, and wood-burning stoves. In 1934 women would have worn their dresses not floor-length, but between the ankle and the knee. . . .



Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, ca. 1495–1498. Fresco, 29 ft. 10 in. x 13 ft. 9 in. Refectory, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan © The Gallery Collection/Corbis

**temporal concerns:** concerns that do not last

. . . In *Dinner for Threshers*, which Wood had hoped to enlarge into a large-scale mural, he borrowed not only formal elements but also the content, which is reminiscent of Renaissance murals that depict the biblical Last Supper. This startling connection endows Wood's farmers, participants in the ancient community ritual of harvest communion, with the dignity of the biblical disciples partaking of a sacramental meal. It also enables Wood's painting, which is already

set in the past (i.e., 1900), to further transcend the **temporal concerns** of the Great Depression, which included one of the most prolonged dust bowl droughts in American history, and farm foreclosures that ran as high as 25 percent in some parts of Iowa in 1931 and 1932.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*: The Regionalist Renaissance," pages 338–341

### What elements in Wood's painting would you need to change to represent the comments below?

#### AGRICULTURE IN DANGER

The Senate debate on the agricultural appropriation bill has brought out many facts which prove that rural conditions throughout the United States are so unsatisfactory as to be the cause of well-founded uneasiness concerning the ultimate effect on the general body of the public. By men who are accustomed to weigh their words and who spoke with knowledge . . . unless a speedy change for the better takes place, a real food shortage may be expected in the near future and that many people will go hungry in what hitherto has been a land of plenty and even of superabundance.

**salient:** prominent, noticeable

Among the **salient** points developed was the tendency alike of farmers and farm hands to leave the country for the city. A recent survey of 3,775 holdings in the State of New York showed a decrease of 3 per cent of farmers and of 17 per cent of hired laborers, a ration which if, as is believed, it holds good for the whole State, means that 35,000 men have yielded to the city's lure. The same conditions exist in the middle West, the food center of the world. In Iowa, for example, the figures show that not more than one-third of the farm boys who were in the army have gone back to the farms. The inevitable result is a decrease in the production of pork, beef and wheat.

**sinister:** dangerous, evil, threatening harm

Perhaps the most **sinister** feature developed by the debate is the increase of tenant farmers. In some States this evil is more pronounced than in others. It is especially prevalent in Kansas, Missouri, Indiana and Ohio. Some of the counties in those States show percentages of tenants running as high as 55, 60 and 72. For the whole country the trend is decidedly upward. The proportion in 1880 was 25.6; in 1890, 28.4; in 1900, 35.3; in 1910, 37; and it is thought that this year's census will reveal a proportion of between 45 and 50 per cent. All history teaches that the condition of a tenant farmer becomes in the long run little better than that of a serf, and that the establishment of a rural landlord class is in the highest degree undesirable. The harrowing story of the land question in Ireland for the 200 years preceding 1903 is a case specially in point. It is **axiomatic** that it is only home and landowners who will build up a prosperous and contented agriculture.

**axiomatic:** true or self-evident

**In the aftermath of severe inflation, military police keep the order to allow a farm auction to proceed. Image Courtesy of Library of Congress**



The remedies for the evils complained of are not easy to find and apply, but it is evident that among them are the removal of artificial restrictions on the sale of farm products, a better system of distribution and marketing, including the free use of cooperation, improved roads, an enlightened effort to remove the reproach of dullness from country life and a closer and more sympathetic study of rural problems on the part of the government. In America, as elsewhere, it is quite likely that legislation of a drastic character, but involving the principle of compensation, will be needed to put an end to the dangerous tenant system.

*Washington Post*, March 28, 1920. From ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *Washington Post* (1877–1991), page 26.

## About the Artist

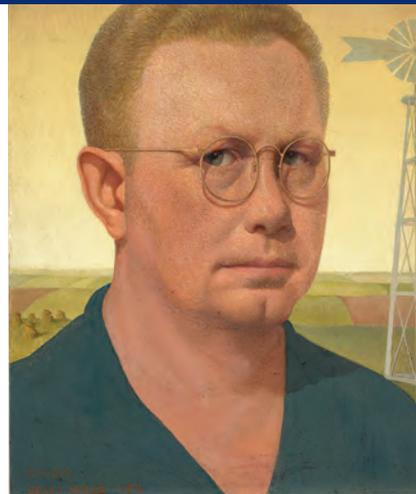
**Grant Wood** (1891–1942) is best known for his representations of the American Midwest and agrarian life. He grew up in America’s heartland—Iowa—the son of a farmer. As his high school did not offer art instruction, Wood took lessons from local artists and correspondence courses through the mail. He helped to illustrate his high school yearbook. At the age of seventeen Wood took a job at a silversmith shop in Chicago, making jewelry by day so that he could attend night classes at the Art Institute of Chicago.



**American Gothic**, 1930. Oil on beaver board, 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 24<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Friends of American Art Collection, 1930.934. Photograph © 1994 The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved

During World War I, Wood worked as a camouflage painter for the U.S. Army. After receiving a commission for a stained-glass window to memorialize the veterans of the war, he traveled to Munich, Germany, to learn the craft. It was during this time that Wood studied early French and German painters. Remaining true to his Iowa roots, he returned to the United States to work with the Works Progress Administration, a government agency that employed many artists during the Great Depression. Upon graduation from college, Wood became a teacher, working first in a one-room schoolhouse and later at a junior high and high school. In 1934, he began teaching at the University of Iowa’s School of Arts. He continued to expand the range of his talents and explore other genres, such as learning the crafts of metalwork, carpentry, and design. A friend offered him a job designing a mortuary. As part of the agreement Wood received a free studio allowing him to work full time as an artist.

Wood’s work is often considered to be “regionalist” because he portrayed life as he saw it in the mid-western region of the United States. *American Gothic* is perhaps



**Self-Portrait**, 1932. Oil on Masonite panel, 14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. Davenport Museum of Art, 65.1

his most famous work, portraying a farmer and his daughter. This painting, in which the viewer looks straight at the two austere individuals, depicts the simplicity and difficulty of rural life in America. Wood’s paintings are pictorial representations of the values he treasured: hard work, tilling the land, growing one’s own food, and caring for family and workers. In keeping with the pioneer spirit of his roots, Wood, who was always photographed wearing overalls, is quoted as saying, “all the good ideas I have come to me while I was milking a cow.”

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe this image accurately portrays aspects of America? Why or why not?
2. Describe the various influences on this artist.
3. Is this picture a “love poem” to the land? Why or why not?
4. How does Wood use art to portray everyday subjects?



What are the consequences of being **silent** in the face of **injustice?**

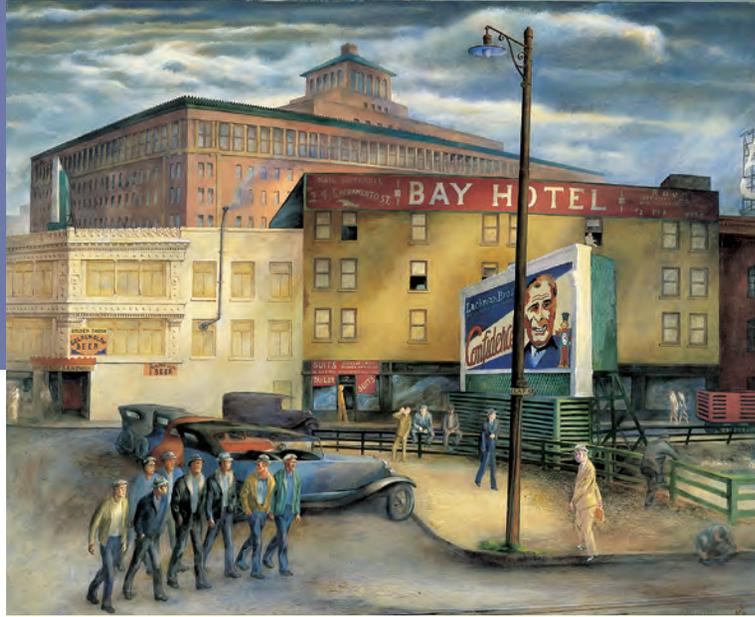
**JOHN LANGELY  
HOWARD**

(1902–1999)

*Embarcadero and Clay Street,*  
1935

Oil on canvas, 35 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 43 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.

Museum purchase,  
Dr. Leland A. Barber and  
Gladys K. Barber Fund  
2002.96



*I tend to ponder, to imagine the consequences of what I might say or do, and that's the way with my work—it's a slow, feeling process. . . .*

*I want everything to be meaningful in a descriptive way. I want expression, and at the same time I want to control it down to a gnat's eyebrow. I identify with my subject. I empathize with my subject. I think of painting as poetry and I think of myself as a representational poet. I want to describe my subject minutely, but I also want to describe my emotional response to it. . . . what I'm doing is making a self-portrait in a peculiar kind of way.*

From Stacey Moss, *The Howards: First Family of Bay Area Modernism*  
(Oakland: Oakland Museum, 1988), pages 61–62.

### How do the comments below color your interpretation of *Embarcadero and Clay Street*?



Front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Friday, July 6, 1934. Image courtesy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*

**crescendo:** the peak of a gradual increase

**Gettysburg:** Pennsylvania city where a historic Civil War battle took place

**Budapest:** Hungarian city where there was much civil unrest

**nonchalance:** indifference; lack of caring

Blood ran red in the streets of San Francisco yesterday.

In the darkest day this city has known since April 18, 1906, 1,000 embattled police held at bay 5,000 longshoremen and their sympathizers in a sweeping front south of Market Street and east of Second Street.

The furies of street warfare raged for hours piled on hours.

Two were dead, one was dying, 32 others shot and more than three-score sent to hospitals.

Hundreds were injured or badly gassed. Still the strikers surged up and down the sunlit streets among thousands of foolhardy spectators. Still the clouds of tear gas, the very air darkened with hurtling bricks. Still the revolver battles.

As the middle of the day wore on in indescribable turmoil the savagery of the conflict was in rising **crescendo**. The milling mobs fought with greater desperation, knowing the troops were coming; the police held to hard-won territory with grim resolution.

It was a **Gettysburg** in the miniature, with towering warehouses thrown in for good measure. It was one of those days you think of as coming to **Budapest**.

The purpose of it all was this: The State of California had said it would operate its waterfront railroad. The strikers had defied the State of California to do it. The police had to keep them off. They did.

Take out a San Francisco map and draw a line along Second street south from Market to the bay. It passes over Rincon Hill. That is the west boundary. Market is the north of the battlefield.

Not a street in that big sector but saw its flying lead yesterday, not a street that wasn't trampled by thousands of flying feet as the tide of battle swung high and low, as police drove them back, as they drove police back in a momentary victory.

Don't think of this as a riot. It was a hundred riots, big and little, first there, now there. Don't think of it as one battle, but as a dozen battles.

And with a **nonchalance** which was dumfounding at times, San Franciscans, just plain citizens bent on business in automobiles and afoot, moved to and fro in the battle area.

### How do the two curators cited below assign meaning to *Embarcadero and Clay Street*?

**Depression:** The Great Depression (1929–1945) an era marked by high unemployment, falling prices, and a severe decline in business

**propaganda:** an effort to persuade people to support a particular opinion or course of action

**coalesced:** came together into one

**verisimilitude:** appearance of truth

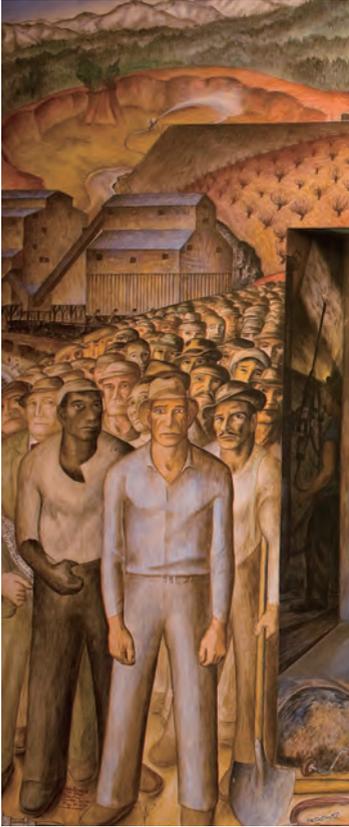
**foreboding:** sensing coming disaster

**precarious:** unstable

[His] own leftist political leanings . . . guaranteed that Howard's rendering of contemporary American life would depict the harsh social and political realities of the **Depression** rather than simply celebrate regional characteristics through picturesque images. His mural [in Coit Tower], *California Industrial Scenes*, portrayed a river of workers being squeezed out of the land as California's natural beauty and abundance are destroyed by technological plunder. Not surprisingly, his was one of the four murals that caused a public uproar, generating charges of "communist **propaganda**" and delaying the tower's opening.

*Embarcadero and Clay Street*, 1935, captures the tensions that had surfaced in the Coit Tower murals and then **coalesced** during the 1934 General Strike by fifty-five thousand waterfront laborers. These tensions exploded in the violence of "Bloody Thursday" on July 5, a date probably referenced in the large sign partially seen at the painting's upper-right-hand edge. In the foreground, workers walk in solidarity down the middle of the street while a man in a suit turns back to look uneasily at them. His obvious nervousness contradicts the supposed "confidence" of his middle-class position represented in the billboard above him. The sleek, modern automobiles ironically rhyme the line of laborers, testament to the benefits of a technological economy they support but whose products are unavailable to them.

Howard represents the local scene with details that lend it **verisimilitude**. Lachman Brothers, Golden Glow Beer, and the Bay Hotel were all familiar icons in 1934 San Francisco. The intersection of Embarcadero and Clay situates this scene at the waterfront, where the labor tensions were the most acute. The similar gray tonalities of the road and sky bound the scene and invest it with an ominous, oppressive weight that extends to the monumental buildings, lending them a dominating, industrial, and gloomy presence emphasized by the unlit streetlamp. Adding to the scene's **foreboding** sensibility, isolated figures contrast dramatically with the group of workers who walk with a sense of organized purpose. Howard has created an urban landscape that combines commonplace realism with symbolic references, depicting the **precarious** balance of hope and despair at the heart of American progress.



A detail from Howard's Coit Tower mural, depicting workers marching shoulder to shoulder. John Langley Howard, *California Industrial Scenes*, 1934. Coit Tower Murals. Image courtesy of Jennifer Tong

It is locale that also supplies the tension in John Langely Howard's *Embarcadero and Clay*, 1935. Although today the picture is somewhat difficult to read, in 1936 Howard's references were so apparent that the canvas was proclaimed a "frankly propagandizing picture." The intersection of Embarcadero and Clay is near the Ferry Building and the center of San Francisco's wharf activity. Therein lies the meaning of this distinct urban landscape. According to the artist, the painting depicts the ominous hours before the longshoremen's strike in the summer of 1934. At left are men of the union committee on their way to a meeting. The businessman at right eyes the group with fear. Quite uncharacteristically, dark clouds hang over the city, and in the background Howard adds an important symbolic note: a figure in the top floor window of the Bay Hotel holds his hand out to check for rain; "Is there a storm brewing?" he asks.

For all the charges of propagandizing that surrounded *Embarcadero and Clay*, Howard's picture is in fact strangely ambiguous. Howard himself had been deeply involved in the struggle on the labor side, as his brother-in-law was one of the striking longshoremen. And he had not shrunk from injecting his leftist politics into his controversial government-sponsored mural in Coit Tower in 1934, as the public well remembered. Yet this picture includes no such overt signs of Howard's sympathies. All the figures impart equal amounts of hostility and vulnerability. Reaction to this picture would seem to be tied to whatever interpretation one chose to make of the events of 1934



With a power plant in the background, Howard juxtaposes the harsh living conditions of the poor, symbolized by the Ford Model T and the tent, with the luxury of the finely dressed visitors who survey the scene after exiting their yellow limousine. John Langley Howard, *California Industrial Scenes*, 1934. Coit Tower Murals. Image courtesy of Jennifer Tong

themselves, and there were, indeed, many conflicting points of view: "To most Americans there is something foreign about a general strike, and a bit ominous—like the . . . storm troopers, socialists, communists, fascists, and a host of other things that used to seem farther away than they are now," wrote Paul Taylor and Norman Leon Gold in *Survey Graphic* in September 1934, "But to many on the Pacific Coast, experience has made the general strike at least real, however differently they may interpret it—as a splendid demonstration of the strength and 'solidarity of labor,' a victory for the 'real soldiers of labor,' a 'sell-out,' by labor 'fakirs,' a 'strikers' dictatorship,' or an 'insurrection.' "

It is the idea of human conflict that Howard pictorializes and deploras—man's tragic flaw **manifest** again in this particular situation.

Steven A. Nash, *Facing Eden: 100 Years of Landscape Art in the Bay Area* (San Francisco, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1995), pages 76 and 79.

### According to Kimeldorf, what may have been some of the concerns or motivations that prompted the strike?

By 1930 West Coast ship owners could openly boast that labor output per worker was higher in San Francisco than in any other port in the world. “Short gangs” of four to six men were working on the docks and in the holds of vessels where formerly eight to ten men had been employed. “Accidents occur constantly,” noted a contemporary source, “due to the speed-up, overloading, and rotten gear.” The large surplus of men who shaped up for work every morning along San Francisco’s fog-shrouded Embarcadero was swollen by the nationally depressed economy into a sizable army of four to five thousand desperate job seekers. “The waterfront was just full of people looking for work,” recalls San Francisco longshoreman Germain Bulcke, “and if you got into any kind of an argument with the boss or if he didn’t like you, he’d point and say: ‘Look, if you don’t shape up there are fifty men out there waiting to take your job,’ which was true.” A rank-and-file newspaper, reporting on the resulting speed-up in San Francisco, observed in 1933: “While only a few years back 18 to 20 tons was the average for a gang, and 25 tons was considered exceptional, today 60 to 75 tons an hour is common—a three-fold increase.” That same year wages were slashed to seventy-five cents an hour, the lowest rate in twenty-five years. . . .

The effects of the maritime strike were also felt locally. Workers in other West Coast industries, inspired by the longshoremen’s heroic example, began organizing and demanding union recognition. Loggers in the Northwest, warehouse workers in California, and fishermen in Alaska all won important union victories after the maritime strike.

Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988), page 83.

### How does the past inform the present? What would be different now if the strike had failed?

There is a simple explanation why the longshoremen have benefited so much from globalization. They control the chokepoints that can halt the flow of imports and exports that American consumers and businesses depend on. In other words the 10,500 longshoremen on the West Coast have the power to paralyze the \$300 billion in cargo that flows through these ports every year.

In the past, management has often surrendered to the demands of dockworkers—granting them fat wages and benefits—instead of enduring a strike or slowdown. This time, officials with the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents port operators and shipping lines, shut 29 ports last week and locked out the workers after complaining that the workers were engaged in a slowdown. The association wants the right to introduce new technology to speed cargo handling, while the International Longshore and Warehouse Union wants the remaining jobs to be under its jurisdiction. . . .

If workers at U.S. Steel or Caterpillar strike, it is easy for their customers to buy steel or tractors from competitors. But if the longshoremen walk out, shipping lines cannot divert their cargo to other ports. Mexico's ports and roads cannot handle the cargo, Canadian longshoremen won't unload the diverted ships, and East Coast ports are unavailable because the Panama Canal is too small to handle the huge Pacific ships. . . .

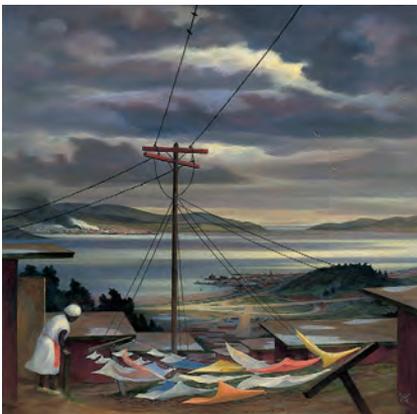
Taking globalization to heart, the union has found partners in Europe, Japan, and elsewhere, where longshoremen are also blue-collar elite. The longshoremen have often used their clout to back each other up against lower-wage nonunion competitors. Several years ago, for example, Japanese dockworkers, who have almost total control over shipping operations in Japan, heeded a request from American longshoremen not to unload fruit shipped from a nonunion port in Florida.

Steven Greenhouse, "The \$100,000 Longshoremen: Union Wins the Global Game,"  
*New York Times*, October 6, 2002: section 4, pages 1, 3.

## About the Artist

**John Langley Howard** (1902–1999) grew up in a family that provided a cultural legacy in the Bay Area through architecture, sculpture, painting, and poetry. He was interested in making things with his hands and wanted to become an engineer. After failing his examinations he dropped out to travel the Western states by motorcycle and eventually enrolled in art school—a career-focus change that would lead to some of his most emotionally powered and politically conscious artwork, created during the 1920s and 1930s.

Howard has been described as a loner and a wanderer, keeping a



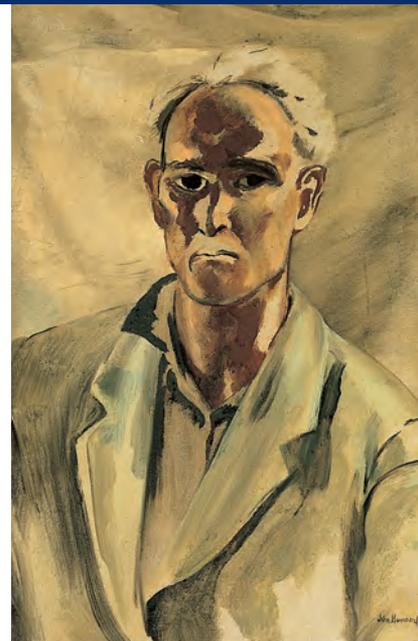
**Storm Coming (San Francisco Bay), 1951.** Oil on board. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of the artist, 1952.6

low profile throughout his career and not able to stay in one place for too long. He lived in Monterey, Santa Fe, Greece, London, and San Francisco, perhaps reflecting the Howard family's tendency to be influenced by their extensive travel and involvement in the European art scene. Langley described himself as a mainly self-taught artist who, while in school, was “against studying things properly.”

As the world changed, Langley's artistic style changed with it. In the 1930s he communicated his political views through Social Realism. After the outbreak of World War II, Langley lost his hope that art could bring social change, dropped human figures from his work, and turned



**Abstraction, 1950.** Casein on paper. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of the artist, 1991.2.9



**Self-Portrait, 1925.** Oil on canvas. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of the artist, 1991.4.1

to landscape painting. From 1953 to 1964, Howard worked as an illustrator for *Scientific American*. His work for the magazine displays an adept technical ability and an interest in the emotional quality of the subject.

Langley continued to paint and exhibit in San Francisco until his death in 1999.

Tess Spinola, graduate of School of the Arts, San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What solutions would you propose for labor issues, and how can you defend these solutions based on the information in this reading?
2. Consider the labor tensions from both 1934 and 2002. What are the issues in both? Identify some of the key issues between labor and management in the period of 1934.
3. What actually occurs during a labor strike?
4. Based on this image and the reading, what would you say is this artist's position on labor issues? Defend your position using specific examples.



Was *JOHN BROWN* a *TERRORIST*?

**HORACE PIPPIN**

(1888–1946)

*Trial of John Brown*, 1942

Oil on canvas, 16½ x 20⅞ in.

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D.

Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.82



*Now those young artists [referring to the students at the Barnes Foundation] worry about the sky. They argue about how it should be. It never worries me. I just paint it like it is.*

*. . . I paint things exactly the way they are. . . I don't do what these white guys do. I don't go around here making up a whole lot of stuff. I paint it exactly the way it is and exactly the way I see it.*

From Judith E. Stein, "An American Original," in *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, ed. Judith E. Stein et al. (New York: Universe Publishing, 1993), page 16.

### What evidence does the reporter offer that substantiates Pippin's depiction of John Brown's trial?

**conspirators:** those who secretly plan or plot to commit a harmful or unlawful act

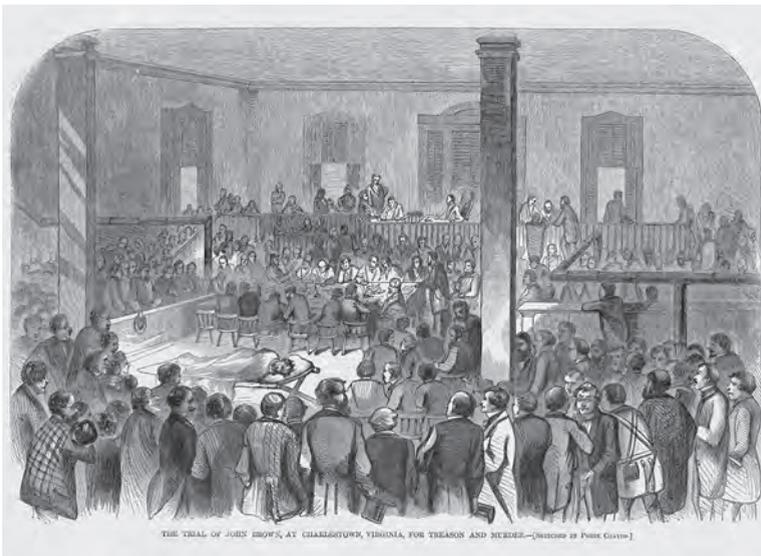
The trial of Brown and other Harper's Ferry **conspirators** commenced here to-day, in the Magistrates' Court. Col. Davenport was the principal Justice, and the following Magistrates were associated with him on the bench: Dr. Alexander, John J. Lock, John F. Smith, Thomas H. Willis, George W. Eichelberger, Charles A. Lewis, and Moses W. Burr.

