

What is 20th Century Art History, and Why Does it Matter?

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“Why should I care about what has happened to art, especially in the 20th century when it changed so fast anyhow?” “What does art have to do with anything important happening in the world?” “What difference does art make in our lives?” “Who really cares about art?” “You can’t make a living doing art.” These are questions and comments I have heard from students constantly over the years. These same students usually know very little about modern art since the Impressionists in the 1870s. I want to teach them about artists and art movements and the corresponding historical, cultural, and technological events that took place in the 20th century.

I am currently teaching grades 9 through 12, all levels of art (from beginning Art I to International Baccalaureate Art) at Lamar High School in Houston Independent School District. My students come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities. The school has a broad mix of ethnicities – 26% African-American, 5% Asian, 31% Hispanic, and 38% White. At-risk students make up 44% of the student population, while another 39% are Honors students. The mix of students in my classroom seems to correlate with the overall school profile. In addition to at-risk and Honors students, I also have Special Education students and LEP (Lacking English Proficiency) students.

Currently, half of my classes are upper level art classes. These students need some kind of background in what has happened in art (i.e. art history) in order to better understand what art is. Unfortunately, many of my students think art is all about making Andy Warhol-like images or painting like Jackson Pollock without understanding what Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism were all about. Also unfortunately, many of my students want to emulate these two artists because the students think Pop Art and/or Abstract Expressionism requires little drawing, painting, or technical skill. I’m sure Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock would appreciate knowing that!

In order for students to understand art today, they need to know how we got to art today. They need to understand the art of yesterday. In an ideal world, I could teach art history and have all the time in the world to go all the way back to cave paintings. Realistically, this will not happen. I think the most important time period for my students will be 20th century art.

I want to include 20th century art history in my curriculum for all my upper level classes next year so that my students see what has transpired. They need to see what artists have done. Seeing art to me is just as important as creating art. In seeing what other artists have done, students can learn so much about techniques, media, styles, communication, the principles and elements of art and how to use them, color, composition... and the list just goes on. Art history is a valuable teaching tool for students to learn how to critique and evaluate art.

I want my students to question “What is art?”, “What constitutes art?”, “Why is art important?”, and “Who cares anyway?” These questions leave a lot of room for debate among students. The 20th century spawned some very controversial art and artists. Students should wonder why we accept some images as art, who decides what constitutes art, how art is funded, who purchases art, and whether or not art is political. Students need to see what directions art has taken and why that is important and where art is going. Should art created using a computer be

considered art? Is graffiti art? Should the NEA fund controversial art? Should taxpayer money fund art at all? Who should decide what art is purchased with taxpayer money? These are just some of many important open-ended questions that students need to examine. Otherwise, what is the point of art?

In order to open up these issues for discussion, students need to have some background knowledge. I propose to develop and focus on three topics for study and corresponding debate: 20th century art history, art funding in the US, and the assessment of controversial art.

I want to include the following “survey” of 20th art history to assist teachers. Many of the art history tomes weigh enough to throw your back out just setting the book on a table. As teachers, we do not have the classroom time or student attention to delve very deeply into art history. Thus I am attempting to provide a summary of art history that can be adapted for the secondary school art classroom. This summary can be broken down into fifteen minute segments for daily classroom mini-lessons. In addition, teachers can prepare Power Point presentations (inserting corresponding works of art from the Internet) to use with an LCD Projector (probably available for checkout from the school library). The technological approach tends to appeal to students.

20TH CENTURY ART HISTORY

Introduction

The most sensible place to start is with the Impressionists and the Realists, even though these movements really began in the mid-1800s. Art radically changed around that time from the traditional “paint what you see” to the use of more abstraction and expression in works of art. Photography came along in the first half of the 19th century and took away the need to record realism in art. Now realism became an option, not a necessity.