At 10½ o'clock the Sheriff was directed to bring in the prisoners, who were conducted from the jail under a guard of eighty armed men. A guard was also stationed around the Court. The Court House was bristling with bayonets on all sides.

**manacled:** chained or locked  
**haggard:** exhausted, tired

Charles B. Harding, Esq., acted as attorney for the county, assisted by Andrew Hulter, counsel for the commonwealth. The prisoners were brought in, Brown and Edwin Copice, **manacled** together. Brown seemed weak and **haggard** with eyes swollen from the effects of wounds on the head. Copice is uninjured. Stephens seemed less injured than Brown, but looked haggard and depressed. Both have a number of wounds on the head.

John Copland is a bright mulatto, 25 years old, and Green, a dark negro, aged about 30.



*The Trial of John Brown, at Charlestown, Virginia, for Treason and Murder (Harpers Weekly vol. III, no. 150, November 12, 1859)*

Sheriff Campbell read the commitment of the prisoners, who were charged with treason and murder.

Mr. Harding, the Attorney for the State, asked that the Court might assign counsel for the prisoners, if they had none.

*continued on inside left flap*

**mitigating circumstances:**  
conditions that justify or lessen  
the severity of a situation

The Court then inquired if the prisoners had counsel, when Brown addressed the Court as follows: “I did not ask to have my life spared. The Governor of the State of Virginia tendered me his assurance that I should have a fair trial, and under no circumstance whatever will I be able to have a fair trial. If you seek my blood you can have it at any moment, without this mockery of a trial. I have had no counsel; I have not been able to advise with any one. I know nothing about the feelings of my fellow prisoners, and am utterly unable to attend in any way to my own defense. My memory don’t serve me; my health is insufficient, although improving.—There are **mitigating circumstances** that I would urge in our favor if a fair trial is to be allowed us; but if we are to be forced with a mere form of trial for execution, you might save yourselves that trouble. I am ready for my fate. I did not ask a trial. I beg for no mockery of a trial—no insult—nothing but that which conscience gives or cowardice would drive you to practice. I ask again to be excused from the mockery of a trial. I do not even know what the special design of this examination is; I do not know what is to be the benefit of it to the commonwealth.

“I have now little further to ask other than that I may not be foolishly insulted. Only cowardly barbarians insult those who fall into their power.”

At the conclusion of Brown’s remarks, the Court assigned Charles J. Faulkner and Lawson Botts as counsel for the prisoners. The first named gentleman, after a brief consultation with Brown and the others, addressed the Court, stating that he could not, under any circumstances, enter upon the defense on so short a notice—it would be but a mockery of justice.

“Examination of the Harper’s Ferry Rioters,” *The Pittsfield Sun*, October 27, 1859, vol. 60, no. 3084, page 3. Copyrighted by American Antiquarian Society, 2004.

In the excerpt below the author discusses both the historical sources Pippin drew upon to create his work and characterizes the artist's career. How do Pippin's own statements about his practice relate to Powell's discussion of his career? In your opinion, what does Powell really think about Pippin?

**marauders:** individuals involved in raiding or plundering

In two of his paintings on the life and times of John Brown, Horace Pippin moved viewers ahead to the events after Brown's ill-fated assault on Harper's Ferry. On October 16, 1859, Brown, along with twenty-one armed followers, seized the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, in hopes of inciting a rebellion among the blacks of the region. After relocating to an adjacent fire-engine house and a day and a half of hostage-taking, sniping, and arson, Brown and his six remaining **marauders** were eventually subdued by the U.S. Cavalry and Marines.

Captured, jailed, and then placed on trial that same month, John Brown instantly became a national figure, and consequently, the Harper's Ferry assault became an instance of nationwide concern. A wounded John Brown, as Pippin depicted him in *The Trial of John Brown*, lies on a cot before a Virginia jury of twelve men and a prosecuting attorney in shirtsleeves. Were it not for Brown's reclining position on his cot, his characteristic open bible, and his incriminating carpetbag at his side, viewers might confuse him with the prosecuting lawyer and the jurors, all of whom have similar beards, hair, and perhaps, the same "wild-man" potential as Brown.



*John Brown Going to His Hanging*, 1942. Oil on fabric, 24 x 30 in.  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, John Lambert Fund, 1943.11

After being found guilty, John Brown was sentenced to "death by hanging," to be carried out on December 2, 1859. . . . In contrast to the other John Brown paintings (as well as the Abraham Lincoln paintings), *John Brown Going to His Hanging* prominently features an African-American woman among Pippin's virtually all-white, all-male cast of characters. Wearing light blue gingham and a scowling facial expression, this black woman introduces into this historical series by Pippin the one and only instance of a black presence in the Emancipation story, and a black point of view in regard to events in American history. Pippin, in numerous accounts of this painting, described the woman as his mother, who, he alleged, was a witness that day to



**John Brown Reading His Bible, 1942.** Oil on canvas board, 16 x 20 in. Formerly the Crispo Collection, Charleston, South Carolina

**paternalism:** the care or control of a country, community, or group in a manner suggestive of a father looking after his children

**benevolent:** desiring to do good for others

**naiveté:** quality of innocence

**belie:** contradict or give a false impression of

Brown’s hanging. Harriet Irwin Pippin (1834, Charlestown, West Virginia—1908, Goshen, New York) was a likely witness to Brown’s execution that December day in 1859. Pippin’s implication that *he*—via a blood relative—was part of this historic event, demonstrated his deep sense that the shifting tides of history *did* impact profoundly upon him as well as other black Americans. . . .

Do Pippin’s paintings of Abraham Lincoln and John Brown emanate purely from a deep sense of the historical, or do they spring from his perspective as an observer in a society that concurrently was reexamining its national myths, heroes, and villains? Are these paintings merely *folk* portraits of larger-than-life *folk* heroes by an uneducated *folk* artist, or are they encoded representations of a kind of white **paternalism** toward blacks, which Pippin willingly and knowingly benefited from during his brief, brilliant career? All of the above, some of the above, or none of the above? Given the strange mixture of **benevolent** management, enforced **naiveté**, and creative control by Pippin’s several handlers, we may never know the precise answers to these questions. But there is little doubt that the works themselves, with their compositional profundity and thematic punch, raise the art of history painting to a new level: a level that incorporates the observations of a middle-aged, unlettered black artist, whose elemental technique and directness of vision **belie** the complexities of re-creating history, via painting, in America at the time of the Second World War.

Richard J. Powell, “Re-Creating American History,” in *I Tell My Heart: The Art of Horace Pippin*, pages 74–76, 79.

## From the Curator

**Consider the comments made with regards to Pippin’s position as an artist and his choice of subject matter.**

On September 13, 1937, Dorothy C. Miller, a curator at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), wrote to [Chester County resident and “author, editor, impresario, critic, and collector”] Christian Brinton for information about Pippin and his work: “I have been told that you have sponsored an exhibition of paintings by Negro ‘primitive’ or naïve artist.” That Dorothy C. Miller described Pippin as a “primitive” reflects the common usage of the

term in the twenties and the thirties to refer to artists with no formal training who were “creative by instinct,” in the words of the art historian who first applied the term to American paintings in 1923. . . .

The benign art-world usage of such adjectives as “naïve,” “primitive,” and “instinctive” notwithstanding, there is a question that the terms had racial overtones when employed by some commentators to describe Pippin. Periodically, Pippin’s admirers forged a connection between the artist’s life as an African American and the forthright, unselfconscious quality of his art. Dr. Barnes did so in 1940, when he described Pippin’s works as the musical counterparts of spirituals, and N. C. Wyeth did so in his remarks at the opening of Pippin’s 1937 exhibition at the West Chester Community Center. After noting that Pippin’s work “ought to be protected, cherished, and encouraged,” Wyeth remarked that it had “a basic African quality; the jungle is in it. It is some of the purest expression I have seen in a long time, and I would give my soul to be as naïve as he is.” The feeling that Pippin’s art was pure, and therefore **unsullied** by the negative and artificial components of contemporary society, can be found again a decade later, in a review by a Philadelphia art critic: “The modern world admires Pippin because it is subconsciously jealous of the natural expression of a crude, simple soul. Pippin had something most of us have lost: something that was trained out of us.”

Judith E. Stein, “An American Original,” page 11.

While Hovenden’s John Brown is a triumphant, larger-than-life martyr calmly going to his execution, Pippin’s John Brown is a diminutive, wounded man at the mercy of a morally corrupt society that condoned slavery. . . .

Twenty-five years after Brown’s death, Hovenden depicted an empowered John Brown whose prophecy of freedom supposedly had been **vindicated** by, and for, many of the painting’s Reconstruction-era viewers. Nearly a hundred years after Brown’s death, Pippin’s downtrodden freedom fighter, faithful to God and to the cause of African American liberation but helpless in the hands of his enemies, presented a picture that was all too familiar to many of Pippin’s contemporaries.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, “Horace Pippin, *The Trial of John Brown: Behold the Man*,” in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), page 374.

**unsullied:** not corrupted or polluted



Thomas Hovenden (1840–1895). *The Last Moments of John Brown*, ca. 1884. Oil on canvas, 46 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 38 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.60

**vindicated:** cleared of accusation or justified

## About the Artist

**Horace Pippin** (1888–1946) spent his youth in rural New York State. Attending a one-room schoolhouse, Pippin obtained his first box of 6 crayons by entering a cereal box contest. Needing to support his ailing mother, Pippin left school at the age of fifteen to work unloading coal in a coal yard.

In 1917, Pippin enlisted as a corporal in the 369th Colored Infantry Unit of the 93rd division of the United States Army. Popularly referred to as the *Harlem Hellfighters*, the 369th was the first African American regiment formed to fight in World War I. While serving in France, Pippin kept an illustrated journal of his experiences fighting along the front lines where he witnessed firsthand the brutality of trench warfare. During the course of his service, Pippin sustained a

severe shoulder injury that greatly limited the use of his right arm.

Honorably discharged from the Army in 1920, Pippin married and settled with his wife and stepson in West Chester, Pennsylvania. At the age of forty, Pippin began to paint with oils. His first painting, *The End of the War: Starting Home*, took him almost three years to complete. As his productivity increased, Pippin began to display his work in local storefronts, which led to his ultimate “discovery” in 1937 when he received an invitation to participate in a local art association exhibition. This exhibition launched Pippin’s career and led to exhibitions in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.

While termed a “primitive” painter in the 1930s and 1940s, Pippin’s own comments convey a steadfast



**Carl Van Vechten (1880–1864), Horace Pippin in front of Gothic Well at the Barnes Foundation, February 4, 1940.** Silver gelatin print, 10 x 8 in. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

commitment to his artistic vision. Upon spending a few weeks at the Barnes Foundation, a unique collection of traditional African and European Modernist works of art, Pippin asked Dr. Barnes, “Do I tell you how to run your foundation? Don’t tell me how to paint.” Where Pippin’s contemporaries appreciated his work for the “folk” quality of both his subject matter and his technique, today scholars recognize that Pippin’s work addresses larger themes such as justice and equality that directly relate to American life of the 1940s as well as today.



**Abe Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, (also known as Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, Pardons the Sentry) 1942.** Oil on fabric, 24 x 30 in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Helen Hooker Roelofs (142.77)



**The End of the War: Starting Home, ca. 1930.** Oil on fabric, 25 x 32 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Given by Robert Carlen, 41-2-1

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Does Horace Pippin portray John Brown as a hero or a criminal? Defend your idea.
2. What was the value of John Brown’s actions at Harper’s Ferry?
3. Compare the Pippin image of John Brown to the Hovenden image. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
4. How was Pippin’s portrayal of John Brown affected by his life experiences?



What **ART FORMS INSPIRE**  
you in your daily life?

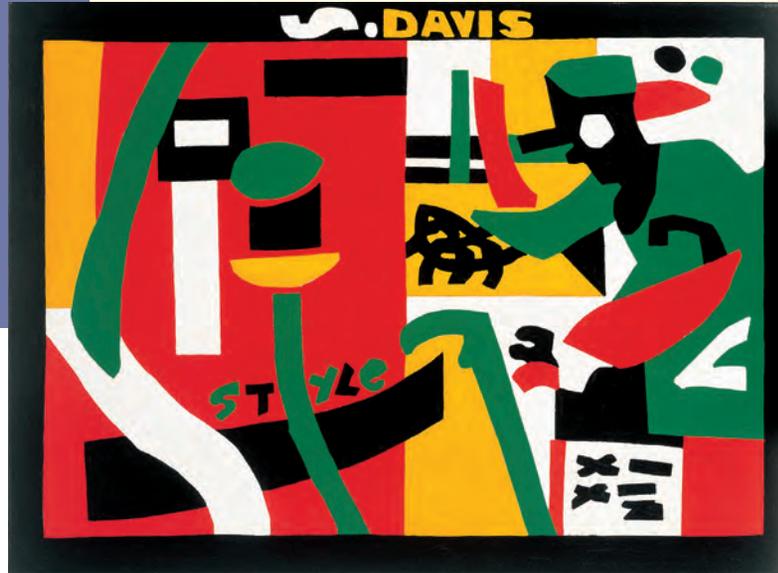
### STUART DAVIS

(1892–1964)

*Night Life*, 1962

Oil on canvas, 24 x 32 in.

Gift of Mrs. Paul L. Wattis  
and Bequest of the Phyllis C.  
Wattis 1991 Trust from Paul L.  
Wattis Jr. and Carol W. Casey,  
1996.75



*Some of the things which have made me want to paint, outside other paintings, are: American wood and iron works of the past; Civil War and skyscraper architecture; the brilliant colors on gasoline stations, chain store fronts and taxicabs; the music of Bach; synthetic chemistry; the poetry of Rimbaud; fast travel by train, auto, and aeroplane, which brought new and multiple perspectives; electric signs; the landscape and boats of Gloucester, Massachusetts; 5 & 10 cent-store kitchen utensils; movies and radio; Earl Hines's hot piano and Negro jazz music in general; etc. In one way or another the quality of these things plays a role in determining the character of my paintings.*

Stuart Davis, "The Cube Root," *Art News* 41 (February 1, 1943): page 34.

*I have always liked hot music. There's something wrong with any American who doesn't. But I never realized that it was influencing my work until one day I put on a favorite record and listened to it while I was looking at a painting I had just finished. Then I got a funny feeling. If I looked, or if I listened, there was no shifting of attention. It seemed to amount to the same thing—like twins, a kinship. After that, for a long time, I played records while I painted.*

From John Lucas, "The Fine Art Jive of Stuart Davis," *Arts* 31 (September 1957): page 33.

*My attitude toward life is realistic, but realism doesn't include merely what one immediately sees with the eye at a given moment—one also relates it to past experiences . . . one relates it to feelings, ideas. And what is real about that experience is the totality of the awareness of it. So, I call [my art] "realism." But, by "realism" I don't mean that it's a realism in any photographic sense—certainly not.*

From "Night Beat. Television Interview with Stuart Davis," by John Wingate (1956), in Philip Rylands, ed., *Stuart Davis*, (Milan: Electa, 1997), page 68.

### What lessons do you think Davis learned from the Armory exhibition?

**Cubism:** an artistic style in which natural forms are reduced to geometric representations

**Futurism:** an artistic style which represents rapid movement and dynamic motion

**esoteric:** understood by only a few

**conspicuous milestone:** a visibly important event

#### CUBISTS AND FUTURISTS MAKE INSANITY PAY

What does the work of the **Cubists** and **Futurists** mean? Have these “progressives” really outstripped all the rest of us, glimpsed the future, and used a form of artistic expression that is simply **esoteric** to the great laggard public? Is their work a **conspicuous milestone** in the progress of art? Or is it junk?

The International Exhibition of Modern Art, which has just come to a close in the Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory, with its striking array of the works of the “progressives,” has during the past few weeks, set many a New Yorker turning this problem over in his mind.

Entirely apart from the canvases and sculptures shown, this exhibition was unique among New York exhibitions. It drew an attendance from a public outside that comparatively limited one that ordinarily goes to art exhibitions.

Here was something revolutionary, something in the nature of a nine-days’ wonder, something that must not be missed. New York did not miss it: the gate receipts show that.



View of Foreign Exhibit; International Exhibition, New York, 1913

Postcard, 1913 Armory Show.  
*Armory Show Collection*,  
scrapbook by Charles A. Smith.  
The Museum of Modern Art/  
Licensed by Scala/Art Resource,  
NY

#### HOW THE PUBLIC ACTED

A good part of New York grinned as it passed along from one paint-puzzle to another. But the fact that there were so many of these paint-puzzles, that they were dignified by an exhibition, made New York, in spite of its grin, wonder if there perhaps was not something in this new art which was a little beyond the mental grasp of the uninitiated.

In circles where art had never before been discussed, one heard the

question: “Have you been to see the Cubists and the Futurists? Yes? Well, could you make anything out of it?” The answer usually was: “Why, I don’t know much about art, but it looked to me like a mess of nonsense.”

The critics, who usually are willing enough to play the part of beacon of light, were singularly unilluminating. Here was an artistic storm and the critic beacons all turned low!

“Cubists and Futurists Make Insanity Pay,” *New York Times*, March 16, 1913. From ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *New York Times* (1851–2003).

### In what ways do you see cubism or jazz informing *Night Life*?

[Stuart Davis] considered the Armory Show, officially known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art, held in New York in 1913, to have been the single most important event in his formative period. He showed five watercolors in the exhibition. Since he was never part of the group of artists who gathered around Alfred Stieglitz, owner of the “291” Gallery, the first gallery to show modernist art regularly in America, the Armory Show presented Davis with his initial opportunity to see numerous examples of **avant-garde** European art and its American derivatives at first hand.

**avant-garde:** new and experimental

John R. Lane, *Stuart Davis: Art and Art Theory* (Brooklyn, NY: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), page 9.

Davis’s evolution as an artist was a continuing dialogue with advanced French art. While his point of departure, throughout his long career, remained the specifics of his **quotidian** existence as an urban American with a taste for the **vernacular**, the visual language with which he inscribed his images was learned from his European colleagues. As a young painter, he looked to such innovators as Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh as models; as a mature artist, he both measured himself against the painters he admired most, such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, and looked to them for confirmation of his direction.

**quotidian:** daily

**vernacular:** common, everyday

Karen Wilkin, “Stuart Davis: American Painter,” in Philip Rylands, ed., *Stuart Davis* (Milan: Electa, 1997), page 19.

Back in 1907 . . . [jazz] music was probably still called *barrel house* or *honky tonk*, when a teenaged Stuart Davis with his pal Glenn Coleman prowled the rough bars of Newark searching out this organic scene. They were, in his phrase, “particularly hip to the jive.” What is remarkable is that, at the time, there was no jazz available on phonograph records (this was still several years off), and there was virtually no way a couple of young white boys

**crucible:** a place where powerful forces converge

**Fauvist:** art characterized by the dramatic use of vivid color

**en masse:** together, as a large group

**paradigm:** a pattern, example, or model

could even know about its existence, let alone its power. But these rough bars in Newark became the **crucible** from which the soul of a young artist was cast. It was here in the heat of the creative moment that the real world of abstraction came together for Stuart Davis.

Often, during key moments of his career, Davis returned to the imagery of jazz to describe his situation. A striking example was the remark he made after attending the famous 1913 Armory Show, where, for the first time, he saw the paintings of the European **Fauvists** and Cubists **en masse**. Immediately, he reported in his diary, he sensed an “objective order,” particularly in Gauguin and Matisse, that gave him “the same kind of excitement I got from the numerical precisions of the Negro piano players . . . and I resolved that I would quite definitely have to become a ‘modern’ artist.” To Davis jazz was a **paradigm** of modern creation.

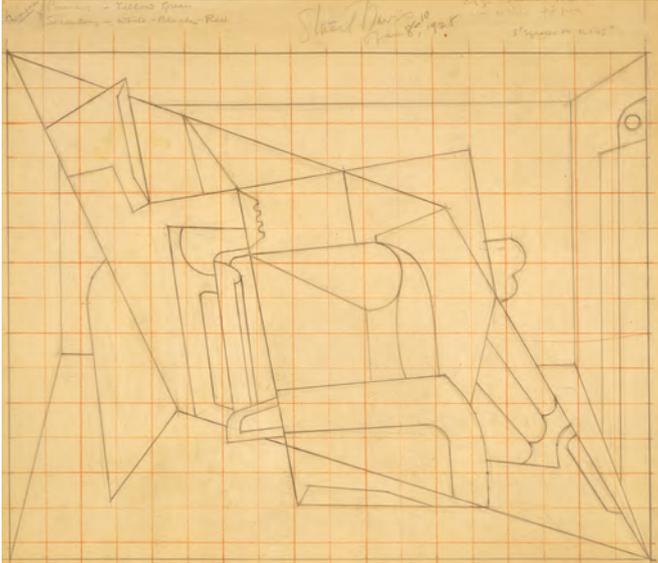
For the whole of his creative life, Davis would disdain mere abstraction in art and prefer to think of his work as having “a realism that every man in the street has the *potential* to see, but in order to see, would have to see it in himself first. He’d have to give value to those qualities which an artist gives . . . to whatever is the artist in him.”



Stuart Davis on the fire escape surveying the urban landscape visible from his studio and apartment at 43 Seventh Avenue, New York, 1935. Image courtesy of The Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA New York, NY.

For six decades, jazz fueled the art of Stuart Davis. Together, they grew up, matured, and became sophisticated. But always, they kept the pulse of the people on the street, and in the little clubs and hangouts where the real news was being passed along.

Ben Sidran, “The Jazz of Stuart Davis,” in Philip Rylands, ed., *Stuart Davis*, (Milan: Electa, 1997), pages 13–15.



LEFT: *Study for Egg Beater No. 2*, 1928. Graphite and crayon on paper, 17 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 2001.9

RIGHT: *Egg Beater No. 2*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 29 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 1996.9

**adroitness:** possession of skillful or ready use of bodily or mental powers

**ruminations:** thoughtful reflections

**despondent:** dejected in spirit, disheartened

**pragmatic:** practical opposed to idealistic

His intensely social nature was matched by his equally intense commitment to documenting his thoughts on the theory and practice of art. His verbal **adroitness** and theoretical bent are revealed in journals he kept for decades, beginning in the 1920s, concerning the artistic problems he was working through in his art practice. It has been estimated that Davis's theoretical writings exceed ten thousand manuscript pages. Add to these his hundreds of letters, notes on meetings, and drafts of speeches, as well as his published articles, and we have a body of writing unique among twentieth-century American artists. His own theories of composition and color dominate his journal **ruminations**, along with, in the 1930s, theories about the relationship of art to society and the special relevance modern art had for its era. When we read the endless variations of his developing "space-color" concepts, it becomes clear that such writings were a necessary part of the process of converting theory into practice, into concrete works of art. He also left notebooks filled with drawings of scenes and objects, sketches of compositional problems he was working through, and quick renderings of the paintings of other artists. Daily calendars contain not just notes about appointments but scribbled comments on the progress of specific paintings. In the papers available for study so far, we do not find writings that are personal in subject or tone. There are no romantic confessions, no **despondent** self-doubts, no musings of a spiritual nature. The man revealed in all these writings is orderly, **pragmatic**, responsive to his social environment and the ordinary "man on the street," and committed to action and change.

### In relation to the curator's comments, what interpretive narratives do you see in the work?

**superimposition:** the placement of forms on top of one another

Archival photographs of Davis, an accomplished jazz pianist, playing the piano raise the possibility that *Night Life* is also a self-portrait of the artist. Davis's dual identities as a musician and an artist are suggested by the **superimposition** of the musician's extended right hand against the left half of the composition, as if making a brushstroke on a vertical painting propped on an easel. Similarly, his left hand is juxtaposed with the white square and black lines, which resemble an artist's palette and pigments.

The composition of *Night Life* is divided vertically into predominately abstract and representative halves, which are mirrored by the horizontal S and vertical DAVIS of the signature.

The seemingly disparate halves of *Night Life*, which are unified by the superimposed word STYLE, may serve as metaphors for the fragmentary, disjunctive experiences of modern life—and modern art—and the artist's unique ability to reconcile these forces.



**The artist in his studio. Image courtesy of The Estate of Stuart Davis/Licensed by VAGA New York, NY.**

As an artist, Davis self-consciously identified with the African American jazz musician as a fellow creator and performer who continually improvised variations on his themes through the use of composition, color, tone, syncopation, and harmony. *Night Life* is a pictorial summation of Davis's distinctive artistic style, which mediated the forces of representation and abstraction but consistently affirmed his belief in the primacy of form, space, and color as the true subjects of art.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Stuart Davis, *Night Life*: The Art of Jazz," in Timothy Anglin Burgard et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young*, (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco 2005): pages 426–427.

## About the Artist

**Stuart Davis** (1892–1964) was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where his father was the art editor of the *Philadelphia Press*. Determined to become an artist, he left high school early and moved to New York City, where he enrolled in art school. To make ends meet, Davis supported himself by drawing cartoons for *Harper's Weekly*. He also began to experiment with collage, using words, letters, and labels to create a multidimensional art form.

In 1913, he was the youngest artist to exhibit at the Armory Show,

where he first saw, and was greatly influenced by, works of Matisse, Picasso, and Van Gogh. He traveled to Paris, where he worked to capture the movement and rhythm of the urban landscape.