Thus, art was set free to change, and change it did. From the Impressionists and Realists to Art Nouveau to Expressionism to Abstract Art to Cubism and on and on to present day, art began a whirlwind of change that has gone in many different directions, genres, media, and themes. At any given time now, there are a multitude of art movements throughout the world.

Technological changes in art media have changed the face of art, such as the invention of acrylic paints and improvements to other paints and painting surfaces. Later in the 20th century, the birth and explosion of technology (computers, graphics, video, cameras, film, etc.) has radically changed art forms.

Art history has mimicked the societal changes throughout the world in the 20th century. Communication became real time. Travel has become a pretty close second. Information is right here, right now, any time of the day. Cultures are harder to tell apart because of the influence exerted on one another through global markets and the corresponding effects on each culture (Freeland 60-81). Societal rules are changing. Norms are changing. Values are changing. Therefore art is changing.

When students see firsthand how art mimics life, it helps them see the importance of art. As they learn about the historical and societal changes that take place, changes in art help them understand the why of these changes. When students understand the “whys,” higher order thinking takes place, and history is permanently embedded in their minds. They begin to see what happened in art with the World Wars, the Vietnam War, the social and political implications of the sixties, feminism, the sexual revolution, technology, AIDs, abortion, and homosexuality. Art addresses all these issues, sometimes in very controversial ways. Students need to know that, and understand why.

Modernism

Modernism is not so much a movement as a period in art from the mid-1800s to the mid to late 1900s. In this time, science became the mind's highest achievement. A new industrial revolution was occurring. New technologies in steel, electricity, chemicals, and oil led to the invention of radio, electric light, telephone, and the electric streetcar. Urbanization was a huge consequence of these new inventions. Workers moved away from rural areas into the cities. Also during this time, imperialism and capitalism were growing. England had colonized India, Australia, and a large part of Africa; France had colonies in North Africa and Indochina; the Dutch colonized areas in the Pacific; and Germany, Portugal, Spain and Italy had colonies in Africa.

Intellectual thought during this time also changed. Communism and socialism as ideology came into being (implementation came later). In 1859, Darwin published his theory of evolution in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Artists rejected the past and pushed the boundaries. Art sought to capture images and sensibilities of the present time, not the past.

Modernism in art focused on the “science” of art – the formal qualities of art. Subject matter dealt with the here and now – scenes from contemporary life. The past was studied and rejected in favor of the present. This was in direct opposition to the powerful academies that had ruled art in France for over 400 years. The academy system dictated how art was taught, what art was publicly exhibited, and who the successful artists were. Modernism replaced the academic way of thinking, but not without accompanying public outrage.

Under Modernism, art was criticized according to the formal qualities – not the subject that was being represented. The term “avant-garde” was developed during this time and referred to artists who rejected conventional art practices (the academies) and moved on to something new and different. This was a new age, and artists were trying new ideas. Realism and Impressionism came of age during this time.

The Realist movement came out of France in the mid-1800s. Art stepped out of “history” and into the present, especially everyday life. The theme of the day was that history is not real and visible – it is in the past. Art should focus on what is real today: rural subject matter, peasants, daily life, and social commentary. Artists redefined reality.

Although Edouard Manet is usually considered an Impressionist, he was in fact a prominent realist. Two of his paintings outraged the Parisian art world. The first painting, *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*, showed a nude woman picnicking with two men in suits. The painting was criticized because this was not a classic nude (modest and unassuming). The nude woman was gazing at the viewer, calmly, directly, and without shame. Also, Manet's rendering of it called attention to the fact that it is a painting, an illusion. He was not trying to hide the fact that it is a painting. Also, it was done in a much sketchier fashion than realistically painted artworks that had gone before. Manet's painting *Olympia* caused a similar uproar. Not only was she nude, but she was a prostitute, and not ashamed at all. In fact, her expression was of cool indifference to the viewer. What is interesting about both these paintings is that Manet was not trying to be outrageous. He was actually combining a history of painting onto each canvas by alluding to previous works and genres. He just changed the rules a bit.

Another interesting facet to Manet is that his “sketchiness” eventually led to the development of Impressionism. Instead of the perfectly rendered paintings to date, Manet dared to use rough brush strokes that showed. Also, his tonal shifts are very abrupt – not a gradation in the “proper academic” style. Manet had a huge impact in the shifting of art to Modernism and Impressionism and the “isms” that came after him.

The Pre-Raphaelites were artists who aimed for realism, but not from life or history. For example, John Everett Millais painted Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The painting is realistically rendered, but the subject matter is fictional. The Pre-Raphaelites were interested in realism, but wanted nothing to do with contemporary subject matter.

The Impressionist movement in France in the 1860s opened the door for 20th century art to radically change from what had gone before. The Impressionists rejected the more rigid, traditional school of thought, and art moved into the great outdoors and became much looser and more exploratory. The Impressionists were interested in effects of light and color at a particular moment in time, pure pigment, and free brushstrokes. Their subject matter underwent a radical change from traditional (religious, historical) to everyday scenes and objects and landscapes.

The term "Impressionism" actually came from the title of a painting by Claude Monet, *Impression: Sunrise*. The term was used in a derogatory manner by a critic, but the name stuck. The Impressionist movement began in the 1870s and 80s in France when a group of artists exhibited their work together.

Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat and van Gogh are often considered Impressionists but are in fact Post-Impressionists. These artists felt that the Impressionists were not paying enough attention to the formal elements of art, so they went back to the exploration of the properties and expressive qualities of line, pattern, form, and color. Cézanne and Seurat tended to be more analytical in their approach to exploring the formal elements. Gauguin and van Gogh were more interested in the expressive qualities.

The work of these artists helped develop color theory in the latter part of the 19th century. Each artist approached color from a very different point of view. Cézanne was best known for his still lifes and landscapes. He had a deep understanding of the relationships between line, plane, and color. As a Pointillist, Seurat believed that the eye should mix the color. His canvases were made up of very intricate systems of dots that interacted with the colors next to them to form a very detailed, very large picture. On the other hand, van Gogh believed in using a combination of color and brush strokes expressively with very loose distorted forms. His emphasis was mainly on using color to create the moods that were emanating from within. Gauguin used large areas of color with subtle changes in value and believed that the artist should determine the color in the artworks, not reality. He also believed (unlike the Impressionists) in altering reality in favor of artistic expression.

During Post-Impressionism, the term "avant-garde" came into use. Artists who were considered ahead of their time and challenged current artistic conventions were called "avant-garde." "Avant-garde" also implies a visionary perspective and that the artist is forward thinking. Eventually, the "avant-garde" became so enmeshed (or mired) in their criticism of art standard that they ceased to communicate in a language the public could understand. They only spoke to each other through their work. The "avant-garde" played an important role in art during the 20th century. These artists were the cutting edge.

The next "ism" to come along was Symbolism. This movement changed direction on the themes of appearance, atmosphere, and light and focused instead on dreams, visions, and feelings. Although Gauguin and van Gogh were major influences on the Symbolist movement, they are not considered Symbolists. Symbolists were trying to express their spirit and intuition through signs and symbols. They wanted art to be art for art's sake, and not utilitarian at all. Art was being created from the artist's internal world. This was also about the time Sigmund Freud started developing psychoanalysis and wrote his famous *Interpretation of Dreams*. Symbolism and Freud were quite compatible.

At the end of the 19th century, the Arts and Crafts Movement emerged as a reaction against the “machine” age and the resulting capitalism. The art produced during that time rejected “artificial” forms in favor of more natural and organic forms. The importance of the Arts and Crafts Movement is that it led to Art Nouveau and its twining plant forms in the visual arts, including decorative arts. The emphasis was on natural forms that can be mass-produced and art could be accessible to the general public.