In 1927–1928 Davis, who was a serious and focused artist, experimented with planes and geometric shapes, creating his “Eggbeater” series. Through this series, which featured an eggbeater, a rubber glove, and an electric fan, the artist abstracted the objects on the two-dimensional surface of the



Arnold Newman, *Stuart Davis*, 1941. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

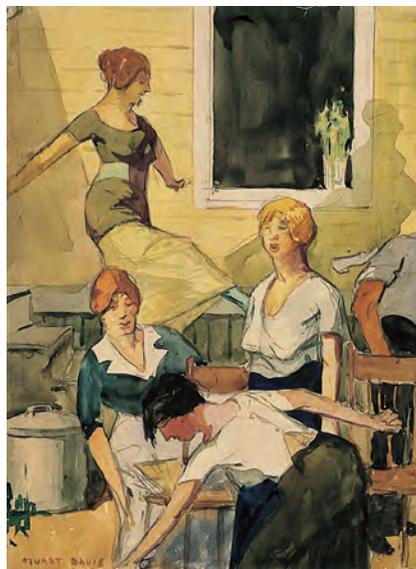
canvas. During the Great Depression he worked for the Works Progress Administration. With the outbreak of World War II, Davis joined the army, using his drawing skills to create maps for the military.

While Davis was greatly influenced by European artists, his work was uniquely American in theme. He could often be found in jazz cafes and bars, saturating himself with the urban scene. His canvases captured the vitality and rhythm of American urban life through his use of shape, color, form, design, and everyday objects. Throughout his career, Davis remained true to his artistic vision and, uninterested in pleasing the public, remarked, “art isn’t a commodity ... it must mean something to the human race.”

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



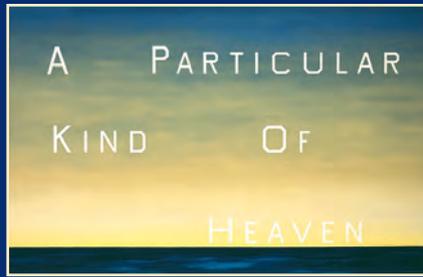
*Egg Beater, V*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 50 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 32 $\frac{1}{4}$  in. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, NY, 122.1945



*Servant Girls*, 1912. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 15 x 11 in. Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute of Art, Utica, N.Y., 63.91

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Davis portray music through art?
2. What is the connection between jazz and modern art? Why would an abstract artist use jazz as his inspiration?
3. How does an artist use “modernism” to portray an idea?
4. Explain how the artist uses his environment for his art.



Do YOU have a conception of

HEAVEN?

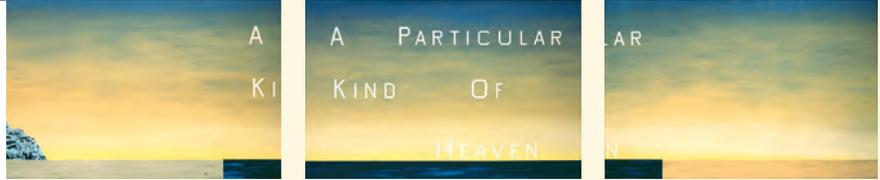
## From the Artist

### ED RUSCHA

(b. 1937)

*A Particular Kind of Heaven,*  
1983

Oil on canvas, 90 x 136 in.  
Museum purchase, Mrs. Paul L.  
Wattis Fund, 2001.85



*Basically everything I've done in art, I was in possession of when I was 20 years old. I use a waste retrieval method of working. I'll go back and use something that disgusted me 15 years ago but that I had enough sense to think about. Some artists change dramatically. I see my work more like history being written.*

From Suzanne Muchnic, "Getting a Read on Ed Ruscha," *Los Angeles Times*,  
December 9, 1990, page 96.

*What I'm interested in is illustrating ideas.*

From *Edward Ruscha*, exh. cat. (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1976): page 4.

*There's no technique to my development of these drawings and attached words. I don't struggle over them. It's not a collage of ideas. They're really instant responses to something from a movie or a lyric or something heard or seen on the street. So the struggle is not in how to perfect the combination of these things, it's in how to make a picture. It's an intuitive thing and an exploratory thing at the same time. . . .*

**mundane:** ordinary, everyday

*If I'm working on something and I feel it's too **mundane**, doesn't have enough engine behind it, or is just not moving along on its course, then I consider it a failure. I do get involved in little failed attempts at things. Occasionally I'll get something going that may make even the halfway point and I see it just isn't happening. Then I'll rip it up. Rip it up rather than repair it. . . .*

*Certified poetry is fine, but I often prefer the accidental poetry you find in the street.*

From Kenneth Baker, "Painting words for things that can't be pictured—but don't call it pop,"  
*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 6, 2004, page E5.

### How does the artist define his current working practice?

*Interview conducted by art historian and former West Coast Director of the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Paul J. Karlstrom*

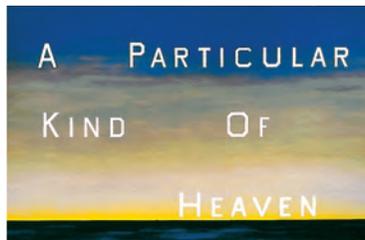
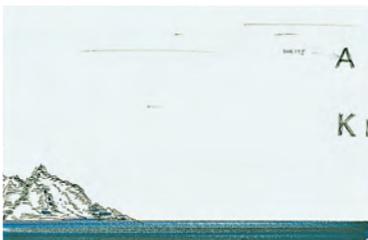
**Paul Karlstrom:** Some interesting things have happened recently at the de Young, and one of them is the inclusion of modernist—even contemporary—art. Are you aware of this and the museum’s previously more traditional, historic role?

**Edward Ruscha:** Well, visiting the museum [during construction] and having it all explained to me, I see that there seems to be more of an emphasis on modernist activity within the collection—and that’s always inspiring. But for me this commission is a new experience. Visiting the building itself, I was overwhelmed by the design and the ambition of the whole project. . . .

**PK:** The basis for your de Young commission is a work from 1983 now in the museum’s collection. Do you recognize in your earlier paintings what you were doing and thinking at that time, or do you simply see them as friends from the distant past that still have something to offer?

**ER:** Well, I see *A Particular Kind of Heaven* as an old friend. And I also see it as source material. Many artists look back on their past work as though it’s absolutely foreign soil, to be forgotten, and sometimes rejected. And yet I feel like all my work comes from something much older than the individual painting. It comes maybe from where I was when I was eighteen years old. I feel the same way today as I did then. So I don’t feel a disconnection from this painting that I’m expanding upon. And to me, it’s just as vital as it ever was.

*continued on inside left flap*



**Maquette for triptych: *A Particular Kind of Heaven*, 2005. Ink, felt tip marker and digital image on paper mounted on mat board, each 55 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 7 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of the artist, 2005.53.1-3**

**PK:** You don't feel that you're imposing "now" on "then," making the past contemporary?



*Standard Station*, 1966. Color screen print on buff paper, 25 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 40 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, Mrs. Paul L. Wattis Fund, 2000.131.5.1

**ER:** No, absolutely, not. I felt this painting was one of the very best paintings in that [1983–1984] series. I recall the realization that there could be many kinds of heavens, but this one is a particular kind of heaven. . . . I originally started painting pictures of single words and found the work resolved itself within that framework. When I started making full thoughts from combined words, they had to follow a kind of logical pattern, and this is one of those paintings. And I look

back and I try to analyze the whole thing and determine what is it that made me go down this particular path or choose a particular word, or—for that matter—how the word “particular” came into focus.

The idea of making a creation on top of a creation seems to be part of my activity beyond this de Young commission. . . . I have begun to go back in my closet of works, and I will respond to a certain work that I did maybe ten, twenty, even thirty years ago, and then feel like it should be elaborated on. That's essentially the basic idea for my show at the American Pavilion in Venice [2005 Biennale].

**PK:** So I suppose in this commission we will have the opportunity to see yet another phase of Ed Ruscha and his myriad interests. This will be one of the major places to view a statement of—or at least a report from—where you are in your thinking at this time.

**ER:** Yes. And this is no easy thing for me because it involves new steps to my procedures toward picture making. But that very [recognition], just saying that, also becomes part of the source—the “food”—for the whole endeavor. I mean, I'm anxious about this [commission], and I'm also extremely hopeful.

### What iconic imagery does the author relate to *A Particular Kind of Heaven*? How does this expand the meaning of the work?

For the 20th-century American art galleries in the new de Young, Ruscha is creating two new, identically scaled paintings that will physically and conceptually expand his earlier panoramic landscape *A Particular Kind of Heaven* of 1983. The left panel will depict a mountain landscape and the letters A and KI, derived from the beginning of the words A and KIND in the center panel. The right panel will depict a desert scene and the letters AR, derived from the end of the word PARTICULAR in the center panel. Both are funded by a bequest of Mrs. Paul L. Wattis.

**tectonically:** relating to tectonic plates, which, when they shift, cause earthquakes

**fallibility:** having the capacity to commit errors

Ruscha's perception and projection of a disjunction in the landscape subtly acknowledges the geology of the California landscape and the **tectonically** inspired architecture of the new de Young museum. His visual overlapping of words also recalls an amateur photographer's attempt to capture a vast landscape by panning a camera. Searching for the invisible line between sequential segments that will create a perfect panorama, inevitably human **fallibility** is revealed.

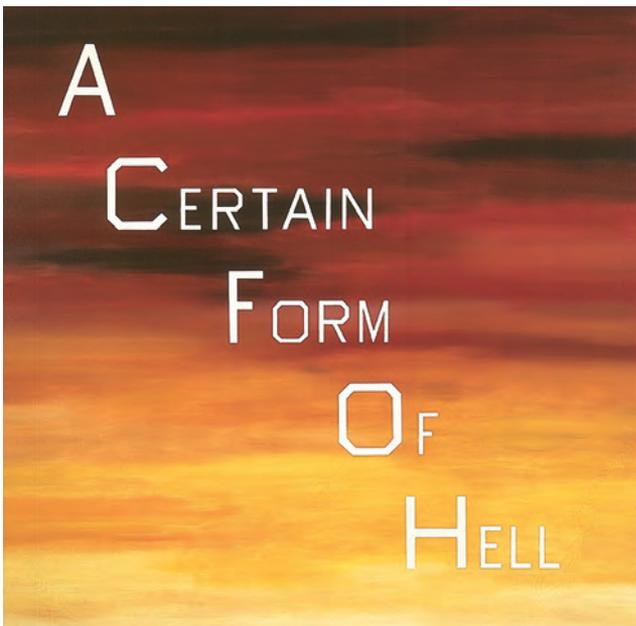
Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Ed Ruscha's *A Particular Kind of Heaven*: Heaven on Earth," *Fine Arts* (Fall/Winter 2005–2006): page 32.

Viewers are invited to follow a stream-of-consciousness path of free association that can either lead to multivalent interpretations or end somewhere in the disjunction between subjects and their meanings. Acknowledging

the coexistence of the real and the surreal in his work, Ruscha has observed, "Sometimes I feel like I'm doing book covers for mysterious stories." . . .

. . . Ruscha has described his characteristic lettering as "a type of typography that I call 'Boy Scout Utility Modern.' . . . It's the kind of thing a carpenter might apply to making a letter form. I like it for just that reason."

However Ruscha's generic letters resemble a specific carpenter's prototype—the wood letters of the famous HOLLYWOOD sign that has become an icon not only of Los Angeles, California, and the United States but also



*A Certain Form of Hell*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 64 x 64 in. Private collection. Image courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

of the artist's work. This implicit reference to America's movie capital is apt; Ruscha has described his canvases as "a flat screen" and has stated that "my paintings have a closer relation to movies than to painting. . . . I guess you could say I am interested in the possibilities that remain in a time which tends to favor the moving image." . . .

In *A Particular Kind of Heaven*, the three lines of bright white text resemble a film title projected on a movie screen and are evocative of a compressed drama enacted on a vast landscape stage. . . . Similarly, although Ruscha has experienced the "big sky country" of the American West in Oklahoma and at his house in the Mojave Desert, the painting's low horizon, Panavision format, and Technicolor palette all evoke the vocabulary of classic American film westerns, particularly their **clichéd** images of an opening sunrise or a closing sunset. . . .

**clichéd:** representing a cliché or stereotype; trite

. . . Ruscha's "particular" or personal vision of heaven is pointedly grounded in his experience of the California landscape, a more accessible form of heaven on earth. It also suggests that everyone is free to perceive, or to create, his or her personal vision of heaven or hell. . . .

Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Ed Ruscha, *A Particular Kind of Heaven: Heaven on Earth*," in Timothy Anglin Burgard, et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), pages 465–468.

## From the Art Historian

**How would you describe Ruscha's relationship with words? Does he look at them as objects or symbols for objects, or do they completely lack meaning?**

Ruscha keeps notebooks in which he lists words and phrases that strike him, from conversations, dreams, music, and books, and he writes these down even while driving. One interviewer asked about the inspirations for certain works: *Slobberin' Drunk at the Palomino*: "That's from a Frank Zappa song." *Mysterious Voltage Drop*: "I read it in an electric manual." *Malibu = Sliding Glass Doors*: "That *whoosh* they make sounds like the ocean." *Talk Real*: "My kid said that once to me when he was small." *Hello I Must Be Going*: "A Groucho Marx quote."

Ruscha remains cannily guarded about his intentions vis-à-vis linguistic signification: “Whether or not the work communicates anything to anyone is not important to me.” When asked directly, “What was more important to you when you were painting words: the way it looked or what it meant?,” he responds that his work is “a flip-flop between those two things.” Those who maintain that Ruscha’s words picture the potholes of **signifying** need only turn for support to interviews in which he discusses how words can lose meaning or fail to mean: “Sometimes I don’t care about the definition of the word,” he has said, and “sometimes you can study a word, like the word ‘the,’ and looking at that word long enough, it just begins to lose its meaning.” But his description of his method as one of “waste retrieval” discloses an intent to lay claim to meaning before its dispersal into **polyvalence**. Certain words attract him, he says,

**signifying:** making meaning through signs and symbols

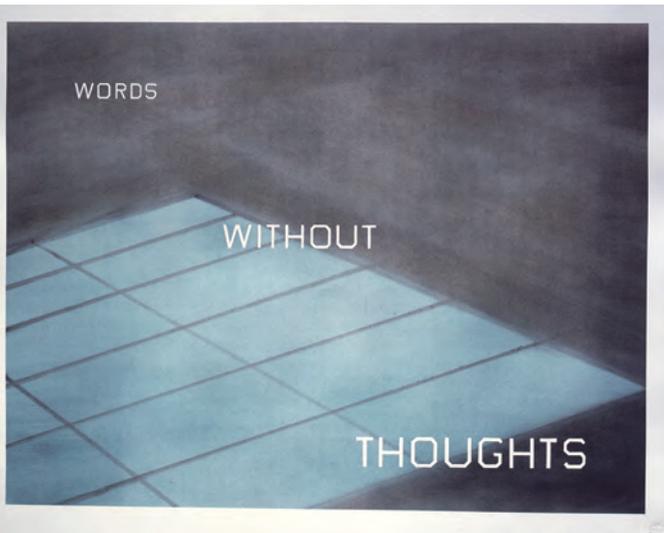
**polyvalence:** multiple meanings or applications

*Because I love the language. Words have temperatures to me. When they reach a certain point and become hot words, then they appeal to me. . . . Sometimes I have a dream that if a word gets too hot and too appealing, it will boil apart, and I won’t be able to read or think of it. Usually I catch them before they get too hot. . . .*

Perhaps the most succinct statement of Ruscha’s project comes from a line in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* he has depicted multiple times: “Words without thoughts never to heaven go.” The guilty King Claudius mutters this while praying; Hamlet, secretly observing, decides not to kill him, fearing he will go to heaven. But Claudius knows his prayers are ingenuous (“without thoughts”), for he is remorseless and has no plans to relinquish the effects of murdering Hamlet’s father (crown and queen). The implication for Claudius, and for Ruscha too, is that

“words without thoughts” do not matter, have no efficacy, that unless they connect to an idea or object beyond the words—to, in Ruscha’s phrase, “the thought behind them”—they will as Claudius laments, “fly up.” Ruscha attempts to conjoin, not sever, **semantic** sense and physical form, and we can trace these attempts in his renderings of single words and objects and in his sustained attraction to those linguistic categories (**onomatopoeia**, rhymes, puns) that challenge the independence of meaning from its material representation.

Lisa Pasquariello, “Ed Ruscha and the Language That He Used,” *October* III (Winter 2005): pages 90–91.



*Words #4*, 1985. Dry pigment on paper, 23 x 29 in. Collection of the artist

**semantic:** relating to the meaning of language

**onomatopoeia:** words that imitate natural sounds, like crack, splash, bow-wow

## About the Artist

**Ed Ruscha** (b. 1937) works in a variety of media including painting, print making, photography, and book production. He also experiments with different processes such as etching, digital media, and the mixographic process. He is known for using words or phrases in his work that he “snatches out of the air.”

Ruscha grew up in Oklahoma. As a child, he drew comics of everyday life and took painting lessons. He eventually moved to Los Angeles, training at the Chouinard Institute. With the intention of becoming a commercial artist, he studied



*Ship*, 1986. Lithograph on Arches roll paper, 45 x 34 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, Mrs. Paul L. Watis Fund, 2000.131.133.1

graphic design, layout, printing, and lettering. He later worked as a typesetter and printer learning techniques that directly influenced his painting style.

Sometimes labeled either a conceptual or pop artist, Ruscha often surprises his viewer with his choice of subjects, turning the everyday into art. When he was twenty-four Ruscha traveled to Europe, finding artistic inspiration from what he observed on the road through his car window. Ruscha made similar trips in the United States, incorporating street signs, gas stations, and words from billboard into his work.

Beyond his association with an art movement or trend, Ruscha is associated with California, specifically the Los Angeles metropolitan scene and the Western cultural landscape. His work often chronicles change and obsolescence; for example his *26 Gasoline Stations* is a book of photographs of twenty-six gasoline stations. Ruscha remarks, “My books are not pages of paper housing a collection of photographs . . . the camera has to be the workhorse of another medium,



Ruscha in his studio, 2005. Photograph by Peter Mendenhall

not an end in itself.” For Ruscha, his books should be viewed as a whole product, a single work of art as opposed to a presentation of individual photographs.

For the reopening of the de Young Museum, Ruscha expanded upon his 1983 painting *A Particular Kind of Heaven*. Adding two new panels to his original compositions, Ruscha invites his viewers to consider questions such as “What is heaven?,” “How do we create heaven?,” “Is California a kind of heaven?” In this way, Ruscha reflects his fundamental interest in California culture through his unique artistic vision.

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Ruscha says, “I see my work like history being written.” What aspects of his work is he referring to?
2. When the artist comments in relation to language and published poetry, “I prefer accidental poetry you find on the street,” how would you interpret his words in relation to his art?
3. Discuss the title of this piece, *A Particular Kind of Heaven*, based on your reading of the information in the monograph.
4. What aspects of California geography and landscape are evident in Ruscha’s work?
5. What does Ruscha mean when he says that there are “many kinds of heavens?”



Do you consider the **URBAN**  
**ENVIRONMENT**  
to be **ART**?

### WAYNE THIEBAUD

(b. 1920)

*Diagonal Freeway*, 1993

Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 60 in.

Partial gift of Morgan Flagg in memory of his son Lawrence

J. Flagg, 1998.186



**verticality:** referring to vertical lines; upright

**precarious:** unstable or unsafe

*Going to San Francisco I was ... fascinated by those plunging streets, where you get down to an intersection and all four streets take off in different directions and positions. There was a sense of displacement, or indeterminate fixed positional stability. That led me to this sense of “verticality” that you get in San Francisco. You look at a hill, and visually, it doesn’t look as if the cars would be able to stay on it and grip. It’s a very precarious state of tension, like a tightrope walk.*

From Karen Tsujimoto, *Wayne Thiebaud* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), page 125.

**peripheral vision:** vision on the external boundary of one’s frame of sight

**myopic:** near-sighted

*I don’t agree with Duchamp that the eye is a dumb organ. Duchamp talked about the eye of the mind. I think the eye has a mind of its own, and there are different ways we see: there’s peripheral vision, the myopic up-close sensation, focused seeing. The more ways you can put together a picture ... the richer it becomes, the more like life.*

From Michael Kimmelman, *Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, the Louvre and Elsewhere* (New York: Random House, 1988), page 167.

*continued on right flap*

*I see myself as a very influenced painter. I really love art history and am thrilled by other painters, and I'll take directly, without any compunction about doing so, from painters I think I can use.*

*I started drawing at sixteen, when I broke my back doing sports. I'd always been interested in cartoons, and that's what I drew. I didn't know anything about painting, didn't even know how one became a painter. When I began to read, and for some reason became interested in it, then painting did become fascinating, but from a totally removed state. I have a very romantic idea of it. I worked in the Disney studios for a short time, got involved in labor agitation, and was canned along with a lot of other people. Then I worked doing sign jobs and in advertising agencies. Slowly I began to work more in layout, because that was more interesting to me, but I was still doing quite a bit of cartooning. I went to New York and sold cartoons to magazines and continued to do that for a long time. When I went into the army I wanted to become a pilot but first studied airplane mechanics and just worked on the line. And then one day I saw some guys making posters, so I became an army artist. And that is what I remained most of the time I was in the service. . . .*

*But what I really thought of becoming, and wanted to become, was a commercial artist. I had, and continue to have, a great regard for commercial artists. I thought I would be a designer, an art director, and was developing a career in that direction, but the more I got interested in layout and design, the more I was led to those examples in fine art from which they derived. The most interesting designs were influenced by Mondrian or Degas or Matisse. That revelation really transfixed me. I started drawing a lot and read continually about it and slowly decided—by that time I already had a family—that I was going to try to become a painter. So for a couple of years I did it on the side. Finally I decided to go back to school, back to college, and get a degree so I could teach in order to have time to paint.*

### According to the authors, what qualities of modern living does Thiebaud capture in his depiction of the urban landscape?



California Street, with Bay Bridge, San Francisco © Neil Emmerson/Robert Harding World Imagery/Corbis

**eschews:** avoids

**intercedes:** intervenes; puts itself in the middle of

**minutiae of infrastructure:** small details of the roads and buildings

It was not long before Thiebaud redirected his analysis of rural landscape towards the natural and constructed strangeness of the San Francisco cityscape. In 1972 he bought a small house as an extra residence and studio in the Potrero Hill section of San Francisco, an old working-class neighborhood in the steep hills south of the city's financial district. Close to his front door are some of the nosedive streets, perchlike intersections, and rows of blocky architecture clinging to the sides of roadways that are so famous a part of the San Francisco cityscape. The alterations of perspective, foreshortening, and standard pictorial space that such scenes offered fascinated Thiebaud, as did the play between abstract geometric structure and the realities of a living, working city, as improbable as these interactions may seem. By liberally juggling the building blocks of form that surrounded him he was able to construct complex urban visions that seem suspended someplace between pure fact and pure fantasy. . . .

In general, the cityscapes' neutrality of viewpoint **eschews** social comment. Color and movement keep the mood light and humor frequently **intercedes**. We can identify, for example, with little characters in cars that seem as if they are about to peel off a nearly vertical ascent, and we are often drawn into the **minutiae of infrastructure** and human habitation that Thiebaud loads into the pictures with much the same relish that we find in the crowded details of many folk art townscapes. . . . For all their concentration on formal ingredients and devices, the cityscapes also tug at human instincts and emotions that maybe difficult to pinpoint exactly but nevertheless play an important poetic role. The memory world of the artist is relevant again, connecting the cityscapes with recollections of his uncle Lowell, a rough-and-tumble road builder who first interested Thiebaud in highways and cars and who taught him to drive at age twelve. Thiebaud has noted that he "remained interested in the city as a human enterprise, and the pile of human tracks it contains and the byways of living and moving," that is, the city as a powerful signifier of modern life.

Steve A. Nash, et al., *Wayne Thiebaud: A Paintings Retrospective*, (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York and London: Thames and Hudson; 2000), pages 27-28 and 30-31.

**juxtaposes:** puts side-by-side

*Diagonal Freeway* **juxtaposes** nature, buildings, and streets in a manner that collapses the viewer's usual impressions of their separateness. Cut off from the steep cliff and vertical skyscrapers by the prominent diagonal of roadway that divides the composition into two nearly equal triangles, the viewer is stranded in the no-man's-land indicated by the blue-gray field of the lower section of the canvas. The strategy is reminiscent of Edgar Degas, whom Thiebaud has identified as an important influence on his design sense. The resulting pictorial dissonance sets up a visual impression that the viewer feels as much as sees. . . .

**spatial:** existing in space

. . . Thiebaud manipulates the **spatial** experience of the scene by exploiting the conventions of traditional perspective. The "diagonal freeway" of the title suspends the viewer between two possible perceptions, depending on whether the expanse lined with light poles is read as a bird's-eye aerial view or a more standard eye-level ground view. At first glance, the shadows of the light poles and vehicles indicate a flattened surface: one seems to be looking down on a single concrete roadway that cuts through the middle of the picture plane. However, a closer inspection reveals that the freeway is divided; its opposite directions exist on two separate levels, and the vehicles are bounded by guard rails. Thiebaud has explained that such apparent confusion is deliberate. . . .

**rarefied:** lofty, exalted; appealing to a select group

. . . He accomplishes this transformation of the commonplace things that constitute American mass society partly through a strategy known as *halation*, in which rainbows of pure color outline the objects in his paintings. He uses this strategy to define the freeway, edging its diagonal lines with his characteristic halo silhouettes in a manner that not only delineates its contours but also isolates it as a **rarefied** object. This effect has been described as giving "to his pictures not just a sense of the shiver of light in a particular place, but also the sense that the scene has the interior life and unnatural emphases of something recalled from memory." Rather than playing across the white strip that signifies the painting's freeway, the light seems to emanate from the **prismatic** mix of colors that make up the band of white itself.