Culture at the end of the 19th century was changing. Appropriately enough, this period was called *fin de siècle* (end of the century). At this time, a wealthy middle class had risen up to become dominant in societies that had previously been “ruled” by the aristocracy. Moreover, the wealthy middle class now aspired to the privileges and advantages of the aristocracy and wanted to live “the good life” of decadence and indulgence. The future was uncertain, political upheaval was increasing, and the prevailing attitude was to live to the fullest because tomorrow was questionable. Artist Gustav Klimt embodied this attitude in his paintings – they were incredibly sensual and erotic.

As the 20th century rolled in, the frenzy of the *fin de siècle* became almost schizophrenic. The overall faith in science (which had correspondingly weakened the strength of religion) was suddenly uprooted. The universe was no longer concrete and absolute. Max Planck came along and introduced his ideas about atomic energy. Then, Albert Einstein had the audacity to say that time and space are not absolute – that if one stands still, the other one moves – his famous theory of relativity.

These were just the beginning of radical changes in science, which then led to changes in technology, medicine, communication, and transportation. All of these new developments in turn changed the social structures of the world. This was also a major shift from survival to self-actualization. In the relatively new field of psychology, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung came on the scene to propose theories about what goes on inside the “self.”

Then, World War I happened. It had a huge impact on the world. Over nine million men were killed and weapons like poison gas were developed and used. The concept of what man can and will do to man just added to the atrocities of the war itself. No one emerged from World War I unscathed. If the devastation of the war were not enough to digest, the corresponding collapse of economies in Western countries throughout the world and the resulting poverty added even more misery to the world outlook. Mankind was not looking very well at this time.

In the late 1920s, Western economies collapsed and the Great Depression began. This was a very difficult time for Western countries. Because of the collapse of the economies, social and political situations became more unstable, which set the stage for World War II, and so the world headed into yet another global war.

World War II again demonstrated man’s inhumanity to man. Hitler came to power in Germany and proceeded to torture and annihilate ten million Jews in an effort to ethnically cleanse Germany so that the Aryan race would reign supreme. Then, the U.S. developed the atom bomb and dropped it on two Japanese cities – Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Now the ultimate weapon had been developed to wipe out civilization, as we know it. The world had to come to terms with the physical, psychological and the economic devastation left by World War II. There were no “winners” any more.

Art changed with the rest of the world. Modernism was the theme of the day. So was avant-garde. Now the formal elements of art were used to express the internal workings of the artist. Expressionism came into being. Expressionism covers several major art movements – German Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S., as well as some of the offshoot movements.

One of the first Expressionist movements was Fauvism. Artists used color to communicate their emotion. Color was the focus of the Fauves – bright, bold, contrasting, intense colors combined with bold, sweeping brushstrokes and patterns. Van Gogh and Gauguin were major influences on the Fauves. This movement did not last long (about five years), but it left a lasting impression on 20th century art.

Henri Matisse was one of the dominant artists in the Fauvist movement. His paintings were traditional in subject matter but the colors he used were completely arbitrary (sometimes jarring), luminous, and wonderful. Matisse used color arbitrarily and emotionally, but also as a formal element that became the underlying structure to his work.

Color was important to the German Expressionists, but form was their real focus. Their expressiveness was created with form, outline, and brush strokes. They wanted to elicit emotional responses from the viewer. The German Expressionists dealt with the horrors and devastation from World War I in their art.

Another major movement that began in the start of the 20th century was Cubism. The premier artist of Cubism was Pablo Picasso. He started out as a Realist, and explored every artistic medium that he could find. He was one of the most prolific artists throughout history. He started out with realistic images and was dissatisfied with the results. Then he began to simplify shapes and planes in his work. He used color to convey his emotional state of mind. In his Blue Period, Picasso used primarily blue colors to represent his poor, downtrodden figures. As his figures got simpler, Picasso began abstracting them more. He started fragmenting them to show volume from all sides at once. This was the beginning of Cubism. Cubism was not totally abstract – some of the subject matter was still recognizable. However, the fragmented parts of the subject were rendered in two-dimensional and three-dimensional space. The colors were toned down, and the space of the picture plane is disconcerting. The picture plane is composed of many planes and surfaces showing all dimensions of three-dimensional space in one view. Again, the formal elements of art are emphasized.

Georges Braque was the other “pioneer” of Cubism. He and Picasso started exploring the medium of collage. Now the medium (made up of mass-produced materials) is moving into the “high art” realm. Cubism challenged established art conventions at that time. The public viewed Cubism with suspicion as being literally revolutionary, which led to the idea that Cubism had political undertones and messages.

An art movement called Futurism was in fact a “revolutionary” art movement. Futurism tackled social and political issues, advocated revolution, and glorified war. In essence, Futurists rebelled against prevailing art convention and focused on motion in time – they tried to literally capture movement. Once World War I broke out, the Futurist movement fell apart. Ironically, many of their ideas became the basis for fascism in Italy before World War II.

Fortunately most artists did not glorify war. After seeing the death and destruction during World War I, artists in general (along with the rest of the world’s population) were horrified. They were from a generation that believed in progress and the innate goodness of man. Suddenly their lives are torn apart by a war that was bloody and terrible and left millions dead. Practically a whole generation of men in Western countries was wiped out in World War I. The Dada movement sprung up as a strong reaction to the horrors of the war. In essence, Dada (including its name) was the absurd. None of the previously held traditions were true or of any value, therefore everything is now senseless, useless, and irrational, which accounts for the absurdity of it all. Strangely enough, although Dada started out as a strong reaction to World War I, it ended up having a huge impact on art from then on. It questioned the whole premise of art. Dada also brought with it humor and the ability to poke fun at ourselves.

Marcel Duchamp was one of the foremost Dadaists. He used “found” objects that had been mass-produced and called them art. The idea was that because the artist chose this object, it is now art. The impact of this led to the idea that man has free choice in life and chance or happenstance plays an important part. The philosophy behind Dada is what eventually led to conceptual and performance art later on in the 20th century.

Another important art form began in the early 20th century. Photography had been invented in the 19th century. Under the leadership of Alfred Stieglitz, it became an art form in the early 20th century. Other photographers, including Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange, and Ansel Adams followed Stieglitz in making photography an art form in its own right. As photography moved toward abstraction, it ceased to be just representational. Photography followed the formal elements of art, which fit right in with Modernism.

Once Dada was out, Surrealism was in. Freud and Jung had a big influence on Surrealism. The subconscious mind and the internal self gained importance. The focus of Surrealism was to bring together the interior and exterior realities in a work of art.

Max Ernst was an important Surrealist artist. Apart from his artistry, Ernst was important because he introduced *frottage* (a collage process that mixes media). This set the stage for more and varied mixed media in later “isms” in art history.

Salvador Dalí was another important Surrealist. His career spanned many decades – from the 1920s to the 1980s. Much of his imagery involved erotica, death, dreams, and aging. His paintings were realistically painted, but his subject matter was not real. He used optical illusion, double imagery, and symbolism to give meaning to his artworks.

Rene Magritte, Frida Kahlo, Joan Miró, and Paul Klee were other prominent Surrealists working in very different styles. Magritte displayed a lot of tongue-in-cheek humor in his imagery while he played around with concepts of visual reality. Frida Kahlo painted surreal self-portraits about the constant physical pain she endured as a result of a bus accident when she was a child. Joan Miró was the master of unconscious “happy accidents.” He worked free form in the first stages of an artwork, and then with careful calculation in the second stage. His work looks unplanned, but in fact after the initial spontaneity, he used the formal elements to enhance the initial mood. Paul Klee worked using a similar method as Miró, but with differing results in style and imagery.

About the time of World War I, artists began looking at utopian ideals – that art can contribute to improving society and mankind. Suprematism and Constructivism were two art movements based on the utopian ideal. Suprematism looked for a common “language” of art to bridge all cultures. The square became the ideal symbol, followed by lines and rectangles. These symbols were used in arrangements that were designed to communicate to all people because of the commonality of the symbols. Constructivism was in essence a three-dimensional version of Suprematism. De Stijl (The Style) and the Bauhaus movements followed in the footsteps of the “utopian” movements.