**prismatic:** as if seen through a prism, showing all of the colors in the spectrum

Daniell Cornell, "Wayne Thiebaud, *Diagonal Freeway*: Inclined Toward Reality," in Timothy Anglin Burgard, et al., *Masterworks of American Painting at the de Young* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2005), pages 436–439.

As described by Adam Gopnik, what are Thiebaud's objectives as an artist?



**City Streets and Pathways, 1996. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 in. Paul LeBaron Thiebaud Collection**

Wayne Thiebaud is an American painter. “Painting is more important than art,” he has been known to announce with only a hint of deadpan humor. “Art—art, we don’t know *what* the hell it is—though we think we do, or try to do. Whenever one of my students says he’s off to do his art, I say, Not so fast.” He is and has been identified as many other things, too, of course: a California artist, a peerless teacher, a still-life painter in the tradition of Chardin, a popular illustrator of cookbooks and poems and, by reputation, a tennis player of eccentric game developed on public park courts, with a wicked backhand. But before he is any of these things he is an American painter—someone who paints for a living and whose subject, for all its formal perfection, is what we are to make of American abundance, a poet of the risks and joys of window shopping.

Thiebaud’s commitment to painting—not to “expression” or “conception” or even to tradition, but to *painting*, the act of applying sticky colors to canvas and making them look like something—is the probity of his art. Once at a lecture he said—and the note of disdain

and even contempt that this mild and charming man achieved as he said it was startling—“People say painting’s dead. Fine. It’s dead for you. I don’t care. Painting is alive for me. Painting is life for me.”

Adam Gopnik, “An American Painter,” in Steve A. Nash, et al., *Wayne Thiebaud: A Paintings Retrospective* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; New York and London: Thames and Hudson; 2000), pages 40–41.

### How does Thiebaud approach the study of art?

He sometimes talks like a teacher because for years he was one (Bruce Nauman was a student), and in front of a work of art, he'll mix professorial authority with a kind of American plainspeak: he'll go on, for instance, about perceptual strategies and "essentialized forms," then, gazing at a Degas pastel or a Frederick Church landscape, cluck his tongue, squint and shake his head in a kind of aw-shucks admiration: "Hmph, it's so good it almost makes my arm ache just thinking about how he did that," he'll say.

He loved teaching, he says, because he loves the craft of art, which he believes must be learned patiently and respectfully, otherwise it can't be learned at all. Art is Darwinian for Thiebaud: it evolves incrementally, building on itself and a knowledge of its own past. "Trying to get students to draw a white cup can take weeks," he says, "and they ask me, 'Do we really need to do this?' And I tell them it would be great if you could make a brilliant end run around all that stuff, but with painting there's no such thing—at least I haven't found it."

Michael Kimmelman, *Portraits: Talking with Artists at the Met, the Modern, the Louvre and Elsewhere* (New York: Random House, 1998), pages 168 and 159.

## About the Artist

One of the most influential and appreciated of Bay Area artists, **Wayne Thiebaud** (b. 1920) was born in Mesa, Arizona, and grew up in Long Beach, California. As a young man he spent time on his father's farm and ranch. Thiebaud had an uncle who was an amateur cartoonist and who encouraged his drawing interest. In high school Thiebaud participated in stage productions, but at sixteen he broke his back due to sports, which caused him to give up athletics and focus on his art. He took a variety of commercial art courses and worked as a freelance cartoonist and illustrator of movie posters. When Thiebaud joined the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II, he worked as an Army artist creating posters, murals, and cartoon strips.



*Three Machines*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36½ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, 1993.18

After a brief time at Universal Studios, he did cartoon work at the Walt Disney Studios and was the art director for Rexall Drug Company in Los Angeles. There, he met sculptor Robert Mallery, who inspired Thiebaud to paint seriously. By 1959 Thiebaud became interested in a more formal approach to his painting, experimenting with light, color value, and patterns. Thiebaud says that he borrows from styles



*Ponds and Streams*, 2001. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, partial gift of Richard N. and Rhoda Goldman, 2001.168



Wayne Thiebaud in his studio, 1999. © Richard Schulman/Corbis and Wayne Thiebaud/Vaga, New York

of many 17th- and 18th-century artists such as Jean-Siméon Chardin, Giorgio Morandi, and Diego Velázquez, and from modern artists such as Edward Hopper and Richard Diebenkorn.

Using colorful and loose brush strokes, Thiebaud works in oils and uses stained acrylics, pastels, and charcoal. Even in painting everyday objects such as cakes and hot dogs, he is concerned with composition, light, and color. A venerated teacher, Thiebaud believes that art must be learned patiently and respectfully. He has been on the faculty of U.C. Davis since 1960 and is now a Professor Emeritus at Davis, continuing to paint, lecture, and teach.

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Thiebaud states, "I see myself as a very influenced painter." What influences had the greatest impact on his work?
2. How do Thiebaud's cityscapes reflect or portray aspects of modern life?
3. What do you notice about how Thiebaud uses perspective, and how does that affect you as a viewer?
4. Why is the "craft" of art significant for this artist?



How could you put **recycled** materials to  
**artistic use?**

### EL ANATSUI

(Ghanian, b. 1944)

*Hovor II*, 2004

Woven aluminum bottle seals  
and copper wire

16 ft. high x 20 ft. wide

Museum purchase

2004.109



*Art grows out of each particular situation, and I believe that artists are better off working with whatever their environment throws up. I think that's what has been happening in Africa for a long time, in fact not only in Africa but the whole world, except that maybe in the West they might have developed these "professional" materials. But I don't think that working with such prescribed materials would be very interesting to me—industrially produced colors for painting. I believe that color is inherent in everything, and it's possible to get color from around you, and that you're better off picking something which relates to your circumstances and your environment than going to buy a ready-made color.*

Raphael Rubinstein, "Full-Metal Fabrics," *Art in America* (May 2006): page 200.

*People at times see my works without any knowledge of their context or even their titles, and they create their own meanings out of them. Some interpretations reveal how close we are as humans. I would agree that context is both an aid and a **hindrance**. In certain ways, it helps anchor a message, and depending on the viewer's capacity and experience, he could go from there and expand or simply stop. I don't think that I define myself strictly in a locational context. People, galleries, and museums make these definitions for their various reasons—some of them necessary, others not.*

*. . . I am drawn more to materials that have been subjected to considerable human use: mortars, trays, graters, tins, and of late, liquor bottle tops. Apart from what their **provenance** has loaded them with, I subject them to the numerous touches of the many assistants who work with me. I believe that what I explore now is not only material, but also process and logistics, elements that anybody dealing with huge quantities of material and difficult means has to grapple with.*

**hindrance:** an impeding, stopping, or preventing; obstacle

**provenance:** origin

From Robert Preece, "Out of West Africa: A Conversation with El Anatsui," *Sculpture* (July/August 2006): pages 36–39.

## In Conversation with the Artist

**Gerard Houghton:** To make something the size of these “clothes” over what must have been a long period obviously required a team of people to help you?

**El Anatsui:** It’s a terribly laborious process. In a day you are talking about maybe half a square foot. Apart from my full-time studio staff, I have assistance from some of my students and largely from young men within the vicinity of my studio, especially when they are on holidays. They are friends of the studio and since 1999 have on many occasions done long hours with me. On a particularly full day, we could be up to fourteen pairs of hands out in the studio.

**GH:** So each person would work on his or her own piece, or would several people work on a single piece together?

**EA:** No, each person would work on a separate segment and then afterwards would come my major intervention of putting these together.

**GH:** So you had a whole group of people working together to create a single piece of material—it’s an interesting model of communal creation.

**EA:** It is a universal approach. I think the form lends itself to this kind of strategy. Working on such a large scale alone can quickly become very boring. Also variety, which is needed at this scale, could come from the style and the feel of each individual hand: on occasion, for instance, when we had to fold and twist the flattened tops before sewing, there were many effects and styles of folding/twisting from each individual, resulting in a variety of textures.



El Anatsui with his assistants. Photo courtesy of Martin Barlow/Oriel Mostyn Gallery

**GH:** One of the things that interests me about these pieces is that the material seems to have the same essential qualities as any piece of cloth, the way it hangs, and can be draped like woven textiles. Yet at the same time you know, intellectually, that it’s made of metal, something rigid and unyielding, and that there’s a sensual opposition set up between what the eye sees and what the mind knows.

**EA:** Yes, this idea of getting a fabric out of metal, it’s interesting to me in the sense that the idea of hardness/rigidity is subverted by having the medium treated that way. Well, and this idea of using drink tops, too. Back home we would characterize someone who is given to the pleasures of drinking and eating as someone who is “building in the stomach,” so that kind of idea is somehow behind it as *continued on inside left flap*

**detritus:** debris

well—the whole piece is talking about “consumption,” or could be seen as referencing it at least. Not consumption as something that is peculiar, in the sense that we are talking about the various landscapes that consumption can create in Nigeria, Ghana, etc. You can have huge piles of **detritus** from consumption, because you don’t have the technology to recycle and also because of weather. A lot of things which are made in Europe and America and are sent over, arrive in certain kinds of packaging, for example fresh milk comes in tins. We have our own milk too, of course, but in addition there are huge imports of milk from outside, which is accessed by way of tins. Being that you don’t have the means to recycle, there develop huge piles of milk tins, drink tops, and all these things all over the place. So it’s an

examination of consumption and the various landmarks it can generate in various parts of the world.

Gerard Houghton, “An Interview with El Anatsui,” in *El Anatsui: Gawu* (Llanduduno, Wales, U.K.: Oriol Mostyn Gallery, 2003), page 22.



*Peak Project*, 1999. Tin and copper wire, in 8 parts, installed dimensions variable. Collection of the artist, image courtesy of Martin Barlow/Oriol Mostyn Gallery

## How does El Anatsui reference both the past and the present through his work? Is he offering a historical critique?

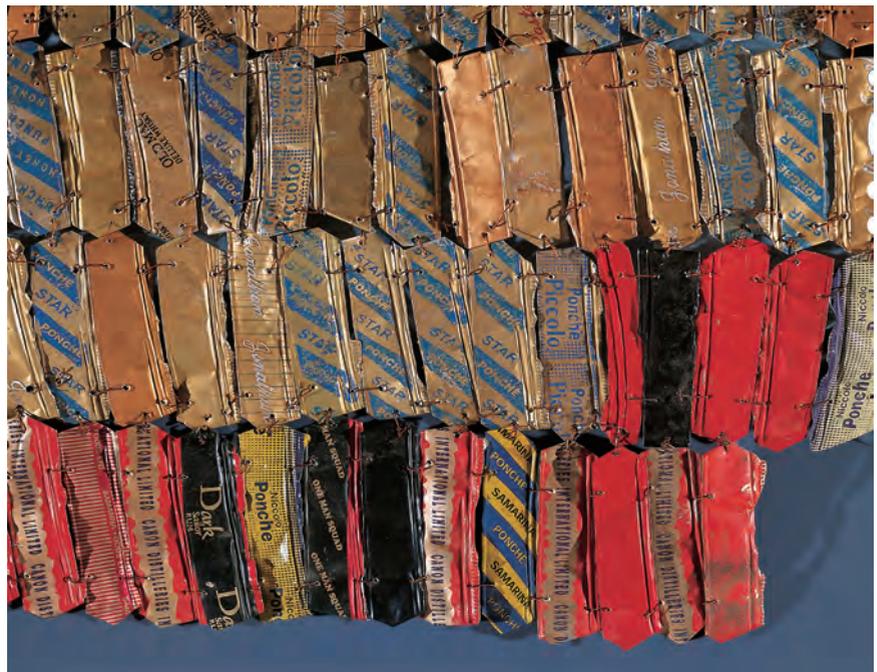
**schnapps:** liquor

Beguiling as the glitter of his metal sheets is, [El Anatsui] has stitched a darker narrative into their fabric. When such European nations as Britain and Holland first landed on West African shores in the 16th century, they came bearing gifts of rum, brandy, and **schnapps**. These they exchanged for gold, ivory, and eventually slaves. [E] Anatsui is not making a direct connection between those events and the present. Rather he is gesturing to the complexity of relations between Africa and the West since that time: the patterns of commerce and cultural exchange and the links of politics, economy, and exploitation that are the result of 400 years of to-ings and fro-ings across the Atlantic. As a consequence, his work speaks as much about Britain as it does Africa. . . . Similarly, the relationship of exploitation between the developed and developing world—between the branded goods we buy and the often abusive conditions in which they are produced somewhere across the globe—are a daily factor of our lives in the West.

**Gawu:** metal cloak, in the Ewe language

In [E] Anatsui's world, beauty comes at a human cost. That's why, despite abandoning natural materials for the detritus of the modern city, he has created in **Gawu** some of his most affecting work to date.

Ekow Eshun, "El Anatsui: *Gawu*," *Crafts* (May/June 2005): page 61.



Detail of *Hovor II* showing the company logos

How does *Hovor II* relate to traditional African art, and what is the artist implying about African traditions?

*Hovor II*, 2004  
Woven aluminum bottle seals and copper wire  
16 ft. high x 20 ft. wide  
Museum purchase  
2004.109

Ewe man's *kente* cloth. Cotton, length 137 in.  
UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.  
Photograph by Don Cole

**kente cloth:** traditional, woven ceremonial cloth

**horizontal treadle loom:** a loom for weaving cloth operated by a foot pedal

**Ewe:** an ethnic group in Ghana, Benin, and Togo and their language

**malleable:** capable of being hammered or pounded into various shapes without breaking

**resilience:** ability to recover strength and spirit



[E] Anatsui has created a series of works that recall the African tradition of making royal **kente cloths**. This ceremonial cloth is hand-woven on a **horizontal treadle loom**, producing four-inch-wide strips that are sewn together to create larger cloths worn during important social and religious occasions. Weavers use both color and complex designs to convey meaning, and each *kente* pattern is unique and named. Both [E] Anatsui's father and brothers wove *kente*, and he received such a cloth as a gift from his family when he was admitted to the College of Art at Kumasi, Ghana. From this source of inspiration, [E] Anatsui has transformed discarded metal bottle covers into monumental textile-like sculptures.

*Hovor II*, a huge, metallic textile that will hang at the entrance of the African gallery, is an outstanding example of [E] Anatsui's sculpture. "Hovor" is a combination of two **Ewe** words that roughly translate as "cloth of value." This astonishing work is 16 feet tall and 20 feet wide and weighs 80 pounds. It is made from thin, **malleable** sheets of aluminum, obtained from the necks of discarded liquor bottles, which have been painstakingly flattened and fastened together. The aluminum is color-printed with liquor company logos that are often visible in the joined construction.

These small colored strips of metal are fastened into sheets with copper wire. Each sheet is then placed into an overall pattern that recalls *kente* cloth, while reflecting our global economy of consumption and recycling. [E] Anatsui creates a sensual opposition between what the eye sees and what the mind knows: the piece hangs and drapes as cloth, yet is constructed of rigid and unyielding materials. The resulting artwork is stunningly beautiful, while conveying ideas about the **resilience** of African traditions over time and the reality of contemporary existence in Africa.

### What is the significance of metal as a material in El Anatsui's work? Do you agree or disagree with the significance the author places on the location in which El Anatsui works?

There are many allusions present in [El] Anatsui's evocations of prominent African textiles traditions, given the important role that metals (iron, gold, silver, etc.) and blacksmiths played in traditional African societies. African peoples ascribe occult powers to blacksmiths on account of their mastery of the elemental force of fire and the changes they exert on metal during the process of smelting iron out of stone. Iron is also a major force in industrial technological processes and the herald of industrial modernity. [El] Anatsui's metal constructs (evident in artworks like *Earth Cloth* and *Adinkra Sasa* [both 2003]) embody ideas about the resilience of African traditions in the face of change, but they also embrace change as a fundamental aspect of life. Their intricate visual structures comment on the power of elemental forces and, with an ironic twist, on the elegance of power.

It is obvious that El Anatsui is now in a very important stage of his career where all the divergent impulses of his creativity merge to produce artworks invested with formal excellence, conceptual significance, and outstanding visual impact. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, [El] Anatsui has decided to remain in **Nsukka** and continue to contribute to the development of sculpture at the University of Nigeria, where he has been teaching since relocating from Ghana in 1975.

**Nsukka:** town in Nigeria

This decision [to remain in Nsukka] is significant because it reinforces his attempt to secure a favorable opinion of contemporary African art in an international art world that largely disregards African artists who live and work in Africa. [El] Anatsui's art consistently speaks to the reality of African existence, unfolding the dense scrolls of history as a critique of neo-colonialism, utilizing pieces of wood and broken pots to construct a communal invocation of the ideal, and using cloth as a metaphor for indigenous notions of dignity and memory.

Dr. Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, "Wonder Masquerade: Transfiguration and Embodiment in the art of El Anatsui," in *El Anatsui: Gawu* (Llanduduno, Wales, U.K.: Oriol Mostyn Gallery, 2003), page 15.

## About the Artist

Born in Ghana, Africa, **El Anatsui** (b. 1944) was a teenager in post-independence Ghana at a time when the local art was striving to break free of the influence of the colonial powers and find its own identity. While he studied art in Kumasi at one of Africa's oldest colleges of art, he felt that the formal training he was receiving was dominated by Goldsmiths College of London and did nothing to satisfy his interests in the villages, local artisans, and marketplaces that surrounded and inspired him.

El Anatsui relocated to Nigeria in 1975 to take a position in the Fine



El Anatsui outside window of Selfridges, London. *Peak Project*, 1999. Milk can lids. Image copyright of artist and courtesy of October Gallery, London



*Wastepaper Basket*, 2003. Aluminium plates and copper wire, 96 in. high, width variable. Collection of the artist and courtesy of October Gallery, London

Arts Department of the University of Nigeria. He set up his studio in Nsukka, where he eventually came to be regarded by locals not only as one of them, but also as a mythical figure with unearthly powers. His use of heavy machinery, the constant visits from foreigners to his studio, and his sculpture installations that mimic ritual processes of certain African societies all contribute to his fantastical image.

In his work, El Anatsui shows his appreciation for local color and traditional materials and methods. He works with both manmade and natural materials, including chainsaws, chisels, found objects,

and metal. El Anatsui's artwork deals with concerns ranging from rituals, performance, and aesthetics to social and political issues. Most important, it serves as a visual narrative of Africa's history and as a comment, often political, on its present.

El Anatsui works in an international art context, and he often travels to different countries to participate in exhibitions. He is one of the few widely recognized African artists who have chosen to live and work in their native land.

Tess Spinola, graduate of School of the Arts, San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the history of colonialism influence El Anatsui's work?
2. Why do you think the artist titled the piece "cloth of value"?
3. How does El Anatsui's working practice complicate the idea of "the artist"? How would you assign credit for creation of the work?
4. In what ways does the artist's environment inform the work?



How long does it  
take you to form  
an **opinion** about an  
**art work**?

### RUTH ASAWA

(b. 1926)

Installation of various works  
in the de Young's  
Hamon Education Tower



*I was interested in . . . the economy of a line, making something in space, enclosing it without blocking it out. It's still transparent. I realized that if I was going to make these forms, which interlock and interweave, it can only be done with a line because a line can go anywhere.*

*I liked the idea that the relation between outside and inside was interdependent, integral. Also, that you can use the same idea to make many different things. That appeals to me more than using many different ideas.*

*You start with general principles. You don't think of something that's Mexican or Chinese. You think of a thing that's in nature and which has principles that apply to anything you do.*

*. . . I don't think of myself as Japanese. I think of myself as somebody with an idea, a human idea rather than an ethnic idea. Human beings have these possibilities, not Japanese or Chinese or American. It applies to every group.*

From Daniell Cornell et al., *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2006), pages 138, 22, and 27.

### Compare and contrast these two articles in terms of how each critic explains or evaluates Asawa's work. Pay special attention to the terms each critic assigns to Asawa's sculpture.

**suspended constructions:**  
sculptures hung from the ceiling  
or walls

Ruth Asawa, a Japanese-American sculptor living in San Francisco, whose **suspended constructions** in the manner of Noguchi have attracted attention, shows new pieces with several in gold and sterling silver. These are “domestic” sculptures in a feminine, handiwork mode—small and light and unobtrusive for home decoration, not meant, as is much contemporary sculpture, to be hoisted by cranes, carted by vans, and installed on mountainsides. Her constructions are made of a coarsely interlaced wire mesh, woven into globular, pendulous shapes, which hang like baskets, paper lanterns, and ropes. Noguchi has already exploited this realm with his many-shaped paper lanterns hanging as silent and still as Asawa's weavings. . . . Variations of color, from silver to deep bronze, offer special effects; and cast shadows, as in orthodox mobiles, are an enhancement. Asawa's objects are fragile and graceful; in groups they are attractive. But so far they remain at the finest limit of decoration, for from member to member of a cluster no particular formal tension exists; the patterns can move by repetition within and to the outside of the globe, but no further. Asawa's weaving technique restricts her to the globular form and its variants. And this, though perhaps the most perfect and natural of shapes, is also the one from which imaginative deviations must eventually be made, tapping the tensions and stresses which force the perfect bland shape into an image.

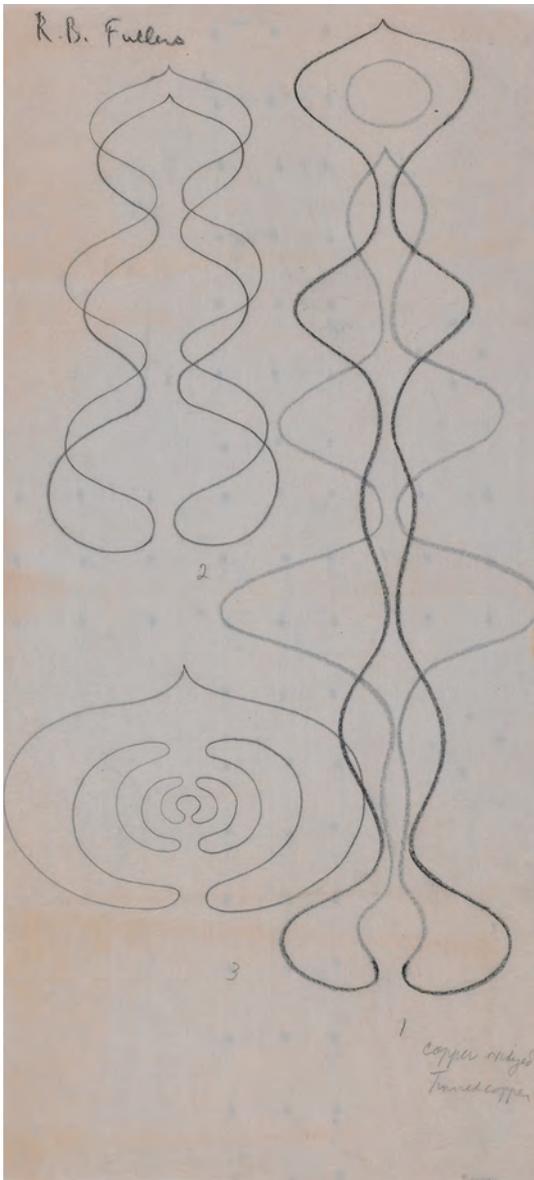
E.C.M., *ArtNews* (April 1956): page 26.

**bulbous nodes:** bulges or  
appendages shaped like bulbs

Ruth Asawa is a San Francisco sculptor who is enjoying her first Los Angeles one-man show at the Ankrum Gallery. Miss Asawa's hanging wire basket forms have become a familiar standby in important national sculpture shows during the past few years. She shapes wire mesh into **bulbous nodes**, which taper into neck forms and widen again into nodes reminiscent of oriental paper lanterns. Oftentimes a series of organic growth forms in a brassy wire will integrate with another in a contrasting tone to create a continuous counterpoint of both linear and formal invention. In other cases Miss Asawa explodes her mesh medium into a wire metaphor of natural growth from foliage and floral forms. Despite an “oriental” feel, these works grow out of the attitudes of the Constructivists, who felt that the new materials of sculpture would have to involve a heightened awareness of space and movement. Miss Asawa's sculpture meets these intangible criteria with elegance appropriate to the austere architecture of the mid-century's international style. These nicely unified and economically stated works are surely among the most original and satisfying new sculpture to have arisen in the western United States since the second war.

Gerald Nordland, *Artforum* (June 1962): page 8.

### How does the art historian's discussion of ethnicity differ from the critics' comments and Asawa's statement?



*Untitled*, 1961. Graphite and crayon on paper, 20 x 9 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of the artist, 2007.28.73

**juxtaposition:** side-by-side placement

Almost all accounts of her art and life remark on the fact of Asawa's Japanese heritage. From her earliest exhibitions to her most recent public art commissions, her ethnicity is evoked as if it would unlock both the meaning of her work and the origins of her experiences. Yet being a Japanese American has meant different things at different junctures to the conditions of Asawa's art-making and the contexts of her art's reception. While it may be impossible to assess what Japanese ancestry means to Asawa—her specific subjectivity—there is no question that her race and ethnicity mattered to others and presented unique circumstance that impacted opportunities for her as an artist just as it affected the way her art was received and interpreted. . . .

Modesty and thrift, filtered through ingenuity and creativity, were evident throughout the farm. Built by Umakichi [Asawa's father], the family home was a simple board-and-batten house with an interior of paper walls and a paper ceiling topped by a tin roof. "My father used to save every nail," Asawa recalls, "and straighten them out." Even the family's bath water was reused. Since Asawa did not like housework, she was assigned to tend the fire for heating the traditional Japanese *ofuro*, or bath, which required chopping wood and making sure the water was hot until the last of the family members took a bath—sometimes as late as 10 p.m. When it was time to germinate seeds, the used bath water was the perfect medium to facilitate sprouting. On the farm, maximizing the limited resources was central to the family's survival. Every element was scrutinized so that it could be utilized for multiple ends. . . .