In the 1930s, with the advent of the Great Depression, artists became concerned with social and political unrest. Picasso painted *Guernica* as a reaction to the horrific bombing and annihilation of a small Basque village in Spain. The bombing was a “practice” exercise by the Nazis, sanctioned by Francisco Franco. U.S. photographer Dorothea Lange was hired by Franklin Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). Her photographs of migrant workers, especially *Migrant Mother, Nipoma Valley*, are breathtaking and stark. That particular photograph has become a universally recognized icon in the art world. Edward Hopper was an American painter who painted stark, realistic images that reflect the lonely isolation of modern man. His *Nighthawks* painting is haunting and pervasive – a group of people isolated from one

another as seen from the dark, empty street through the lighted window of a diner. Jacob Lawrence's series *The Migration* tells the story of African Americans moving from the hostile South to the North in search of better living conditions, employment opportunities, and an improved social climate.

Regionalism appeared during the Depression era. This movement has also been referred to as the American Scene Painters. These artists turned their focus toward rural life. *American Gothic* by Grant Wood is probably one of the best-known paintings from this period. It too is an icon that is instantly recognizable. In fact, at one time it was used in a cereal commercial. Thomas Hart Benton was a regionalist who painted historical images from his beloved Missouri. His paintings tell a story. Regionalism tended to be somewhat nostalgic, which was reassuring during the Depression years. Regionalism was also considered to be a eulogy to a way of life that was dying out – people were moving to cities to find work, and the small farmers were fast disappearing.

What the Regionalists were doing in the U.S., the Mexican Muralists were paralleling in Mexico. Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Siqueiros were the Mexican Muralist artists. They portrayed political and social issues in Mexico with the emphasis on the common man. Oppression and historical allusions comprised much of their subject matter. As their title indicates, much of their work was done as murals.

After World War II, the world changed radically yet again. Because the U.S. emerged from the war relatively unscathed economically (while other Western countries were economically decimated), the art capital of the world moved from Paris to New York, where money was available for art. This move also pushed American artists into the forefront of the art world.

After World War II came the realization that mankind now has the weapon with which to annihilate itself. At that time, nuclear power was held by the U.S. and Russia. The huge problem was and is the instability of political situations in both countries. The U.S. has been enmeshed in one war or "conflict" after another with relatively brief intervals in between since World War II (the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and now the war in Iraq). Russia has not fared much better – the czars were overthrown in 1917, and the Communists came to power until 1989. In between those times, Russia brutally suppressed uprisings in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, and tried to invade Afghanistan. So the world is in chaos (the above-mentioned conflicts are just a few of the numerous wars, rebellions, uprisings, and/or invasions that have occurred in the latter part of the 20th century), and now we add the treat of nuclear war with two super powers at odds with each other (the Cold War) poised with their fingers on the button, so to speak.

Art and society reflected this chaos, instability and insecurity throughout the remainder of the 20th century. The sixties and seventies brought about a societal rebellion in the U.S. and other Western countries. What had gone before was no longer acceptable. Previously held values and beliefs were rejected. A youth oriented culture emerged. The power of the people (especially young people) was put to the test. Governmental policies were questioned and found lacking (Vietnam War, Watergate, the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover, for example). Sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll were the order of the day.

After World War II and its 35 million dead, the world in general was unable to reconcile any justification for what had taken place. After World War I, maybe, but even that was a struggle. After World War II? No. As a result, cynicism, despair, disillusionment and skepticism became the collective mood in art. Artists were unable to make sense of all the horrors that had occurred. So, art turned to Existentialism and the absurdity of human existence. Much of the artwork produced during this time was brutal, tortured, despairing, and showed man as being lost and

isolated in this immense world. Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, and Alberto Giacometti were three prominent Existentialist artists.