From [Josef] Albers, Asawa believed that each material had its own inherent nature, which could be drawn out through combination, **juxtaposition**, or manipulation. "Each material has a nature of its own, and by combining it and by putting it next to another material, you change or give another personality to it without destroying either one. So that when you separate them again, they return back ... to [their] familiar qualities." Her wire sculptures maintain this equilibrium. While they are essentially a line,



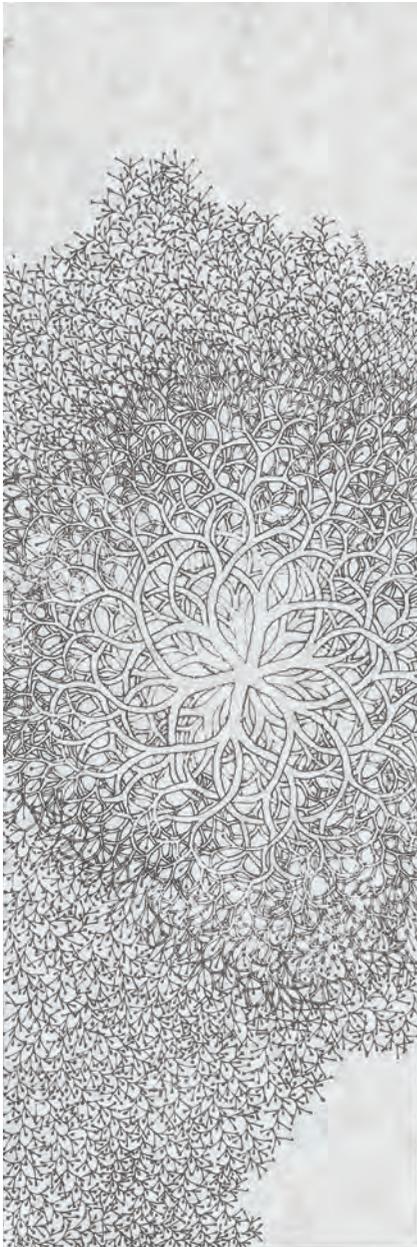
Installation of Ruth Asawa sculptures in the lobby of the Nancy B. And Jake L. Hamon Education Tower at the de Young, 2006. Photograph by Joseph McDonald

**volumetric:** having the quality of volume, as a container

through manipulation they become **volumetric**, yet they retain their essential “line-ness”: they could easily be unwound and returned to their initial state. Asawa goes further: “It’s the same thing that you don’t change a person’s personality, but when you combine them with other people, other personalities, they take on another quality. But the intent is not to change them, but to bring out another part of them.” Inherent in an Asawa wire sculpture, then, are its various states. Not only does the exterior become the interior and back again, but the material contains simultaneously its past and future states. This becomes the ultimate metaphor for understanding Asawa’s Japanese American heritage. It is embedded in all of her work and at the same time also always fluid, moving from one state to another while remaining essentially itself.

Karen Higa, “Inside and Outside at the Same Time,” in Daniell Cornell et al., *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2006), pages 30, 32, and 41.

### How does the curator's analysis expand your understanding of Asawa's sculpture? What specific words do you find particularly illuminating?



*Untitled*, ca. late 1960s. Black ink on paper, ca. 1960s. 17.8 x 6 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Sinton, 1969.24

**discursive constraints:** limits within the exploration of a topic

Ruth Asawa's artwork has always been concerned as much with space as with the objects that she creates to occupy it. Her training under Josef Albers at Black Mountain College (1946–1949) had been in drawing, painting, and design rather than sculpture. Under his mentorship the most important lesson she learned was to look and think in terms of figure-ground relationships, which translated to a concern with negative space in both two and three dimensions. In a 1973 essay Asawa is quoted, "Albers taught us to see things in a context, that the space under a table is as important as the table." This understanding of negative space as a shape led her to the modern experiments with wire that became her signature vocabulary. As she developed a language of open and closed forms, she also became interested in the spaces that were created by bringing forms together. . . .

In place of self-expression, Asawa was encouraged to think of modern art as problem-solving, of posing visual challenges and finding resolutions through meticulous observation and the manipulation of materials. She has said that the most valuable thing about her education at Black Mountain College was that it was not about learning a subject but about learning to think. When asked about the difficulty of defining her wire sculptures within traditional art categories, Asawa says, "I don't care. . . . I'm interested in finding solutions to problems. I can make all these different shapes and forms *out of wire*." Even in 1995, after a lifetime of inventing new ways to work with wire, she asserted, "I am excited by the endless possibilities of working with this form, and have only just begun to really explore them." . . .

Asawa's embrace of her roles as wife, mother, and homemaker led many critics to focus on the handworked nature of her sculptures in the climate of the 1950s and early 1960s, when gender stereotypes were common. Rather than noting her use of industrial wire and its uncanny transformation through her deceptively simple manipulation of interlocking loops, these writers related her sculptural process to the domestic traditions of craft, especially weaving, knitting, and crocheting. With these misguided attempts to situate Asawa's sculptures within the **discursive constraints** of domesticity and craft, it is instructive to consider how she collaborated with [Imogen] Cunningham to present her work in photographs. . . .



Imogen Cunningham, *Ruth Asawa and Her Children at Home*, 1957. Gelatin silver print, 9¾ x 10½ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier, 2006.114.10

**seminal pieces:** works that display the origin of the artist's ideas

**paradoxical:** seemingly contradictory but possibly true

The artist is shown in her studio, surrounded by sculptures and four of her children. On one level, it is a simple, domestic scene of children playing in the presence of their mother. However, on another level, the sculptures alter the environment completely, shifting its context to that of work and creativity. The works are not hung in isolation, merely as objects to be observed. The intricately designed patterns produced by the looped wire are beautiful in the way they introduce an awareness of light and form into the room, defining shapes and reflecting them. They also testify to the mental concentration and physical intention that creativity requires, underscoring the deliberate attention that preoccupies

everyone in the scene. Living in the midst of her sculptures was more than a practical necessity for Asawa; it was a way of incorporating the disciplines of art into daily living. . . .

Choosing the fifteen works that she believed represented the **seminal pieces** in the history of her developing language of wire sculpture, Asawa worked with the museum's then-director, Harry Parker, and me to situate the works in relation to each other within the confines of the lobby. For this installation, Asawa's guiding principle was the relationship between transparency and shadow, a seemingly **paradoxical** play that turns negative space into positive line and displaces forms to the floor, walls, and ceiling. We were especially concerned with installing the sculptures in ways that would result in unexpected transformations and juxtapositions. Because Asawa generates her sculptures through the rhetoric of line rather than the more solid geometry of planar surfaces, her transparent forms sometimes reveal themselves to be more solid in the shadows they cast than in their substance. Viewing the play of multiple shadows as the sculptures enliven the installation space, the spectator understands these works more completely by contemplating their interactions than by viewing each one in isolation.

Daniell Cornell, "The Art of Space: Ruth Asawa's Sculptural Installations," in Daniell Cornell et al., *The Sculpture of Ruth Asawa: Contours in the Air* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2006), pages, 138, 142, 148, 150–153, 156.

## About the Artist

**Ruth Asawa** (b. 1926) grew up in a family that earned most of what they had from years of exhausting labor. She was a middle child out of seven siblings, all of whom received Japanese and American names. Work and school occurred six days a week. On Saturdays the children went to Japanese school where they studied **kendo** and calligraphy, giving Ruth her first experience with a brush and ink.

The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942 immediately affected the Asawas. Her father, Umakichi, was taken to an internment camp in New Mexico and the rest of the Asawa family was relocated to a detention center at a racetrack in Santa Anita, California. While at the center, Ruth took art classes with Japanese internees from the Hollywood studio of Walt Disney.

Upon graduating from high school in 1943, Ruth left the relocation camp and went to Milwaukee State Teacher's College to become an art teacher. Upon fulfilling her course requirements, Ruth was barred from

student teaching because of her ethnicity and never received her degree. Ruth got a \$112 loan from a church in Hawaii and enrolled in Black Mountain College in North Carolina.

At Black Mountain, Ruth decided she wanted to be an artist. Under the instruction of her mentor Josef Albers, Asawa learned to challenge the eye through the use of color and line. In 1947, during a trip to Mexico, Asawa learned a wire-looping technique which the local villagers used to make baskets. Upon returning to the United States, Asawa experimented with the technique, developing her signature sculptural style. In 1949 Ruth moved to San Francisco, where she married Albert Lanier, whom she met at Black Mountain College. Believing art and life were inseparable, Asawa integrated her studio into her home, establishing an international reputation while raising six children.

After receiving notice that the Milwaukee Teacher's College wanted to recognize her as one of



Imogen Cunningham, *Ruth Kneeling Behind a Hanging Looped-Wire Sculpture*, 1957. Gelatin silver print, 9¾ x 7¾ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of Ruth Asawa and Albert Lanier, 2006.114.7

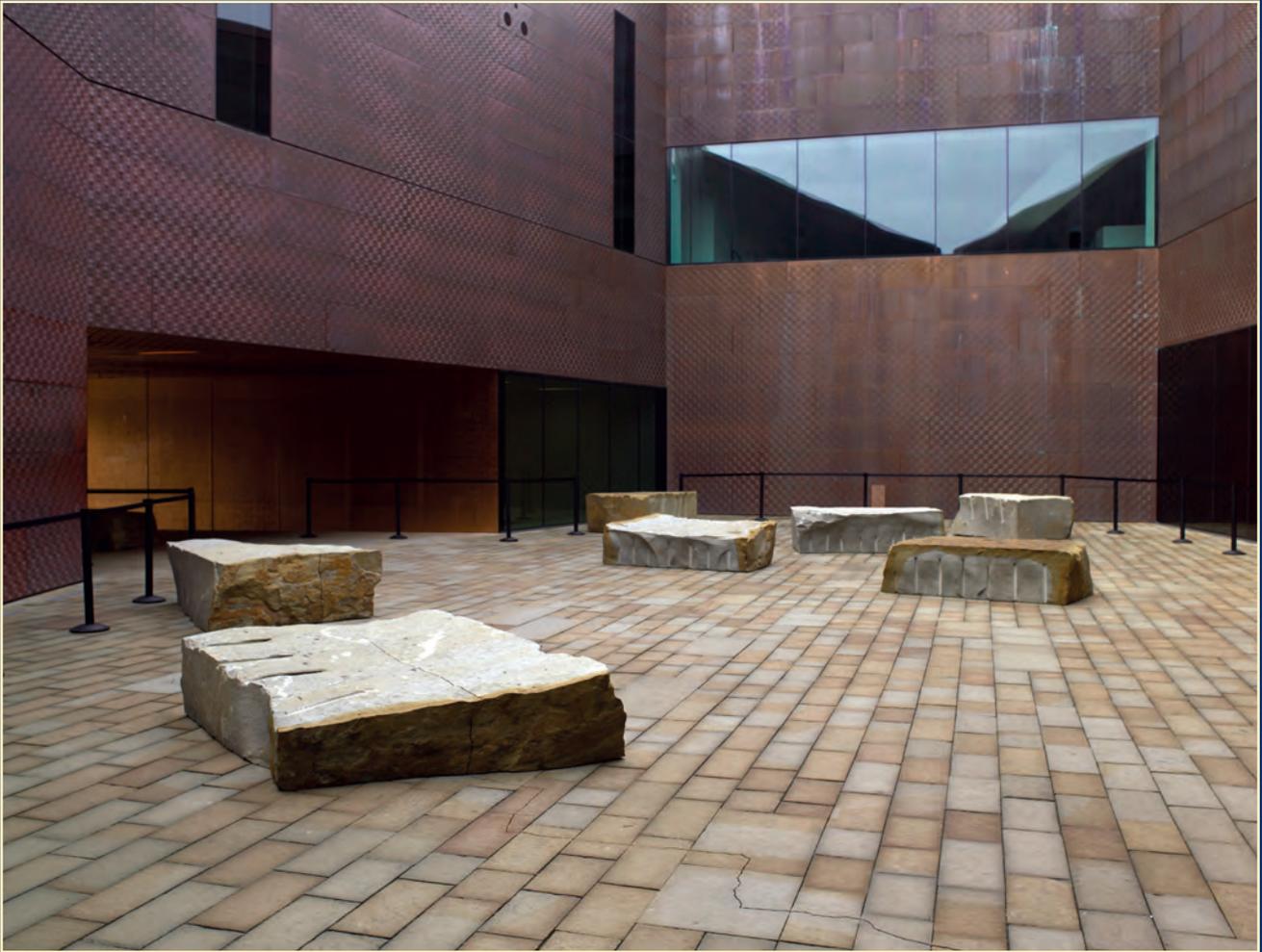
their most distinguished alumni, Ruth replied by asking for the Bachelor of Arts Degree they never gave her instead, and it was officially hers in 1998.

Tess Spinola, graduate of School of the Arts, San Francisco

**kendo:** Japanese art of fencing and swordsmanship

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you interpret Asawa's statement, "I liked the idea that the relation between outside and inside was interdependent, integral"?
2. After you read the two critiques of Asawa's work, which critic most accurately captures the artist's style and intent?
3. Although the artist says that she is a person with an "idea" who does not wish to be categorized as a Japanese American, there are influences on her art that come from both her family background and personal experiences. Write about the factors that influenced her art.
4. Considering Asawa's use of materials, form, and space, write about the interplay of solids and shadows in her work.



What role does **nature** play in your daily life?

### ANDY GOLDSWORTHY

(b. 1956)

*Drawn Stone*, 2005

Appleton Greenmore sandstone  
Museum purchase, gift of  
Lonna and Marshall Wais  
2004.5



*I stop at a place or pick up a material because I feel that there is something to be discovered. Here is where I can learn. I might have walked past or worked there many times. Some places I return to over and over again, going deeper—a relationship made in layers over a long time. Staying in one place makes me more aware of change. I might give up after a while. My perception of a place is often so frustratingly limited. The best of my work, sometimes the result of much struggle when made, appears so obvious that it is incredible I didn't see it before. It was there all the time. . . .*

*The energy and space around a material are as important as the energy and space within. The weather—rain, sun, snow, hail, mist, calm—is that external space made visible. When I touch a rock, I am touching and working the space around it.*

Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration with Nature*  
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990), page 1.

*My work with buildings is an attempt to understand and draw out their nature. Installations that engage with the building architecturally have been the most successful in trying to achieve this intention. There is a difference between a work that hangs as a rectangle on a wall and one that covers the wall completely—one is a picture, the other is the wall. At best, these works should feel as if they have risen to a building's surface as a memory of its origin, a connection between the building and its material source.*

Andy Goldsworthy, *Time: Andy Goldsworthy*  
(New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), page 8.

### How does Goldsworthy's design for the de Young relate to his comments about working with buildings?

**cleaved boulders:** rocks/  
boulders that have been cut or  
split

Commissioned for the opening of the de Young on Oct. 15, Goldsworthy's "Faultline" [*Drawn Stone*] is a drawing in stone, a quake-city creation that will draw visitors into the new museum along a meandering crack running from the roadway out front through a series of **cleaved boulders** you can sit on.

It's a simple idea, "but so complicated to achieve a crack that appears effortless in this space," said Goldsworthy, 49, a lean, soft-spoken man with large reserves of patience and energy. "To get this line flowing and joining it together is incredibly difficult. There's so much effort gone into making it effortless."

Goldsworthy, an amiable chap with silvery hair and close-cropped beard, an Elvis tattoo on his right forearm, and kneepads over his jeans, stood up and gazed across the sunny courtyard, where mason Bernie Gotzhein was setting some just-cracked stones in mortar.

**fissure:** crack

The **fissure**—which seen from above suggests a topographical map—will curve and zigzag across staggered rows of rectangular pavers laid out in advance. Aided by his American project manager, Jacob Ehrenberg, Goldsworthy was composing one small section at a time. He plucked pavers from the grid, cracked them to his satisfaction—about 10 percent get rejected—and watched as Gotzhein mortared them in place. . . .

"We're basically following Andy around," said Gotzhein, a good-humored guy from Cleveland Marble Mosaic who'd never worked on an art project before and was intrigued by this one. "You got to get your mind set for this kind of work."

**ephemeral works:** works that  
last only a short time

**minarets:** high, slender towers

Goldsworthy is famous for the often **ephemeral works** he improvises with leaves, rocks, icicles, branches, sheep bones, and whatever else nature offers up in a particular place. Some of those beautiful pieces—a Japanese river rock draped in red maple leaves, **minarets** of stacked sea stones on the Isle of Skye—last only a few moments, hours, or days. They melt in the sun, get swept away by tides or wind, toppled by gravity. The process was documented in the lovely 2002 film *Rivers and Tides*. . . .

"There has been a distinct separation between the ephemeral works and the permanent pieces, and this one falls somewhere between the two. So it's significant for me for that," Goldsworthy said.

"It has this unpredictability about it," something "kind of intuitive, experimental, in a very heady context. Perhaps only now can I handle coming to a situation like this. The older you

*continued on inside left flap*



*Stones Split to Make a Spiral*, 1994. Image courtesy of the Haines Gallery, San Francisco

**seismic shock absorbers:** features added to structures to help them absorb the shock of an earthquake

get, I think, the more uncertain you can be. You can be more responsive to a site because of the experience you've had. I couldn't have handled something like this 30 years ago. I'd be terrified. I understand stone better. I've got more chance of it working, and more chance of being able to learn from the stone." . . .

"I wanted a crack that had a certain energy and movement to it, in contrast to the straight edges of the pavers," Goldsworthy said. "I found that by hitting it from behind with a hammer, it imparted energy and unpredictability to the line." It's a balance of chance and control. "I'm very demanding of what I want, but the stone's very demanding, too. That's what creates the tautness and tension of the line. . . . I'm enjoying the delicacy, the precision of this, the line. They're qualities you don't often associate with stone."

Goldsworthy's work is usually about the place where it's made. This project presented a different challenge. He only had the plans for the museum.

"It's very difficult to get some way into understanding something that's not there," he said. "In the absence of a building, I had to look toward other things, the general feeling of the place, of California. Obviously the fissure, the crack, is something that takes on a special significance in this landscape."

The old de Young had to be torn down because of earthquake damage. And the new one, with its huge **seismic shock absorbers**, "has been made in defiance of earthquakes. This is a small reminder of that threat, if you like. It's with us all the time. I hope it's not something that's hitting you on the head, just a gentle reminder."

The eight rough-hewn Yorkshire boulders the crack will bisect will serve as benches and as a reminder that all this stone came from the earth.

Some of the 10,000-pound blocks were split, with drill and chisel, at the English quarry, others at Hunters Point after arriving here. A crew from Sheedy Drayage Co. brought them into the museum on big steel winches, placing six of them in a seemingly random pattern set out by Goldsworthy. Two other boulders remained on the museum loading dock; they didn't crack as cleanly as Goldsworthy would have liked, and he's mulling the possibility of going back to Yorkshire to fetch replacements.

"The discoloration of the paving stone is explained in these blocks," he said. The other-orange is caused by **oxidized iron** in the soil that stained the stone and seeped into its center. "You can look at the blocks and realize the geological history of the stone that you're treading on. It's important for me to realize that the stone of a building is from the earth."

**oxidized iron:** iron that has been exposed to oxygen

**transience:** the quality of being temporary, not permanent

If some people assume the crack is an unintended flaw in the building, that's OK by Goldsworthy, who imagines children playing and people congregating along its path.

"Although obviously it's not going to fall apart, wash away, or melt in a way a lot of my works do, it still does talk about the same things—**transience**, movement, change. It's a crack. It's an indication of what may happen, and what will happen eventually, in the very long term."

In the meantime, Goldsworthy has been wandering through Golden Gate Park, improvising a piece here and there with bark, mud, and eucalyptus leaves.

"As much as it's a great honor and fantastic to be here, it's also a lot of pressure, and getting out there and doing something for myself is a way of dealing with that," Goldsworthy said. "It keeps me in touch."

Jesse Hamlin, "Follow the fissure to the new de Young—Andy Goldsworthy will lead the way," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 2005, (as posted on <http://www.sfgate.com>).



Andy Goldsworthy working with local stone masons to create *Drawn Stone*

## How does *Drawn Stone* relate to the history of the de Young and the museum's collections?



*Rush, Thorns, Slate*, 1994. Image courtesy of the Haines Gallery, San Francisco

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco are cognizant of the potential for art commissions to have a major impact upon the presentation and perception of the new de Young Museum. Few artists are more eminently qualified for this task than Goldsworthy. . . .

A Goldsworthy commission for the new de Young will resonate with American art traditions represented by objects already in the de Young's permanent collection, including Hudson River School paintings that were influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's, Henry David Thoreau's, and John Ruskin's reverence for nature. A Goldsworthy work, itself embodying the transformative

power of nature and culture, will serve as an apt metaphor for the transformation of the new de Young Museum and will also signal a renewed level of commitment and ambition regarding contemporary art.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, Acquisitions Statement, *Drawn Stone* object file, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Goldsworthy's works typically emphasize natural processes such as creation and transformation, often achieving a state of near transparency in which the artist's intervention is not immediately apparent. As Goldsworthy has observed, "Working with nature means working on nature's terms. . . . Movement, change, light, growth, and decay are the life-blood of nature, the energies that I try to tap through my work. I want to get under the surface. When I work with a leaf, rock, stick, it is not just the material in itself, it is an opening into the processes of life within and around it. When I leave it, these processes continue." . . .

. . . Describing *Drawn Stone*, he notes, "Although obviously it's not going to fall apart, wash away, or melt in a way a lot of my works do, it still does talk about the same things—transience, movement, change. It's a crack. It's an indication of what may happen, and what will happen eventually, in the very long term."



*Clay Wrapped Rock*, 1992. Image courtesy of the Haines Gallery, San Francisco

*Drawn Stone* thus has a subtly subversive quality. It challenges the viewer's conceptions of what constitutes a work of art by blurring the distinction between the natural and the man-made, while also drawing attention to the power of nature to undermine or destroy even the most monumental works created by humans.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Andy Goldsworthy's, *Drawn Stone*: A Fine Line," *Fine Arts* (Fall/Winter 2005–2006): pages 18 and 21.

## In Conversation with the Artist

**Fine Arts:** What appealed to you about creating a site-specific piece for the de Young's opening?

**Andy Goldsworthy:** I've felt some connection to San Francisco ever since my first visit. But when I discovered that the stone pavers for the museum were coming from a quarry in Yorkshire, England—close to the place where I grew up—I began to feel a special affinity for the site. And I thought the stones could be a “way in” for me.

I went to the quarry to look at the stone and originally thought I'd use it as a material, as a connection between the finished surface and where it came from. But as I began working with it, I found that the stone broke cleanly and left a beautiful line.

**FA:** Talk about the lines and the name of the piece, *Drawn Stone*.

**AG:** The lines give a sense of movement. And they are seductive. Think of the way children take pleasure [in] finding cracks in pavement. The lines themselves are seductive, so they run their fingers along them. When people experience this piece, it may appear as if the lines are heading in lots of different directions. Instead, they're all leading to the museum's entrance. They're all inviting people to enter. And of course, the cracks are a little subversive. They can be perceived as accidents, as faults, which means something very specific with the seismic role of earthquakes in California. I also like the connection between the quarry and the site where the stones now rest. I've left drill and extraction marks to deepen that sense of connection.

“A Conversation with Andy Goldsworthy,” *Fine Arts* (Fall/Winter 2005–2006): page 22.

## From the Art Historian

### How does Goldsworthy challenge sculpture as a tradition?

While sculpture has been thought of as permanent and outside time, Goldsworthy's works change: the forest projects gradually decay, while the earthworks will, initially at least, grow, as weeds and undergrowth cover them. Sculpture traditionally represents the imposed will of the maker, but Goldsworthy is a collaborator with nature, interested in the way wind and rain form pools in the folds of his earthworks, the sun and shadow encourage some growth and not other. He is concerned with the way people respond to his sculpture, without trying to influence them. Place is crucial to his art: a work must fit, must draw on the environment and become part of it. But place is distinct from mere space.

Andrew Causey, “Environmental Sculptures,” in *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture 1976–1990*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1993), page 127.

## About the Artist

**Andy Goldsworthy** (b. 1956) is a contemporary artist who grew up in northwest England. He spent much of his teenage years exploring the land and working on a farm. It was during this time that he developed a lifelong fascination with natural elements such as stone, snow, wind, plants, and soil. Goldsworthy trained as an artist at the Bradford School of Art and Preston Polytechnic School. While Goldsworthy was an art student, he was required to spend a great deal of time indoors in the art studio, but he was still drawn to the outdoors and the land, which he thought of as a work of sculpture.

After attending a presentation by Richard Long about “land art,” Goldsworthy was inspired to create

his first work of art using stones he found along the English coastline. Later he worked as a groundskeeper on an estate near Scotland where he continued to use nature to create artworks that reflected nature’s impermanence—for example, the changing of the tides or the erosion of soil. At the North Pole, Goldsworthy created *Touching North*, a work consisting of four enormous snow arches. Through this work and other works he reminds the viewer that all of nature is changeable, unpredictable, and impermanent.

Goldsworthy is known for connecting rural and urban environments in his choice of materials. This is apparent in

*Drawn Stone*, which he was commissioned to create for the entrance area of the new de Young Museum in San Francisco. Goldsworthy connects the work to themes of



Goldsworthy at work. Photo by Kaz Tsuruta

movement and change inspired by the instability of California geology. He actually created cracks in the Appleton Greenmore sandstone that he used in the museum entryway. The meandering crack invites the visitor to follow its path over and around boulders to the museum’s main entrance. Referring to the occurrence of earthquakes in California, Andy Goldsworthy speaks about the faux fault line he created, noting, “It’s an indication of what may happen, and what will happen eventually, in the long term.”

Gail Siegel, Education Consultant,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco



*Touching North*. North Pole, April 24, 1989. Photograph by Julian Calder. Image courtesy of Haines Gallery, San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Goldsworthy says, “My work with buildings is an attempt to understand and draw out their nature.” Respond to this quote, relating how *Drawn Stone* engages with the entrance to the de Young.
2. How does Goldsworthy’s use of natural materials contrast with the more traditional art forms such as painting or drawing?
3. In what ways does this piece reflect a reverence for and an understanding of nature?
4. How does Goldsworthy “collaborate with nature” to make art?



Who **determines** the  
**meaning** of an art work?

### KIKI SMITH

(b. 1954)

*Near*, 2005

Cast aluminum, copper leaf,  
hand-blown glass, 13 x 41 x 24 ft.

Museum purchase, gift of  
Dorothy and George Saxe  
and the Friends of New Art  
2004.94



*I trust my work. It's a collaboration with the material, and when it's viewed, it's a collaboration with the world. . . .*

*Making art is a lot about just seeing what happens if you put some energy into something.*

From Steven Sherrill, "Kiki & Me," *Modern Painters* (July/August 2005): pages 77–78.

*My father lived in the house he grew up in, and when he died, my aunt came and took all the furniture in the house, so we didn't have any furniture. We would go on weekends to the supermarket and get fruit crates to make furniture. We'd paint them—that was all the decoration they got. Every room had different colored boxes. We had one room that was just cardboard boxes, so there's this sort of nostalgia in (the piece) for me as well. . . .*

*I've always used glass and ceramic, materials associated with craft, and then I thought about the fog, something you notice as a tourist. There's a lot of homeless people and a lot of fog. I lived here for a year in the seventies. I also associate San Francisco with gender politics, gay liberation and hippies, so [the glass drops] are coated with **stannous chloride** to make them a little bit rainbowy.*

**stannous chloride:** chemical compound using tin and chlorine

From Kenneth Baker, "They're more than glass drops and a crumpled box. For artist Kiki Smith, they're strands of memory," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 21, 2005, (as posted on <http://www.sfgate.com>).

**Fine Arts:** What was your reaction to the invitation to create a site-specific piece?

**Kiki Smith:** I was honored and scared. But when someone gives you a great big opportunity, you say yes and you try to live up to it.

**FA:** You've described this sculpture as a "riff" on the oldest painting in the de Young's collection, *David, Joanna, and Abigail Mason* (1670). Talk about the process that got you here.

**KS:** When I came to visit San Francisco, I stayed in a hotel downtown and I walked a lot, and wrote down my impressions—intuitive and subjective—in a little notebook. I was struck by the contrast I kept seeing between great wealth and homelessness. And I was impressed by the way the mist comes into the city, changing what you see at every moment and from every vantage point. I'd been reading a lot of colonial history; it's not my personal history, but I thought the **aesthetic** was tremendous. I wanted my work to feel like New England, plain and severe, but also "fancy" in some way, in the crafts tradition.

**FA:** That tradition has been important to you.

**KS:** Yes, and it's often a maligned tradition—ceramics, glass, jewelry. Now, with computers, there's a great **resurgence** of decorative life. I live in New York, and I make a lot of work from cardboard, from found material, and I kept thinking about people who actually live in cardboard. So all these convoluted things—the mist, the beauty of the city, my interest in colonial history and in crafts—led me to listen to my brain. It's collaboration between internal life and external influences. At some point, making art is trusting the practice, letting go of your ideas and agendas, and dealing with something in the present.

**FA:** How do you hope visitors will experience the sculpture?

**KS:** My work is more than my intention. I see all sorts of things—children in a flying house, a cow jumping over the moon, a Buddhist crown, a big piece of jewelry for the room. Maybe these two little girls were shot off into out space and abandoned.

**FA:** How did the de Young itself shape what you've created?

**KS:** Since it's a copper building, I kept thinking of a jewel in the crown. And I like the fact that the aluminum will get duller and duller, just as the copper outside has become quieter. I think the piece has a sense of **whimsy or folly**; it's like something discarded, but with a jewel inside. And with the drops and the flying box together, there's a sense of playfulness. I hope it will generate curiosity.

**aesthetic:** an idea of what is beautiful or pleasing

**resurgence:** a new arising; revival

**whimsy or folly:** anything humorously fanciful or foolish

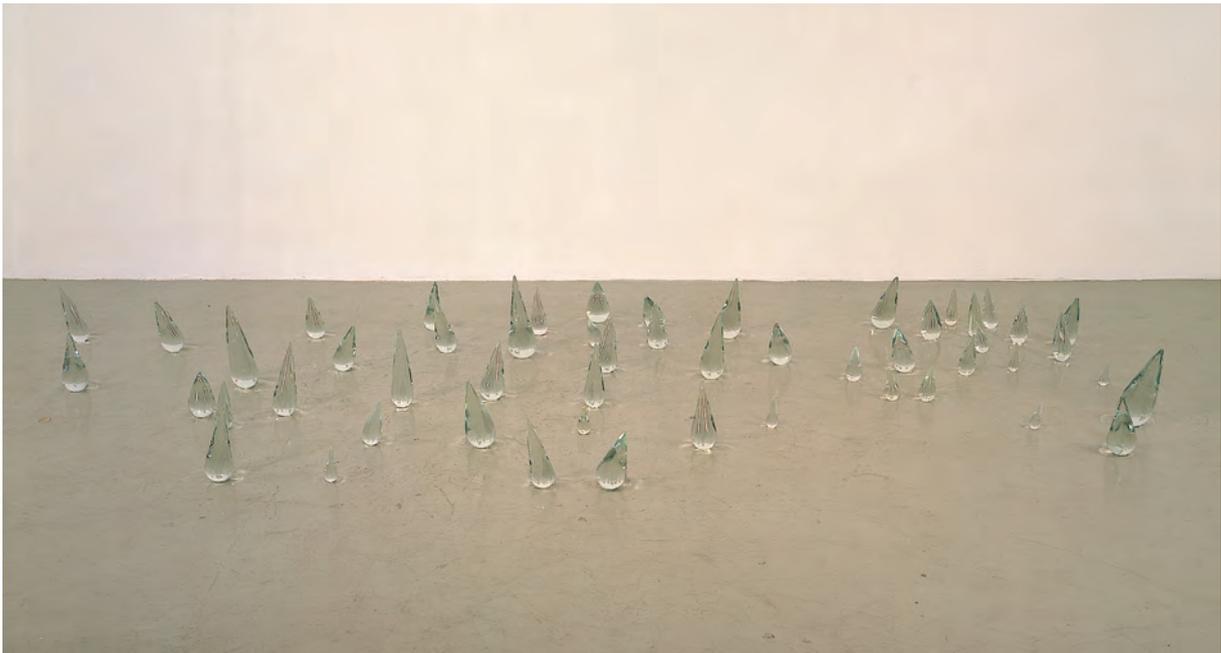
### Do you view *Near* as a memorializing or devotional piece? What alternative narratives struck you when you first studied the work?

**visceral:** instinctive rather than reasoned

**illuminate:** light up or make clear

Smith's work is distinguished by its emphasis on the human body as a site of artistic exploration. Her **visceral** investigations of the body's external appearance, internal organs, and biological functions often **illuminate** its status as a locus for social, political, and cultural engagement. Smith also has confronted complex stereotypes and taboos associated with perceptions of the female body, particularly those that have fostered the marginalization of women. Through her emotionally evocative and intellectually articulate embrace of the human figure, Smith has helped to reestablish humanism as a viable subject for contemporary artists.

For her new de Young installation entitled *Near*, generously funded by Dorothy and George Saxe and the Friends of New Art, Smith has appropriated the images of Joanna and Abigail Mason from one of the most famous 17th-century American colonial portraits, *David, Joanna, and Abigail Mason* (ca. 1670). Smith's selective inclusion of Joanna and Abigail, and her omission of David, the family heir and primary focus of the original painting, reflect her ongoing interest in images of women and in redressing an historical imbalance that has traditionally favored men over women. . . .



*Tears*, 1994. Glass, fifty-one units, length of each approximately 4½ to 14½ in. Collection of Michael and Jeanne Klein, Houston

**religious votive images:** images that serve for dedications and offerings made to religious figures, such as saints

**supplicant:** one who asks humbly



Attributed to the Freake-Gibbs Painter (active ca. 1670), *David, Joanna, and Abigail Mason*, ca. 1670. Oil on canvas, 39 x 42½ in. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1979.7.3

Rendered as two-dimensional silhouettes gilded with copper leaf, Smith's images of Joanna and Abigail Mason recall the *milagro* or *santos* traditions, in which **religious votive images** are used as intermediaries for **supplicants** seeking divine intervention. Smith's appropriation of these 17th-century portraits is consistent with her personal belief that ordinary human beings deserve the same respect and reverence as religious icons and their relics. Nearly three centuries after Joanna's and Abigail's mortal remains were consigned to the earth and their memories were consigned to obscurity, Kiki Smith has resurrected their images to grant these ancestor children, and the child in every human being, a form of artistic immortality.

Timothy Anglin Burgard, "Kiki Smith's *Near*: Mortality Immortalized," *Fine Arts* (Fall/Winter 2005–2006): pages 11–14.



Copper foil figures inspired by Joanna and Abigail Mason.



Shadows cast by *Near*



### How does the commission and design of Smith's *Near* relate to the comments of the critics below?

Though Smith considers herself part of a long creative continuum, she delights in charting new and unfamiliar territory, continually reinventing herself along the way. . . .

"When I started working with the human body, the figure was a disregarded issue in art. And the body is one thing that everyone can identify with," says Smith, who is currently sculpting small doll-like figures inspired by 18th-century porcelain figurines and early 20th-century flappers. "I'm always interested in things that are being shunned. In my art, I go to what is dismissed. But I don't try to be autobiographical or **didactic**."

**didactic:** instructive; used for teaching

**cryptic:** difficult to understand

Unlike so much of the **cryptic** conceptual art that fills galleries today, creating an uncomfortable distance between viewer and object, Smith's art provokes a visceral response, a glimmer of recognition that connects us to universal truths. In all its protean manifestations, her work appeals to both the head and the heart. It captivates us with a storyteller's facility for unexpected twists of meaning and interpretation that challenge us to question ever-shifting sociopolitical and historical constructs and our own perceptions. For Smith there are no boundaries between the public and the private, body and spirit, man-woman and nature, life and death. She lives in the gaps. Her art, which can be at once beautiful and repellent, **abject** and **ethereal**, transcends the contradictions and dualities that cause so much conflict both within ourselves and in the larger world.

**abject:** low or unfortunate

**ethereal:** light and airy or heavenly

"I make art to try to make my life better, so that I'm less conflicted," says Smith. "Being an artist is about being present, listening to your inner voice and trusting the process. I don't always have a specific plan or outcome. I enjoy the struggle. And it's gratifying to feel useful in some way, outside of myself."

Dana Micucci, "Breaking Boundaries: Kiki Smith masters various media to comment on today's issues," *Art & Antiques* (November 2006): page 57.

There was much clucking of tongues last fall when the *New York Times Magazine* ran a laudatory profile of New York mega-dealer Arne Glimcher of the Pace-Wildenstein Gallery. There was Glimcher on the cover surrounded by his stable of talent—all of them solidly established male artists on the downside of 50. Pace, a **notorious bastion** of male chauvinism, built its foundation largely through representing Louise Nevelson during the '70s but hadn't taken on a woman artist since Agnes Martin joined the gallery in the mid-'70s.

**notorious bastion:** well-known place or institution



Kiki Smith and Zach Wollard  
at Kiki Smith's studio.

© 2006. Film still from *Kiki Smith:  
Squatting the Palace*, directed  
by Vivien Bittencourt and  
Vincent Katz

In light of that, it came as a bit of surprise last month when Glimcher decided to throw his weight behind 40-year-old New York sculptor Kiki Smith. Not only is she a woman, but she makes intensely emotional, defiantly feminine art that's markedly at odds with the generally ultra-cool Pace aesthetic.

"Every so often an extraordinary artist happens, and Kiki's one of them," Glimcher says of Smith, who since 1990 has shown locally with the Shoshana Wayne Gallery. "Her work is resonating very powerfully in the culture right now because it's intensely personal. . . . Kiki's work isn't the product of a system or school—it's about her."

**upper echelons:** highest levels

Smith is inarguably the toast of the town at the moment, but all it takes is a brief conversation with her to deduce that she's singularly lacking in the careerist instincts one assumes are mandatory if one wants to play hardball with the big boys in the **upper echelons** of the art world. . . .

Smith grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey, the eldest of three girls. She describes her childhood as "not quite normal."

**lackadaisical:** relaxed,  
lethargic

"I was raised to do nothing," she says, laughing. "I don't know what my parents had in mind, but I had no ambition whatsoever. I practically flunked out of high school, then enrolled in trade school and studied baking because I thought I'd do manual labor the rest of my life. After baking school I went to live in San Francisco, but it was too **lackadaisical** for me—everybody was smoking pot, which I never liked, and being from the East Coast, I wanted to *do* something. Lounging around in nice weather didn't make sense to me, so I left after a year."

Kristine McKenna, "The Art of the Body Part,"  
*Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1994, pages 5 and 86.

## About the Artist

**Kiki Smith** (b.1954) grew up in New Jersey with a mother who was an opera singer, a father who was a famous Minimalist sculptor (Tony Smith), and twin sisters. Growing up, the girls were always surrounded by singing and dramatic readings, and their only art studio was the front room. Famous Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Richard Tuttle were regular guests at the house, and Smith would watch them work and exchange ideas.

Smith had a hard time in school and did not realize she wanted to be an artist until she was 24 years old. She nearly flunked out of high school and never followed through after drop-



*Born*, 2002. Lithograph on mold-made T.H. Saunders Paper, 68½ x 56⅝ in., edition: 28. Publisher and printer: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Emily Fisher Landau, 2002



Smith supervising the installation of *Near* in 2005 at the de Young. Photo by Kaz Tsuruta

ping her portfolio off at the Hartford Art School in Connecticut, deciding to begin a self-taught career instead.

Smith's work remained on the periphery until the 1980s because of its grisly content and her personal lack of interest in public recognition. As the issues of AIDS, abortion, and race began turn the body into a political battleground, affecting the



*Jersey Crows*, 1995. Silicon bronze, 27 units, each 6¼ x 17½ x 11 in. to 16 x 19½ x 23½ in. Private collection

art scene, Smith's work rose to the surface.

Today Smith finds inspiration in myriad different sources, including Greek and Egyptian sculpture, Buddhist iconography, biblical stories, and fairy tales. Through her work, she aims to destroy stereotypes by illustrating the body of Everyman as a bag of flesh and bones and by putting all of our most private acts on public display.

Smith's work is often autobiographical, and she finds it a constant struggle to expose herself. Her art is her way of answering the questions that dominate her mind, things like, "What body parts could you lose and still think of yourself as yourself?"

Tess Spinola, graduate of School of the Arts, San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. When discussing *Near*, Kiki Smith says, "I hope it will generate curiosity." What aspects of this piece are you curious about?
2. How has Smith reflected current moral issues along with moral issues from the colonial period?
3. What stories might Smith be telling the viewer by creating *Near*?



When have you been **captivated** by the **light**  
of the sun, moon, or stars?

### JAMES TURRELL

(b. 1943)

*Three Gems*, 2005

Concrete, plaster, stone,

L.E.D. lighting

Foundation purchase, gift of

Barbro and Bernard A. Osher

2003.68



*My room had these dark green curtains with tar in the middle that were completely opaque. You could pull them down and make the room quite dark in the day, although some light would come in around the edges. When I was six years old, in order to assert my own presence in the room, I took a pin or needle to these curtains and pierced them to make star patterns and the constellations. I would simply make bigger holes for stars of greater magnitude. Pulling down the curtains and darkening the room, you could see stars in the middle of the day.*

From Andrew Graham-Dixon, "James Turrell: A Life in Light,"  
in *James Turrell: A Life in Light* (Paris: Somogy Publishers, 2006), page 28.

*The best magic of all is the magic that is real. I'm interested in working straight with that power.*

From Jan Butterfield, *The Art of Light and Space*  
(New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1993), page 68.

*continued on right flap*

## From the Artist

*Light is a powerful substance. We have a primal connection to it. But, for something so powerful, situations for its felt presence are fragile. I form it as much as the material allows. I like to work with it so that you feel it physically, so you feel the presence of light inhabiting a space. . . . My desire is to set up a situation to which I take you and let you see. It becomes your experience.*

From Andrew Graham-Dixon, "James Turrell: A Life in Light," in *James Turrell: A Life in Light* (Paris: Somogy Publishers, 2006), page 35.

*Basically, we're crustaceans. We are unaware of what we do when we make these structures we live in. We go outside, but only to go into other structures. We're like bottom dwellers – we rarely look up at the ocean in the air.*

From Richard Cork, "Look Up to the Sky and See," *Art Review* (May 2006): page 116.



*I feel my work is using the material of light to affect the medium of perception. I'm using light in its material aspect. This is where other artists like Mark Rothko or Barnett Newman come in. If you're really looking at a Rothko or Newman, light comes out of them; they are glowing. They are dematerialized. I try to take light and materialize it in its physical aspects so you really feel it . . . and its presence in space, not on a wall.*

From Richard Andrews, "The Light Passing By," in *James Turrell: Sensing Space* (Seattle: Henry Gallery Association, 1992), page 12.

**Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1949. Oil on canvas,  
68 x 34 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 2 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,  
Bequest of Josephine Morris, 2003.25.5**

### How does the author define the artist's use of light?

For his new de Young commission . . . Turrell has created a “skyspace,” a circular, domed viewing chamber with an opening in the ceiling that frames the sky above. Although he has been creating skyspaces since 1975, this project is the first to adopt the form of a stupa, a cylindrical mound or structure that traditionally served as a Buddhist shrine. This new skyspace, *Three Gems*, is situated within a grass-covered hill in the Osher Sculpture Garden. Viewers walk through a short underground tunnel and then enter into a cylindrical, open-air space carved out of the hill. The retaining walls and walkway of this cylindrical space are red plaster and concrete, and the central domed stupa form is finished with white plaster. Entering the stupa through a door on the far side, viewers sit on a bench that runs around the circumference of the skyspace and view the sky through a circular opening in the roof. Viewers' perceptions of the sky color are subtly altered by an L.E.D. lighting system concealed inside the chamber, and by changing light and weather conditions outside the chamber. . . .

Turrell's ultimate goal is not to alter nature, but rather to alter the viewer's frame of reference—removing all extraneous visual information to create a focused and clarified vision of the transformative power of light. Viewers typically progress through sequential states of disorientation, acclimation, and, ideally, enlightenment. Turrell's emphasis on this internal transformation may be seen as a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment and may be traced in part to his Quaker upbringing, which included communal meetings where he was encouraged to “go inside and greet the light” of divine revelation. His works shift the viewer's focus from supposedly objective scientific realities to subjective spiritual experiences in which “light is not so much something that reveals, as the revelation itself.”

Timothy Anglin Burgard, “James Turrell's *Three Gems*: Science and Spirit,”  
*Fine Arts* (Fall/Winter 2005–2006): page 17.

**According to the critic, what is Turrell's ultimate goal as an artist, and how does his work achieve this aim?**

Just as the great British painter Turner taught people to appreciate the beauties of a sunset as never before, so does James Turrell encourage all of us to pay more attention to the effects of light and air and atmosphere constantly at play in the world around us. His work can be intensely beautiful, intensely mysterious, but the work is only beginning. How that work is absorbed by the consciousness, how it shapes and changes habits of seeing — that is what is all-important.

From Andrew Graham-Dixon, "James Turrell: A Life in Light," in *James Turrell: A Life in Light* (Paris: Somogy, 2006), page 41.



**J.M.W. Turner, *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835. Oil on canvas. 36 $\frac{5}{16}$  x 48 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. National Gallery of Art, Washington**

### What role do light, space, and time play in Turrell's work? How does the author relate Turrell's art to other artists' use of light?

Our sense of sight is exquisite: it allows us to see the light that rains down from the night sky and the spectrum of color resident in a drop of water. Sight gives us access to vistas as infinite as the cosmos and as tiny as molecular structure, and yet, as central as the sense of sight is to our ability to understand our environment, we tend to think no more about the act of seeing than we do about the act of breathing. As automatic as the movement of breath in and out is the sweep of our eyes, scanning, noticing, dismissing, concentrating.

**mimicry:** the act of imitating

**illusory:** unreal or deceptive

**nonvicarious:** characterized by direct experience, rather than mediated

**verisimilitude** the appearance of truth

**antecedent:** a preceding circumstance or forerunner

. . . James Turrell's art is not one of simple **mimicry** of natural visual phenomena. It is the creation of spaces that offer the viewer the opportunity to understand that seeing is conditioned by the limits, either learned or physical, of perception. While many artists, such as J. M. W. Turner, Albert Bierstadt, and Ansel Adams, have sought to induce the sensation of seeing the effect of light within atmosphere, Turrell is interested in the creation of equivalent, rather than **illusory**, experiences. "There is a rich tradition in painting of work about light, but it is not light—it is the record of seeing. My material is light, and it is responsive to your seeing—it is **nonvicarious**." . . .

Light has long received the attention of artists, and many have sought to record the action of light within clouds, atmosphere, and the world. In the centuries preceding our own, many European and American artists strove for **verisimilitude**, or a heightened sense of the natural in their works, often making light the metaphorical connection to the divine. In the works of the nineteenth-century American Luminists we find an artistic sensibility that is an **antecedent** for the presence of light found in Turrell's work. Departing from the bravura landscapes filled to overflowing with the stunning vistas, storms, and streams of light that characterized the work of artists such as

Albert Bierstadt and Frederic E. Church, the Luminists painted the landscape as if it were charged with light. Martin Johnson Heade, John Frederick Kensett, and Fitz Hugh Lane depicted light as luminous atmosphere which seemed to well up against the illusionary window of the frame. Art historian Barbara Novak points out, "In contrast to the operatic landscapes, luminism



Frederic Edwin Church, *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 56¼ x 84¼ in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, Midred Anna Williams Collection, 1970.9

Martin Johnson Heade, *Singing Beach, Manchester*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 20 x 36 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, 1993.35.12



**aristocratic:** of high birth, rank, or privilege

**democratic:** expressing political or social equality

is classic rather than baroque, contained rather than expansive, **aristocratic** rather than **democratic**, private not public, introverted not gregarious, exploring a state of being rather than becoming. . . .”

But the work of James Turrell is not only about light, it is also about space. The essence of Turrell’s art, in contrast to that of the painters mentioned above, is not the creation of illusions of light within pictorial space, but the interaction of the viewer with light in real time and space. Turrell’s works begin with the creation of a space that then becomes inhabited by light. The control of that light dematerializes the architectural space and redefines it as a perceptual space which appears limitless to the eye, despite the mind’s efforts to confirm the physical boundaries of the architecture. . . .

Time is the third aspect of Turrell’s work, after light and space. For the audience, the viewing experience is a dynamic one, since the viewer’s eyes are adjusting and reacting to light; in those works with variable or outside light, the piece itself changes as well. Turrell speaks of needing to “pay the price of admission” to experience his works, and by this he means the viewer must make a commitment to sustained viewing over time. Without this commitment to dedicated looking, or “probing,” the works are almost literally nothing, as a quick glance or a museum walk-by might reveal only flat planes of neutral color or perhaps empty, dark rooms. . . .

James Turrell has evolved a remarkable body of work which extends itself deeply into aspects of individual perception. What makes his works fascinating is their inherent dualities, rational yet mysterious, simple yet sublime. He has achieved an extraordinary feat: to create works of art of scale and profundity in which the viewer has an essential role, for, without the cognitive and perceptual space inside the mind of the viewer, these works would not exist.

Richard Andrews, “The Light Passing By,” in *James Turrell: Sensing Space* (Seattle: Henry Gallery Association, 1992), pages 9–11, 14, 17.

## About the Artist

As an undergraduate at Pomona College, **James Turrell** studied psychology, mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, geology, art, and art history. Turrell recalls that while attending art history courses he became more transfixed by the beam of light from the slide projector than by the image produced on the screen.



*Roden Crater, East Portal, 2000.*  
Photo: F. Holzherr

While pursuing a Master's degree in art theory at U.C. Irvine, Turrell began his first experiments with light. He rented an entire hotel, known as the Mendota Hotel, which he refashioned into a perceptual "lab" by boarding up the windows and painting all of the surfaces white. Within the different rooms of the hotel, Turrell experimented with

shaping light and introducing light sources from the surrounding city.

During this early period of his career, Turrell supported himself by restoring antique cars and vintage planes. He also flew small crop-dusting and mail planes, having earned his pilot's license at the age of sixteen. Flight continues to play a very important role in Turrell's creative process. He describes flying as "studiotime."

In the early 1970s Turrell began thinking about a project that would take him away from the lights of Los Angeles. Wanting to focus attention upon celestial movements, Turrell spent seven months and 500 flying hours searching for a peak with an approximately 5,000-foot concave summit. The artist searched from the Canadian border to Mexico and from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Crest.