The first major American avant-garde art movement was Abstract Expressionism. The idea was to express emotion and the inner man through pure expression freed from objective subject matter. There were two types of movements in Abstract Expressionism – gestural abstraction and chromatic abstraction.

Gestural abstraction (sometimes referred to as action painting) was about the emotion and expressiveness used in applying pigment. Jackson Pollock was the epitome of gestural abstraction. His work was all about dripping, throwing, and slinging paint onto huge canvases, and then crunching up glass and other materials into the wet paint. The expressive action in the creative process is what mattered.

Willem de Kooning was another gestural abstractionist. He used more figurative subject matter than Pollock, but his figures were made up of very loose, energetic brush strokes full of slashing lines and garish color. Some of his paintings actually had holes in them from all of that “expressive energy” de Kooning put into them.

The chromatic abstractionists were concerned with using color instead of gesture for expressiveness. Color by itself was used to communicate feelings and emotions. Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko were the premier chromatic abstractionists. They believed that color in its purest form could express human emotion perfectly. Color field paintings were a variation of this style.

Abstract Expressionism quite naturally segued into Minimalist Art, which focused on reducing three-dimensionality into its simplest forms. The idea was to get rid of objective subject matter because that just confused the viewer and kept him or her from experiencing the simplicity of basic form. Tony Smith and Donald Judd were two prominent Minimalist sculptors. Maya Ying Lin’s design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is also Minimalist. And, quite lovely I might add.

The Abstract Expressionists and their spin-offs as well as the Minimalists focused on two-dimensional and three-dimensional art as an expression unto themselves in space. It only made sense to add the dimension of time and call it Performance Art. Happenings began taking place in the 1950s as Performance Art. The art was about experiencing whatever spontaneous event transpired. Sometimes there would be a photographic record of the event, but usually the emphasis was on experiencing and/or participating in the event that occurred.

Performance Art gave way to Conceptual Art in the late 1960s. Performance Art was about something that was occurring. Conceptual Art took away the event or object, and the remaining art was the artist’s idea. For example, American artist Joseph Kosuth created a work entitled *One and Three Chairs* that consisted of an actual chair, a full-scale photograph of the chair, and a large-scale copy of the dictionary’s definition of a chair. The viewer is asked to ponder what constitutes “chairness.”

In the 1950s in England, artists were rejecting the notions of the avant-garde that art should belong to the elevated few. Instead they took art to the masses so to speak. They integrated aesthetics and popular culture (mass-produced or mass-viewed formats such as advertising, comic books, and movies). One memorable artwork from this time is Richard Hamilton’s *Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing*. It is a collage made up of figures cut from glossy magazines with references to mass media, advertising, and popular culture that indicate the artist’s comments on the modern consumer culture. It is a humorous work of art, as well as a deep one.

Pop Art moved to the U.S. in the sixties. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were two of the early American Pop Artists. Johns called attention to objects “seen, but not looked at” like targets, flags, numbers, and alphabets (Kleiner 1052). Rauschenberg used assemblage to combine different common objects that may have no relation to each other, but can be each viewed as independent subject matter.

After Johns and Rauschenberg came Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and Claes Oldenburg. Lichtenstein used melodramatic scenes from comic books faithfully rendered in oil on canvas as his subject matter. He reproduced them using Benday dots (dot system that creates the color in comic books with the use of varying placement and size of colored dots), the actual “comic book style” lettering, and the heavy outlines. Warhol used mass-produced images as his subject matter. He silk-screened (a mass-production process) the mass-produced images such as *Brillo Box* and *Marilyn Diptych*. Claes Oldenburg did huge sculptures that comment on the American consumer culture – cue balls, clothespins, typewriter erasers, etc.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the Superrealists evolved. They used Pop Art iconography (for example, Marilyn Monroe) that was rendered realistically. Again the emphasis is on art that is accessible to the public. Audrey Flack did “photo-realistic” paintings of pop culture icons, but her intent was more emotionally expressive than Warhol. Chuck Close was another Superrealist who painted very large (9’ x 7’) portraits that were so realistic that on that scale they became abstract. Duane Hanson created polyester resin sculptures of real people in real situations pertaining to lower and middle-class American scenes. A good example is *Supermarket Shopper*. Hanson creates the whole scene realistically using real people as the molds, wigs, clothes, shopping cart, and real looking items in the shopping cart.