*Gard Blue, Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, 2002.*  
Photo: F. Holzherr



James Turrell. Photo: F. Holzherr

Roden Crater, which is located 40 miles northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona, perfectly fit the requirements. After successfully purchasing the property from a rancher, Turrell began to reshape the crater into a naked-eye observatory. Working with astronomers and **archaeoastronomers**, Turrell built an extensive series of tunnels and more than 20 viewing chambers that focus the observers' attention on celestial events—lunar eclipses, for example—or that create stunning visual effects, such as causing the night sky to appear as if it rests directly on the Earth's surface. Turrell plans to open the crater to the general public, providing visitors with a viewing experience that contrasts the finite quality of human perception and the infinite grandeur of the cosmos.

Emily K. Doman Jennings  
Museum Educator  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

**archaeoastronomers:** people who study how past cultures have understood celestial phenomena

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What influences affect Turrell's use of light, time, and space in the creation of *Three Gems*?
2. By creating the stupa, Turrell invites the viewer to "go inside and greet the light." How does this affect the viewer's perception of nature?
3. Considering the information about 19th-century artists and their use of light, what are the similarities and differences between the artists discussed and James Turrell?



How do you navigate between

**traditional** and  
**contemporary** culture?

### ZHAN WANG

(b. 1962)

*Artificial Rock*, 2005

Stainless steel,

177 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 78 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 94 $\frac{1}{2}$  in.

Foundation purchase, gift from  
Dagmar Dolby in celebration  
of Ray Dolby's 1965 founding  
of Dolby Laboratories  
2005.61



*In my work, I confront the changes in old concepts and opinions—how something that you have been used to for centuries undergoes a radical change in a very short time. In this process, you start looking at your position, but you also have to consider the problems of everyone around you, the changes they also are experiencing. For example, Chinese people traditionally had a special idea of nature, while now they are mostly looking for **material gains**. I think this is part of the same process: nature has turned into material gain. But imagination, **aspiration**, and hope have not changed. The reality has changed, but the structure hasn't.*

From Francesca Dal Lago, "Space and Public: Site Specificity in Beijing,"  
*Art Journal* (Spring 2000): page 80.

*After stainless steel has been polished it has the unique quality of never rusting; thus, it will fulfill the people's most idealistic expectations of a material.*

*After polishing, stainless steel reflects the colors of its surroundings so that it has essentially no color of its own, changing according to alterations in its environment.*

**material gains:** gains in material possessions

**aspiration:** hope, desire, or goal

## From the Artist

*Following polishing, the stainless steel combines a mirror surface with the texture and contours of natural stone. Everything reflected on its irregular surface appears twisted and broken. The merit of this lies in its ability to inspire in people all kinds of fantasies and new hopes.*

*In comparison to gold and silver, stainless steel is a relatively cheap material . . . yet so glittering as to appear exorbitantly costly: you get twice the result with half the outlay.*

*\*Finally, the most important, because stainless steel is able to change with its surroundings, it will never again encounter the problem of not keeping up with the changing times.*

From Britta Erickson, "Material Illusion: Adrift with the Conceptual Sculptor Zhan Wang," *Art Journal* (Summer 2001): pages 77–78.

## From the Critic

### What are the key terms the critic uses to describe Zhan Wang's work?

**perpetual movement:**  
movement that does not stop

There is a steadfast and **perpetual movement** in Zhan Wang's work. His sculpture can seem to move at the rapid rate of global culture and finance, or it can slow down, like water tracing the first outline of a vast canyon. The Chinese conceptual sculptor has spent his career fashioning work that facilitates movements between historical and contemporary conditions, between simple, daily life and paradigm-shifting thought and action. Time spent with Wang's work allows viewers to observe mass cultural movements, while preserving distinct moments for private reflection—each individual changing and adjusting his or her viewpoint again and again. . . .

**homogenization:** the blending of diverse elements into something uniform

Wang does not transform scholar's rocks in order to criticize the tradition, nor does he use the practice for nostalgic ends. He honors the act of contemplation, and its traditional understanding, as much as he acknowledges the massive changes and ultimate **homogenization** of urban China. He melds natural forms, pure materials, and flawless construction to reveal the point at which we can see where physical experience meets our examination of that experience.

Aimee Le Duc, "Zhan Wang: Conceptual Contemplation," *Sculpture* (July/August 2008), pages 59–60.

### What historical tradition does Zhan Wang refer to? How does that tradition relate to Zhan Wang's modern context?

**monumental:** very large

**derived from:** coming from a source or origin

**cosmology:** study of the nature of the universe

**erosion:** wearing away of rock or soil

**aesthetic theory:** framework guiding judgment and appreciation of beauty

**contemplative inspiration:** influence on the mind and soul through thoughtful activity

**reclusive:** shut off from the world

**literati:** intellectuals

**allude to:** refer to or suggest

**new Beijing:** the rapidly modernizing capital of China

*Artificial Rock* (2005) is a **monumental** work that makes reference to the mountain rocks commonly found in Chinese gardens called *jiashanshi* (“fake mountain rocks”). These rocks (termed “scholars’ rocks” in the West) are **derived from** the large stones that were chosen to ornament gardens and courtyards. As large as 20 feet high, these stones were meant to evoke the mystical and inaccessible mountain paradise realms of the immortals in Buddhist and Taoist **cosmology**. Principally of limestone, they were chosen for the unusually fantastic shapes that resulted from centuries of water **erosion**. By the Ming period (1368–1644) a class of Confucian-trained gentlemen scholars developed an **aesthetic theory** based in personal expression and freedom. Their emphasis on the ideal of **contemplative inspiration** derived from Taoist teachings led them to prize a **reclusive** life in mountain retreats. Members of this Chinese **literati** who lived in more urban settings began collecting smaller-sized rocks that were placed indoors for the purpose of inspiration and meditation. They range in size from miniature stones about an inch tall to larger rocks five feet tall. Most are of a size that can be displayed on a table or desk in wood-carved stands that **allude to** mythical, stylistic, or symbolic associations evoked by the imagery of the rocks.

Zhan Wang became interested in these garden rocks when he began noticing how often they were being used as ornamental sculpture in front of the new steel and glass structures that dominated the architecture of the **new Beijing**. The old, human-scale neighborhoods, which retained the traces of the city’s historical past in their tile roofs and intimate courtyards, were being destroyed to make room for what seemed to be the impersonal, monolithic design of a modern metropolis. In 1997, Zhan Wang created a conceptual project called “New Picture of Beijing.” In that work he produced a photographic map of all the sites of the *jiashanshi* in front of the modern buildings, manipulating the image to suggest that the surface of the natural rocks had been replaced by his polished steel versions, which reflected (both in material and literally) the building behind them.

Daniell Cornell, Acquisitions Statement, *Artificial Rock* object file,  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

**dao:** In Chinese philosophy, a fundamental idea relating to the correct or divine way.

**external encumbrances:**  
outside burdens

Ideally, the late Ming literati would have liked to disappear into the **dao**, freed of all **external encumbrances**. Nevertheless, they lived in busy cities and were in contact with traders and manufacturers (some of them of works of art). Happiest in each other's company, they established certain rules of style and taste by which they could be identified as a separate group. These rules were stated in considerable detail. . . . The most important and comprehensive of these treatises was published in 1637 under the name of Wen Zhengheng (1585–1645). . . . Wen Zhenheng's position is clearly stated in the opening paragraph:

To live out in the far country is best; next best is to live in the rural areas; next comes the suburbs. Even if we are unable to dwell among the cliffs and valleys and to follow the path of the hermits of old, and we have to settle in city houses, we must ensure that the doors, courtyards, buildings, and rooms are clean and smart, that the pavilions suggest the outlook of a man without worldly cares, and that the studies exude the aura of a refined recluse. There should be fine trees and interesting plants, a display of antiquities and books, so those who live there should forget about age, the guest forget to leave, the visitor to the grounds forget about fatigue. It should seem cold when the weather is hot and suggest warmth when it is freezing. Those who only use large quantities of timber and paint (i.e., construct large houses) are building themselves prisons and fetters.

James C. Y. Watt, "The Literati Environment," in Chu-Tsing Li and James C. Y. Watt, *The Chinese Scholar's Studio* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pages 5–6.



Wu Bin (Chinese, 1573–1620)  
*Pine Lodge amid Tall Mountains*,  
ca. 1590–1620

Hanging scroll, ink on paper

Gift of the Avery Brundage Collection Symposium Fund  
and the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum Trust Fund, B69D17

Photograph by Kaz Tsuruta

Copyright Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

## About the Artist

Working at the intersection of tradition and globalization, the internationally acclaimed Zhan Wang is among China's preeminent contemporary artists. He trained as a sculptor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Zhan Wang's early work reflects the pervasive tradition of Social Realism, the official artistic style of the Communist Chinese state.



*Sidewalk*, by Zhan Wang © John T. Young/Corbis

Upon graduating in 1988, Zhan Wang received an appointment to the Sculpture Research Institute, associated with the Central Academy. While working at the research institute, Zhan Wang attempted to reshape sculpture into an experimental art form. This led him to explore both installation and performance.

The *Temptations* series, created in 1994, marked one of Zhan Wang's early successes at bridging



Chinese artist Zhan Wang stands in sculpture of London skyline © Lindsey Parnaby/epa/Corbis

sculpture and installation. Casting Mao-styled suits, Zhan Wang placed the objects in unexpected contexts such as soon-to-be-demolished buildings. The cast uniforms made reference to the standardized culture of Communist China, yet the void within the casts alluded to growing questions about individual identity emerging during the mid-1990s.

Zhan Wang began to explore the break between tradition and progress through his *Ruin Cleaning Project*, which he conducted from 1994 to 1999. Taking the ever-changing cityscape of Beijing as his object, Zhan Wang worked to restore buildings undergoing demolition. Cleaning away debris from century-old homes that the state ordered destroyed in order to accommodate modern skyscrapers, Zhan Wang would dust and repaint the traditional structures and then

document the ultimate destruction of the building. During this period critics began to refer to Zhan Wang's work as "conceptual sculpture," creating a clean break from his association with Social Realism.

Concurrent with the *Ruin Cleaning Project*, Zhan Wang also began to create his stainless steel *jiashanshi*, or scholars' rocks. Appreciating stainless steel for its reflective surface and manufactured ubiquity, Zhan Wang started making entire cities fashioned out of stainless steel cookware, objects which during the modern era replaced traditional kitchen items. To date Zhan Wang has constructed replicas of Beijing (2002), Chicago (2005), London (2005), and San Francisco (2008), to name a few.

Emily K. Doman Jennings  
Museum Educator  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What qualities of stainless steel does Zhan Wang highlight? How do these qualities relate to contemporary Chinese society?
2. How did the Chinese literati use the *jiashanshi*, or scholars' rocks?
3. How do Zhan Wang's sculptures relate to both personal and global issues?

# Site in Sight

How location shapes perspectives

Get Smart with Art is made possible with support from the William K. Bowes, Jr. Foundation, Mr. Rod Burns and Mrs. Jill Burns, and Daphne and Stuart Wells.

**WILLIAM K. BOWES, JR.  
FOUNDATION**

Written by Sheila Pressley, Director of Education, and Emily K. Doman Jennings, Research Assistant, with support from the Education Department of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, © 2005. 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade curriculum development by Gail Siegel. Design by Robin Weiss Design. Edited by Ann Karlstrom and Kay Schreiber.

## **MISSION STATEMENT:**

This curriculum represents the diversity of the de Young's collections as well as reflecting the multiple academic disciplines practiced within the fields of both art and secondary education. Studying this curriculum, students are introduced to the rich and varied images created by selected artists, linking periods of history, art, and literature through their written and oral responses to the images. Through the use of this curriculum students deepen their appreciation for and understanding of the diversity of world cultures and art.

## **Development Team:**

### **Museum Staff:**

Sheila Pressley, Director of Education  
Emily Doman, Museum Educator  
Gail Siegel, Education Consultant  
Timothy Burgard, Curator in Charge,  
American Art  
Kathy Berrin, Curator in Charge, Art of  
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### **Teacher Advisory Committee**

Don Melsopp  
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Mary Noxon  
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### **Intern Support:**

Lindsay Grant  
Tess Spinola  
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## Sight in Site

Art has the power to illuminate, inform, and enrich one's perspective, leading the viewer to analyze, question, and hypothesize. Each person's point of view is highly subjective and individual. The way a particular artist views an event or an issue is strongly influenced by personal background, lived experiences, place of origin, and choice of medium. The fifteen pieces in this binder, entitled "Site in Sight," are connected by the individual voice of each artist examining his or her unique perspective of a concept, place, time, or idea.

Interdisciplinary themes in this binder include:

Leadership

Human interaction

Perspective

Power

Life transitions

Aspects of culture

Environment

Identity

# How the Binder Works

## **Getting Started**

This section was designed for all students, regardless of your particular content area or teaching area subject. Through the use of this section, students learn about the fifteen highlighted images in the curriculum. There is one master lesson (Lesson 1), intended for the instruction of the entire class. During the second lesson (Lesson 2), students work in teams to learn about one particular image. Students may then present their object interpretations to their classmates, either in the classroom or at the museum. Through this series of lessons students learn about all of the images before working on their culminating visual or written projects. You also may choose to use this set of lessons to teach thematically selected objects instead of teaching all of the works of art.

## **Subject-specific Lessons: Visual Art, English, History, and Art History**

In this section you will find lessons designed for specific subjects, including English, history, visual art, and art history. The lessons in this section involve projects and writing and may be adapted to your specific curriculum and the varying skills of your students. You may wish to teach one discrete lesson or offer students the opportunity to choose from the different options within a given discipline. We encourage you to adapt these lessons to best fit your teaching plans and the needs of your students.

## **Object Information Sheets**

This section contains information on the fifteen images used throughout the “Site in Sight” binder. These object information sheets provide students with interesting and necessary information about the artist, the work of art, and the time period and cultural context in which it was created. Each monograph has an introductory query designed for students to draw upon how their own lived experiences relate to the themes being explored by the artists. In addition, each object information sheet includes vocabulary definitions and comprehension questions.

## “Getting Started”

### Program Description:

These lessons are crafted for students’ and teachers’ interpretation and analysis of the varied works housed at the de Young, thereby expanding their understanding of the creative, cultural, historical, and literary importance of the works studied. Lessons included support the California state standards for visual arts, language arts, and social studies.

### Objectives:

Through this sequence of classroom discussions, students will:

- Analyze and respond to multiple works of art.
- Show an understanding of how the work relates to broader historical and artistic periods.
- Present verbally their personal insights regarding one of the works included in the binder.
- Look closely at formal elements of art: line, shape, color, composition
- Complete two worksheets: “Getting Started” and “Our Visit”.
- Be evaluated based on participation in classroom discussions, small group interpretation/presentation, and museum visit.

### Materials:

Appendix A (front) – “*Getting Started*” note-taking handout to be used during the model lesson for the entire class(copies for all students)

Appendix A (reverse) – “*Reading Notes*” note-taking handout to be used during small-group work with object information sheets (copies for all students)

Appendix B (front) – “*Classroom Presentation*” note taking handout for student note-taking during small-group presentations (copies for all students)

Appendix B (reverse) – “*Museum Observations*” note-taking handout for students’ use at the de Young (copies for all students)

Object Information Sheets

DVD

### Procedure:

#### Lesson 1: Directed Instruction for the Whole Class (50 minutes)

##### Part 1: First Look (Entire Class–20 minutes)

This lesson grounds the study of art in visual analysis, empowering students to interpret works of art based on what they notice opposed to what is written about a work of art.

1. Choose one of the fifteen objects provided.
2. Recreate the *Getting Started* chart (appendix A) on the board. Distribute copies of the chart to students so they may also record class observations.
3. Inform students that evaluation will be based on participation and notes. Notes should include both their own personal observations about a piece as well as information shared by fellow classmates. Also remind students that in the interpretive process conflicting ideas may arise. These ideas should be shared as they are crucial to understanding both the class's ideas about the piece as well as the artist's possible intention.
4. Choose a student to record class comments on the board, allowing you to facilitate the discussion.
5. Display the artwork on either a projection screen or on a TV using the provided DVD.
6. Follow the sequence of questions on the *Getting Started* chart: What do you notice about the work? What does the work remind you of? What do you think the artist is trying to communicate? What visually suggests this interpretation?

### **Part 2: Finding Information (Entire Class–30 minutes)**

This lesson prompts students to navigate the interpretive process of synthesizing multiple sources of information into a single argument or opinion.

1. Recreate *Reading Notes* (Appendix A, reverse) on the board and distribute copies to the class for personal note-taking.
2. Have a student or teacher read aloud the object information sheet relating to the work in question.
3. Before reading aloud, inform students they will be looking for information relating to composition, interpretation, historical significance, or personal opinion. After reading each paragraph, provide students with the opportunity to ask questions or comment on what they found to be of interest in the reading.
4. After completing the reading, review the information noted by the class and provide a summary interpretation. Ask students if they agree or disagree with this interpretation. Do they see anything different?

### **Lesson 2: Small-Group Explorations (50 minutes)**

Prior to teaching this lesson decide whether your students are going to study all of the pieces contained in "Site in Sight" or whether you are going to focus on several thematically linked objects. Additionally, consider your final outcome project, whether it is a written or an art project and which objects will be the focus of the project. Once you make this instructional decision, then organize the object information sheets accordingly.

This lesson is designed for students to work in cooperative learning groups exploring the compositional, interpretive, and historical significance of a work. The lesson culminates in the development of an oral presentation to be given either in class or at the museum.

### **Part 1: Information Analysis (Small Groups–25 minutes)**

1. Divide the class into 1–4 study groups. Each group should be given one object information sheet. Each student should have a copy of Appendix A and B in order to record his or her own observations, questions, or interpretations regarding the work as well as what they learn while reading the object information sheet.
2. Working in small groups, students will repeat **Lesson 1**, which you modeled.

### **Part 2: Presentation Development (Small Groups–25 minutes)**

**\*Note: Presentations may take place in class or at the de Young.**

1. Students compile short presentations regarding their group's object. Each presentation should begin with what the students noticed or possible interpretations of the work. Presentations should conclude with a discussion of what they learned by reading about their object and how this information relates to what they originally noticed.

While students present, the class should take notes regarding the work of art, using *Class Presentations* (Appendix B, front). Notes should include what they personally noticed about the work and what their classmates learned about the piece by reading the object information sheet. Remind your students that the notes they take will be used in their final project.

### **Lesson 3: The de Young Visit and Presentation**

1. If students give their presentations at the museum, their classmates should complete Appendix B while at the museum.
2. Students will meet in their groups and review their presentations. To increase visibility during the student presentations, you may wish to form two touring groups. Each group should have at least one or two representatives for each object. Presentations should be short and to the point so that everyone has input.
3. Students should also be given the opportunity to complete *Museum Observations* (Appendix B, reverse) so that they have a record of their personal impressions about each work of art viewed during their visit.

Note: Upon conclusion of the student presentations, you may wish for students to revisit the images they will need to be most familiar with for the final project.

# Getting Started

## First Look

What do you notice about the work?	What does the work remind you of?

## Focus

What do you think the artist is trying to communicate?	What visually suggests this interpretation?

# Reading Notes

Artist:

Title:

Date:

Composition	

Interpretation	

Historical Importance	

Personal Opinion	

# Classroom Presentation

Artist:

Title:

Date:

Interpretations

Compositional  
Elements

Striking Notes from  
the Artist or Author

# Classroom Presentation

Museum Observations  Write...	
Sketch...	

# English Site in Sight

**Note to the Educator from the Authors:** These lessons integrate art into your English curriculum, thereby developing students' reasoning, reflection, and research skills. We have designed the lessons around some rich connections to history and English and we have worked to give students practice in essay-writing, a frequently taught form at this level. You can use these lessons with your students as they are presented here. Or you can modify, expand, and customize them to emphasize your teaching goals. We encourage you to make these materials useful and fun!

## **Model Lessons:**

- 1. Writing about a character:** This lesson draws upon three pieces that feature strong characters that connect to the artists' beliefs, philosophies, and purposes.

Kiki Smith, *Near*

Horace Pippin, *The Trial of John Brown*

Diego Rivera, *Two Women and a Child*

**Task/Assignment:** Essay on how a character represents the artist's ideas

**Standards:**

- 2. Juxtapositions:** Through a detailed visual analysis, students look for similarities and differences between two works of art.

El Anatsui, *Hovor II*

Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*

Elihu Vedder, *The Sphinx of the Seashore*

**Task/Assignment:** Essay comparing two works of art

**Standards:**

- 3. Our Relationship with Nature:** Taking Andy Goldsworthy's perspective on nature as a departure, students explore connections between artists' processes and nature.

Andy Goldsworthy, *Drawn Stone*

Wayne Thiebaud, *Diagonal Freeway*

James Turrell, *Three Gems*

Zhan Wang, *Artificial Rock*

Albert Bierstadt, *California Spring*

**Task/Assignment:** Essay relating a quotation to a work of art

**Standards:**

# Writing about a Character

## Historical/Social Context

Learn about the world, country, cultures or region featured in the works of art. Learn also about social or historical events that provide clues to understanding the art.

## Brainstorming & First Response

Choose three artworks and pay particular attention to the **people**. Talk with a classmate about what and who you see. Jot down your observations about the **characters** in the chart below. Think about these elements as you observe:

- facial expressions
- what people are doing
- who they are near, next to
- what they're wearing, carrying
- what is around, above, on them

## Focus

Now focus on **one character** from one piece of art. You will “become” this character. By thinking about some of the elements you observed and recorded in the previous exercise, try to imagine this character’s point of view. Remember that you are the character and jot down some information in the chart below.

<b>Character</b> <i>(Give yourself a name)</i>	
<b>What you’re doing</b>	
<b>Why you’re doing this</b>	
<b>Where you are</b>	
<b>Who is with you</b>	
<b>How you feel</b>	
<b>Something you might say</b>	

## Learn about the Art

With one or more classmates, read the object information sheet for the artwork you selected. As you read, pay particular attention to the beliefs and values of the artist. You will find lots of information about the artist’s ideas in the readings. Add information about your character to the chart you began in the previous section.

## Thinking & Planning

Artists use characters to communicate important ideas. Their pieces are not random or haphazard. Sometimes these ideas are about the history or politics of the era. Sometimes the ideas are about relationships, beauty, or society. Characters in a piece of art represent the artist’s ideas, intentions, and values. From your character’s point of view, think about how the artist shows his or her ideas. Use the chart below to record your notes.

<b>Artist’s Ideas, Values, Intentions</b>	<b>How Artists Demonstrate These Through Their Character(s)</b>
<i>Example: Kiki Smith believes that it’s important to consider how females are portrayed in art.</i>	<i>In Near, the sisters pose together. Their brother is conspicuously absent.</i>

## Project/Assignment

Write an essay on one of the artworks in **Writing about a Character** explaining how one of the characters demonstrates the artist's intention.

1. Begin by providing information about the artist.
2. Explain who the character is and how his or her appearance in the artwork represents something important for the artist. Consider these features' characterization in the workart as you develop support for your main idea: facial expression, colors, shadow, distance from other characters, size and position, clues to social status and importance in society, posture. Provide examples to support your claim.

# Juxtapositions

## Gather Information about the Social and Historical Context

We learn a lot about art by understanding the historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds of individual pieces. Review the notes you took about the three pieces below and with one or two classmates fill in the chart below.

	<b>Country/Culture</b> • Where in the world does the piece come from/represent?	<b>Social/Historical Information</b> • What social issues or historical events were occurring that are represented in the art?	<b>Your First Response</b> • What do you notice, like, or dislike about the art?
<b>Hovor II</b>			
<b>Dinner for Threshers</b>			
<b>The Sphinx of the Seashore</b>			

## Focus

Although the pieces first appear to be very different, there are similarities. Each piece contains several elements that represent or symbolize something important for the artist. With one or two classmates, look again at the pieces and find symbols. In a sentence for each symbol, try to explain what it might represent. In the chart below, write a sentence explaining what you believe the symbol represents.

Use some of these words to guess the meaning of symbols:

**reflect symbolize stand for indicate show suggest**

Read the examples to get you started.

<b>Art</b>	<b>Element: Object/Symbol, Action, Material</b>	<b>What the element represents/suggests</b>
<b>Hovor II</b>	• bottle caps	• This piece of art, inspired by the traditional clothing of a chief, is made of bottle caps and <u>reflects</u> a bridge between old and new.

<b><i>Dinner for Threshers</i></b>	• characters' actions	• Since only women are serving and men are seated or eating, this piece <u>shows</u> the different roles and status of men and women.
<b><i>The Sphinx of the Seashore</i></b>		

Review your chart and look for similarities in two of the pieces. Are there similar symbols? Common themes? Jot some similarities in the following chart.

<b><i>What is the same? What is different?</i></b>		
<b><i>Title</i></b>		
<b><i>Similarities</i></b>		
<b><i>Differences</i></b>		

## Language for Comparing

Use some of these words and expressions in your comparison of pieces in **Juxtapositions**.

X is as (adjective) as Y

Both X and Y are...

Neither X nor Y are...

X and Y are alike because they share (these characteristics)... Like X, Y...

## Project/Assignment

*Write an essay comparing two of the artworks in **Juxtapositions**.*

1. Begin your essay by giving some background information about the pieces.

Develop a main idea (thesis statement) for your essay by identifying one or more common features in two pieces.

2. Support your main idea by explaining the common feature(s) in both pieces of art.

Use information you recorded in the FOCUS activity.

# Our Relationship with Nature

## Historical/Social Context

Learn about the world, country, cultures or region featured in these five pieces of art. Learn also about social or historical events that provide clues to understanding the art.

## Linking Art to Nature: Your First Response

Each artwork in this lesson relates to our relationship with nature, as the title suggests. Look at each piece and talk with a classmate about what you think the art “says” about nature. What do you think the **artist** of each piece believes about nature? Jot down your ideas here.

<b>California Spring</b>	
<b>Drawn Stone</b>	
<b>Diagonal Freeway</b>	
<b>Three Gems</b>	
<b>Artificial Rock</b>	

## Focus

After sharing ideas with your classmates, read the following quotation by Andy Goldsworthy, creator of *Drawn Stone*.

**“Drawing is not restricted to or defined by pencil and paper; it is related to life, like drawing breath or a tree taking nourishment through its roots to draw with its branches the space in which it grows. . . .Drawing at its most essential is an exploring line altered to changes of rhythm and feelings of surface and space playing from one to the other. . . .”**

What do you think Goldsworthy means by this quote? Talk about your interpretation with one or two classmates, then write down what you think the quotation means.

## Learn about the Art

Select one of the five pieces to write about. Reread about it. Study it. This time look for quotes that connect your piece of art to Goldsworthy’s ideas.

*Artwork:*

*Connections to Goldsworthy’s ideas:*

## Project/Assignment

Reread the quote from Goldsworthy:

**“Drawing is not restricted to or defined by pencil and paper; it is related to life, like drawing breath or a tree taking nourishment through its roots to draw with its branches the space in which it grows. . . .Drawing at its most essential is an exploring line altered to changes of rhythm and feelings of surface and space playing from one to the other. . . .”**

Show how one of the artworks in **Our Relationship with Nature** supports one or more of Goldsworthy’s beliefs. Write an essay in which you show the connection between the quote and the

artwork. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from the reading, your experiences and your observations.

1. Begin your essay by giving some background about the relationship between art and nature. You might want to include information about the artist. Develop a main idea (thesis statement) for your essay that links Goldsworthy's belief with the artwork you have selected.
2. You will want to explain Goldsworthy's "philosophy." Refer to your notes.
3. Provide some specific information about the artwork you chose. Show how it links to one or more of Goldsworthy's ideas. Consider some of these elements as you plan your writing:

*change*

*surface and space*  
*texture*

*use of color*  
*rhythm and feeling*

*materials*

# History Sight in Site

**Note to the educator from the authors:** These lessons integrate art into your social science and history curriculum, thereby developing students' reasoning, reflection, and research skills. The purpose of the lessons is to provide a departure point for you to integrate art meaningfully into your classroom. We encourage you to build on these lessons and adapt them to your curriculum and to the particular needs of your students. Your enthusiasm for integrating art with learning is the most powerful tool for engaging your students.

## Model Lessons:

1. **Artists and Their Context:** This unit looks at the artwork, lives, and perspectives of American artists with different backgrounds or from different generations.

**Suggested museum objects:**

Ruth Asawa, *Tower* installation

Kiki Smith, *Near*

Horace Pippin, *The Trial of John Brown*

Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*

John Langley Howard, *Embarcadero and Clay Street*

**Task/assignment:** Comparative essay analyzing how the lived experiences of particular artists informed their work.

**Standards:** 11.7.5, 11.8.8, 11.11.3

2. **Using Social Realism and Romanticized Art in History:** This lesson explores the difference between idealized depictions of history versus "realistic" depictions of an observed event.

**Suggested museum objects:**

John Langley Howard, *Embarcadero and Clay Street*

Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*

**Task/assignment:** Comparative essay taking into account the historical backgrounds of two works of art.

**Standards:** 10.3, 10.6, 11.2, 11.5, 11.6, 11.8, 11.11, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4

3. **Two Perceptions of America:** Students will analyze two key interpretations of America from time periods separated by 100 years or more.

**Suggested museum objects:**

Albert Bierstadt, *California Spring*

Stuart Davis, *Night Life*

Wayne Thiebaud, *Diagonal Freeway*

Ed Ruscha, *A Particular Kind of Heaven*

**Task/assignment:** Interpretive essay detailing how the geographical location of an artist informs his creativity and how these perspectives provide an understanding of the cultural trends within the United States.

**Standards:** 11.1, 11.2, 11.5, 11.10, 11.11

# Artists and Their Context

## Historical/Social Context

During the 20th century, cultural trends within the United States signified many changes, including more women entering the work place and the struggle for civil rights. Choose two works that reflect this social evolution within the United States.

## Close Reading

Reread the object information sheets and your notes pertaining to the artists of your choice. Below, list biographical and historical information about the development of each artist. While reading remember to distinguish between opinion (O) and fact (F) in the column provided. Both fact and opinion may play a role in your final writing.

Artist:	Title:	Date:		
Notes			O/F	1-6
•				
•				
•				
•				
•				
•				
•				

Artist:

Title:

Date:

Notes	O/F	1-6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li> </ul>		

### Ordering the Facts

Number the facts for each artist in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important.

### Drafting Your Essay

Highlight three of the most compelling facts about each of the artists. Be sure to consider issues such as materials used, the period in which the artist worked, family background, education, and artistic philosophy. Using direct quotes from the object information sheets may help you prove your point.

### Writing Prompt

Compare and contrast how the lives of Smith and Asawa shaped their artistic styles. Use some of these words and expressions in your comparison.

X is as (adjective) as Y Both X and Y are... Neither X nor Y are... Like X, Y...

X and Y are alike because they share (these characteristics)...

# Using Social Realism and Romanticized Art in History

## Historical/Social Context

Spurred by the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, economic concerns dominated American culture in the 1930s. *Embarcadero and Clay Street* offers a glimpse into the growing social tensions surrounding the advancement of labor unions while *Dinner for Threshers* alludes to the fading viability of the American family farm.

## Close Reading

Reread the object information sheets and your notes dealing with suggested works of your specific artists. List below any historical information about the work or information describing the artist's perspective. While reading remember to distinguish between opinion (O) and fact (F) in the column provided. Both fact and opinion may play a role in your final writing.

### Grant Wood, *Dinner for Threshers*, 1934

Notes	O/F	1-6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li></ul>		

### John Langley Howard, *Embarcadero and Clay Street*, 1935

Notes	O/F	1-6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li>   <li>•</li> </ul>		

### Ordering the Facts

Number the facts above in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important.

### Drafting Your Essay

Highlight three of the most compelling facts about each of the works of art. Be sure to consider issues such as historical context, artist perspective, and any idealized qualities in each image. Using direct quotes from the object information sheets may help you prove your point.

### Writing Prompt

Write a comparative essay that analyzes the art using one of the following prompts:

1. Why would John Langley Howard keep *Embarcadero and Clay* more ambiguous vs. more politically oriented in 1934–1935? Was it safe for an artist to express himself or herself?
2. Is a romanticized view of history helpful or harmful to how we see history? How would Howard's *Embarcadero and Clay Street* change if painted from a romanticized perspective? What would differ in *Dinner for Threshers* if painted from a realist perspective in 1934?
3. Is art dangerous? Should governments or sponsors censor an artist's work? Defend your view.

# Two Perceptions of America

## Historical/Social Context

Throughout the history of the United States landscape has greatly defined our national identity. The suggested objects featured in this exercise reflect the changing attitudes of the United States from the 19th to the 20th century.

## Close Reading

Choose one the artists' quotes that appear in the object information sheets from your suggested objects.

Write your quote below.

What do you think the artist means? What is the main idea that he seeks to convey?

Reread the **From the Artist** and **From the Historian** sections printed in the object information sheet, taking notes in the area provided below.

Object Title:

**Artist Inspiration:**

**Intended Audience:**

**Information from the Curator/Historian:**

**Close Reading**

What does the information from the three categories above tell about major cultural trends within the United States?

**Writing Prompt**

Choose a quote from one of the sections cited above and discuss how location or artist experience ties to broader themes of national identity. Consider the following as you plan your interpretive essay: what inspires each artist, the artist's intended audience, information contributed by the historian and the curator, and how these images relate to larger trends within the United States.

# Visual Arts

## Sight in Site

**Note to the Educator from the Authors:** We recognize that you potentially teach students' aged 14-18, with differing age-appropriate needs. More immediately, we recognize that the media in which you teach may run the gamut of every conceivable material and skill level. Some teachers may be approaching this binder from a more traditional media driven agenda, while others are teaching a survey studio class with a greater emphasis on conceptually driven projects. With this diversity of needs in mind, the authors have laid out lesson plans that have open-ended project ideas so that you may use the structure and enclosed objects to teach the concepts and/or skill sets that best suit your curriculum needs.

The teacher will select one of the themes below to prompt students to create an original piece of artwork that demonstrates higher-level interpretation or mastery of the concept or techniques addressed in the source object. It is the choice of the teacher as to which art object(s) will be used as motivation. It is also the choice of the educator as to whether the concepts addressed by the master artist will be the emphasis of the lesson, or if the skills and techniques employed by the master artist will be the focal point.

### **Model Lessons:**

- 1. Juxtaposition:** Add a visual element to a landscape, room, or other space that wouldn't normally fit or would cause a viewer to wonder and make new connections.

**Suggested Art Objects for First Look:**

*Drawn Stone*

*The Sphinx of the Seashore*

*Night Life*

*Near*

*Diagonal Freeway*

**Media Applications:**

Computer Art, Art 1, Drawing, Painting

- 2. Neighborhood Illustration:** Choose a region or neighborhood that reflects your origin, home, or identity.

**Suggested Art Objects for First Look:**

*Diagonal Freeway*

*California Spring*

*Drawn Stone*

*Embarcadero and Clay Street*

**Possible Media/ Discipline Applications:**

Painting, Drawing, Computer Art, Art 1, Architecture

- 3. Point of View on a Topical Event:** Choose an important event recent or historical that has had a major influence on you or another group of people.

**Suggested Art Objects for First Look:**

*Drawn Stone*

*The Sphinx of the Seashore*

*California Spring*

*The Trial of John Brown*

*Embarcadero and Clay Street*

*Two Women and a Child Night Life*

*A Particular Kind of Heaven*

**Possible Media/ Discipline Applications:**

Painting, Drawing, Computer Art, Art 1- 2

- 4. Altered Everyday Object:** Choose an everyday material and make a nonfunctional object

**Suggested Art Objects for First Look:**

Asawa Tower Installation

**Possible Media/ Discipline Applications:**

Art 1, Ceramics, Sculpture, Architecture

# Juxtaposition

Description: To *juxtapose* is to place contradictory or different objects or images together in order to create an unusual and thought provoking combination. Artists do this to create connections and relationships and to generate ideas. In this project you will bring together different elements in a landscape with surreal or mythical elements that affect overall meaning when seen together.

Media: **Computer Art**

Materials: Reproductions of supporting artworks (*Drawn Stone, The Sphinx of the Seashore, Night Life, Near, Diagonal Freeway*); Photo-editing software and computers, scanner, digital camera, color printer.

Objectives:

- To practice using **selections** in PhotoShop or other image editing software
- To learn about and use the **elements** of **space** and **scale** to create the illusion of three dimensions
- To explore **environment** and **setting** to create an overall artistic message
- To use the **principle** of **contrast** to **emphasize** an aspect of the environment
- To practice scanning and creating digital photography
- To explore **color combinations** and **color schemes**
- To explore unusual combinations of images and place in order to make new connections

Procedure:

1. Decide on a place of importance to you. It can be real or imaginary.
2. Build a collection of background and foreground elements from scanning printed matter and from digital photography.
3. Create a new document with the following specifications and save it with a descriptive title that includes your name (ex: *juxtapose\_yourname*).
  - 150 pixels per inch
  - 7"x 10" (or 10" x 7")
  - RGB color
  - Transparent background
4. Choose one of the images from Step 2 as a background. Copy and paste it into your document. Scale this background to fit your entire document. Remember to hold down the *shift* key so that the proportions remain correct.
5. Decide on a feature of your environment that you would like to insert (tree, furniture, animal, etc). Use *selection* tools to select, copy and paste the item into your document.
6. Take a digital photograph of a symbolically important object (or even yourself!) against a plain background. Follow steps 4, 5, and 6 to insert your object into the document.
7. Remember to scale (EDIT-Transform – "Scale") your various layers so that some features appear to **recede** and some **advance**.
- 8. Flatten** your layers. You can even apply a filter (such as "Cutout"). You can adjust the controls in the filter window to produce a simplified, **abstracted** version of your image.
9. Adjust colors or channels to create a **complementary color scheme**.
10. Save and drop off a copy of *juxtapose* to your teacher.

Closure / Assessment: Written Reflection or Artist's Statement recommended.

Vocabulary: ***Juxtaposition, complementary color scheme, abstracted, recede, advance, color schemes, contrast, emphasize, scale, selections***

Extensions to Other Art Disciplines:

**Art 1-2**, using traditional collage materials and processes;

**Painting**, from collages or sketches; when collages have been printed they can be transferred to paper for painting.

# Neighborhood Illustration

**Grade Level:** 9 – 12

**Appropriate Art Courses:** Art 1, Drawing, Painting, Architecture, and Computer Graphics

**Content Standards:**

- Artistic Perception: Students perceive, analyze, and respond to sensory information using language and skills unique to the visual arts.
- Creative Expression: Students create and participate in visual art.
- Aesthetic Valuing: Students respond to, analyze, and make judgments about visual art.
- Connections, Relationships and Applications: Students connect and apply what is learned in each art discipline to other subject areas.
- Historic and Cultural Context: Students understand the historical and cultural dimensions of visual art.

**Objectives:** Students will demonstrate mastery of one and two-point perspective drawing by rendering a study of a scene from the specific neighborhood in which they live. Having studied Wayne Thiebaud's *Diagonal Freeway*, students will participate in discussions about the piece and demonstrate comprehension of the formal and conceptual elements of the piece by responding with oral and written feedback during the Getting Started and/or Visiting the Museum portions of the curriculum. Students will look specifically at the concept of an artist using their familiar home surroundings as inspiration for their work, and explore this idea by producing their own interpretations of familiar surroundings by illustrating their own neighborhood.

**Time:** 2 days – 2 weeks (depending on complexity of assignment)

**Materials:** pencils, erasers, rulers, heavy drawing paper/illustration board/canvas board, media for adding color/value (crayons, paints, markers, charcoal etc.)

**Visual Aids:** photo references from students' neighborhoods, additional Wayne Thiebaud San Francisco neighborhood pieces, handouts for 1-2 point perspective drawing

**Vocabulary:** perspective, vanishing point, landscape, cityscape, figurative

**Discussion and Motivation:**

Students participate in the Getting Started portion of the curriculum, and if the teacher feels it is appropriate and possible, in the Visiting the Museum portion. During these phases, students will look at, respond to, learn about, and talk about the painting *Diagonal Freeway* by Wayne Thiebaud. As part of this process they should be led through a discussion of why an artist would choose to paint scenes from the neighborhood and region in which they live. Essential questions that should be addressed include:

- Does a landscape have to be about a place that is exotic or iconic to be important?
- Why do some artists use their immediate surroundings as subject matter, while other artists travel to find inspiration? What factors in an artist's life might affect this?
- How does an urban cityscape differ from a "natural" landscape? How do the differences go deeper than the obvious physical details?
- How does it feel to you as a viewer to see an image of a city that does not portray any people? How would the image feel to you if there were people included?
- How does Thiebaud use, as well as dismiss, the traditional rules of three-dimensional perspective in their portrayal of the space?

**Procedure/Activity:**

Students will identify the neighborhoods in which they live. If they have photographs of their neighborhood, they should bring them in; otherwise, the class should use a block of time to do an internet search for photographic references of their area. If this is not possible, other solutions include: (1) the teacher doing a

search ahead of time (ask students where they live before starting the unit), and (2) asking students to photograph their neighborhood ahead of time as outside work.

Once the references are obtained, students will do preliminary sketches from the photos. If students have not yet been introduced to one-and-two-point perspective, this should be done as an activity first so that they are already familiar with the procedure. If they have already learned these skills then proceed with this lesson. Students should be given adequate time to sketch from their references until they are comfortable with the scenes – this amount of time should be determined by the teacher depending on the needs of the class.

Students will do a larger drawing onto the surface of the final piece (this will be determined by the medium through which they will add value, texture, and/or color). They should attempt to be realistic in their perspective rendering to prove their mastery of this skill.

Depending upon the medium in which the teacher has chosen for the students, they will complete the piece by building in value texture, and/or color.

**Closure and Assessment:**

Each student will write an artist's statement for display with his or her piece, explaining to the viewer why and how artistic decisions were made and what the work means to the artist. Students will fill out a grade rubric for their final landscape. This will address how successfully they met the requirements of the project, and how much time and effort they put into the piece. Depending upon the teacher's determination, the rubric can assess the technical merits, the use of time and planning, the accuracy of the illustration, the use and defense of creative license in the scene's portrayal, etc.

# Point of View on a Topical Event

Description: For any important event that happens to people in their lives, there is usually more than one point of view, opinion, or perspective depending on how or where it was experienced. In this project you will choose an important event that has had a major influence on you or on another group of people. You will create a poster on an issue that incorporates graphics, design and text with a call to action or response, expressing your point of view.

Media and Related Art Disciplines: **Computer Art, Painting, Drawing, Art 1-2**

Materials: Reproductions of supporting artworks (*Fault Line, Sphinx, Aspiration, California Spring, John Brown, Embarcadero and Clay, Two Women and a Child, Night Life, A Particular Kind of...*); The rest will vary based upon art discipline: Poster paper, pencils, news and contemporary issue magazines, old books, paint, glue, scissors, markers, press-on letters, photo-editing software and computers, scanner, digital camera, internet access, color printer.

Objectives:

- To understand and work with compositional **Balance** in a Poster Layout
- To understand and work with **monochromatic, complementary, or triad color schemes**
- To further develop effective use of **negative** and **positive shapes** and **spaces**
- To effectively communicate a message about an issue or event or pose a call to action in response to an issue or event
- To create a political or social artwork, in the tradition of posters

Procedure:

1. Research and analyze examples of topical art and poster art as well as how people have used propaganda to shape opinion.
2. Decide on an issue or event for your poster. Write it down as well as what message or action you wish to communicate or encourage.
3. Work in a vertical format.
4. Search for and collect *three or four strong* images symbolic of your issue and message.
5. Decide on a **color scheme** – **monochromatic, complementary, or triad** - and design a background and border area with either simple shapes, gradients, or solid colors that incorporate one or more of your colors.
6. You may have to change the colors in your separate images by adding a watercolor wash to them or altering digital layers to reflect your color scheme.
7. Your text should reflect your message and call to action. Use text (typed, printed, or with pressed letters if your handwriting is rough) that incorporates one of your colors and is large enough to read easily and place into your poster.

Closure / Assessment: Written Reflection or Artist's Statement recommended

Vocabulary: **Topical, Color Scheme – Monochromatic, Complementary, or Triad, Negative and Positive Shapes and Spaces, Balance**

# Altered Everyday Object

**Grade Level:** 9 – 12

**Appropriate Art Courses:** Art 1, Ceramics, Sculpture, Architecture

## **Content Standards:**

- Artistic Perception: Students perceive, analyze, and respond to sensory information using language and skills unique to the visual arts.
- Creative Expression: Students create and participate in visual art.
- Aesthetic Valuing: Students respond to, analyze and make judgments about visual art.
- Connections, Relationships and Applications: Students connect and apply what is learned in each art discipline to other subject areas.
- Historic and Cultural Context: Students understand the historical and cultural dimensions of visual art.

**Objectives:** Students will demonstrate comprehension of the relationship of form to function by deliberately changing some elements of a useful household object, so that it retains the visual characteristics of the original object yet is purely decorative and no longer functional. Having studied the Ruth Asawa wire sculptures, students will participate in discussions about the pieces and demonstrate their comprehension of the formal and conceptual elements of the work by responding with oral and written feedback during the Getting Started and/or Visiting the Museum portions of the curriculum. Students will look specifically at the concept of an artist who takes inspiration from ordinary, functional, domestic objects and creates sculptures, which retain the characteristics of the original objects, yet lose their functionality and become design statements.

**Time:** 2 weeks – 4 weeks (depending on complexity of assignment)

**Materials:** This depends upon the course and available materials – suggestions include: clay, cardboard, wire, paper-mache, etc.

**Visual Aids:** live examples and/or photographic references of household objects, additional Ruth Asawa wire sculpture images

**Vocabulary:** form vs. function

## **Discussion and Motivation:**

Students participate in the Getting Started portion of the curriculum, and if the teacher feels it is appropriate and possible, in the Visiting the Museum portion. During these phases, students will look at, respond to, learn about, and talk about the wire sculptures by Ruth Asawa. As part of this process they should be led through a discussion of why an artist would choose to use ordinary functional objects as inspiration for a non-functional sculpture. Essential questions that should be given to them to address are:

- Does a sculpture have to be of a person or about a famous event to be important?
- Why do some artists use their immediate “familiar” surroundings as subject matter, while other artists choose instead to portray people or events? What factors in an artist’s life might affect this?
- How does function direct form? When does a “useful” object become art? When does it not?
- How was Ruth Asawa inspired by egg baskets in her travels to Mexico? Where do you see evidence of this in her work? What “useful” objects inspire you?
- How can you change the nature of an object so that it loses its functionality, yet retains its significant and unique characteristics?

## **Procedure/Activity:**

Students will identify an everyday household object that is used in their home as the basis for their sculptures. If they can photograph or “borrow” the object, they should bring these in; otherwise, the class

should use a block of time to do an Internet search for photographic references of their object. Objects for inspiration could include: kitchen utensils, bathroom objects, building tools, etc.

Once the objects and/or references are obtained, student will do preliminary sketches. Students should be given adequate time to sketch from their references until they are comfortable with the objects and their characteristics – this amount of time should be determined by the teacher depending on the needs of the class.

Students should begin to identify what parts of the object are functional, and what parts are the unique design details. They should decide how they will change the object so that it is no longer functional, and what elements will remain in the design to reflect the specific look of the original object. These decisions should be reflected in their design proposals and sketches.

Depending upon the medium in which the students are working, they should construct the final pieces.

**Closure and Assessment:**

Each student will write an artist's statement for display with their piece, explaining to the viewer why and how their artistic decisions were made and what the work means to the artist. Students will fill out a grade rubric for their final sculpture. This will address how successfully they met the requirements of the project, and how much time and effort that they put into the piece. Depending upon the teacher's determination, the rubric can assess the technical merits, the use of time and planning, the craftsmanship, the use and defense of creative license in the design, etc.

## ***Art History Sight in Site***

***Note to the Educator from the Author:*** The art history section is concerned with comparing and contrasting various types of art (landscapes, still lifes, and portraits) using examples from the de Young collection. These examples transcend specific historical periods and movements and can be used to compare line, color, form, medium with other works of art. After successfully using this format in my own art history class, I would encourage teachers to use these prototypes to help in preparing their art history curricula and in preparation for the art history exam.

# Comparing Landscapes

## Option #1

Ed Ruscha (b. 1937)

*A Particular Kind of Heaven*, 1983

Oil on canvas, 90 x 136 in.

Museum Purchase, Mrs. Paul L. Wattis Fund

2001.85

Ed Ruscha is an important and influential American artist of the post WW II generation. Originally associated with the **pop art** movement of 1960s, his art evolved to address issues pertaining to the **American landscape** tradition, **minimalism**, and **conceptual art**. *A Particular Kind of Heaven* is one of a series of works in which word phrases are silhouetted against the sky like a geometric form of flattened skywriting (Ed. Ruscha – *Standard Station*, 1966).

Part of a long series of American Landscape paintings (Martin Johnson Heade – *Singing Beach, Manchester*, Fredric E. Church – *Rainy Season in the Tropics*, and Albert Bierstadt – *California Spring*, etc. starting with Hudson River School artists), Ruscha's work is focused on the west coast of America's Pacific Rim.

## Compare and Contrast Vocabulary

Pop art  
Landscapes  
Minimalism  
Conceptual art  
Asian Calligraphy  
Hudson River School  
Manifest destiny  
Triptych  
Silhouette

## Topics

How can you compare a Hudson River School landscape to Ruscha's *A Particular Kind of Heaven*?

What was Bierstadt's view of God, Democracy, Heaven as compared to Ruscha's?

Compositionally, how does Ruscha bridge Bierstadt's concept of American Manifest Destiny include the Pacific Rim?

## Option #2

Wayne Thiebaud (b. 1920)

*Diagonal Freeway*, 1993

Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 60 in.

Partial gift of Morgan Flagg, in memory of his son Lawrence J. Flagg

1998.186

Wayne Thiebaud, a representational pop artist, started out as a freelance cartoonist, a commercial illustrator, and a set designer. His *Diagonal Freeway* is part of a series of Northern California landscapes (*Diagonal Ridge*, 1968, *Ponds and Streams*, 2001) that re-form the perceptual world, challenging the viewer's expectations about the horizon and perspective. The prominent diagonal roadway cuts the composition into two triangles – one flat blue-grey and one of colorful skyscrapers – a strategy reminiscent of Edgar Degas, Renaissance orthogonal, constructionist and color-field painting. Thiebaud exploits the traditional conventions of landscape painting by flattening topography, alternating the observer's viewpoints, manipulating color and abstracting every object.

### Compare and Contrast Vocabulary

Representational art

Pop art

Landscapes

Horizon line

Perspective

Orthogonal

Constructionist

Color-field painting

Line

### Topics

Compare Thiebaud's *Diagonal Freeway* with Albert Bierstadt's *California Spring*. How does each artist use light, line, color, and perspective?

What elements from Thiebaud's early artistic training do you see in *Diagonal Freeway*?

Historically, Thiebaud's 1993 work and Bierstadt's 1875 *California Spring* are over a century apart. What was occurring in each respective time, and why did neither include humans in their compositions?