Environmental Art came into being in the sixties as well. These artists focused on large-scale works using the earth. They have been instrumental in calling attention to environmental issues as well. Robert Smith used heavy equipment to move earth in order to create *Spiral Getty*. Recently in the news for *The Gates* in New York City, artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been at their environmental art for a long time – since the late sixties in fact. They temporarily alter a selected environment in an environmentally friendly way. They fund these projects through the sale of peripheral items (drawings, plans, posters, etc) when the project is done. Typically a project takes years to plan, implement, and obtain permits. Then it is exhibited for a few weeks and then dismantled.

In the 1970s, artist Judy Chicago pulled together a team of over 400 workers to create *The Dinner Party*. It is a feminist version of *The Last Supper*. The actual table is in the shape of a triangle, with each side measuring 48 feet long. There are 13 place settings on each side, with each setting (except for common silverware and drinking vessels) individualized for each of the 39 “invited guests.” The runners and the porcelain plates portray imagery depicting the accomplishment of each of the 39 women guests who have been left out of history. The entire table rests on a white tile floor inscribed with the names of another 999 women of achievement who were also largely ignored. The initial exhibit opened in the U.S. in 1979 and then traveled throughout the rest of the world for the next 10 years. After that, it had no permanent home and had to be put in storage. Now, the Brooklyn Museum in New York has offered it a permanent home. (Coincidentally, the Brooklyn Museum is the same entity that came under fire from Mayor Giuliani and the City of New York for the *Sensation* exhibit).

Modernism with its formalist roots fell by the wayside in the 1970s. Modernism was just simply played out. Artistic conventions had been challenged to the limit, and there just weren’t any more challenges to overcome. With all the political and social structures changing so radically and quickly throughout the world, the rise of Postmodernism was a natural.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is more of a collective culture than a movement or “ism” or style of art. Under Modernism, increasingly only the avant-garde and their followers had access to art. In Postmodernism, everyone has access to art. In Postmodernism, anything goes. Postmodernism brought into focus the thinking behind the art, not just the art itself. All art is valued because it is creative.

However, Postmodernism is very difficult to describe, especially since we are still in that era. Hindsight will make it much easier to label Postmodernism. Postmodernism is all over the map. It can be revivals of Modernist movements that are re-examined by artists. It can also be (and frequently is) controversial art that pushes the definition of art. Some of the better-known examples are Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ* – a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine. We certainly don’t want to leave out Robert Mapplethorpe’s photographs, a few of which happen to be erotic and homosexual in nature. The irony of this controversy is that a large part of Mapplethorpe’s work was elegant photographs of flowers and vegetables. Then of course, the aforementioned exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* contained artworks such as Chris Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin* that was a mixed media work using cutouts from pornographic magazines and elephant dung to name a few. Postmodernism in part appears to push the envelope. It forces the question “What is Art?” It also seems to force and/or court controversy.

Postmodernism does not seem to have definable “movements.” However, it does embrace individual artists and causes that are worth noting. Women artists and women’s issues are much more prevalent and accepted in the art world today. The art of different cultures and ethnicities is becoming more valued and respected as well. Folk art, or “untrained” art, has become a recognized art form as well. Some art forms that had been traditionally thought of as “crafts” are moving into the art realm. (Kleiner 853-901, 961-1091)

ART FUNDING IN THE U.S.

Public funding of art is a controversial topic. The major controversies began in 1989 with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding various exhibits that included Robert Mapplethorpe’s graphic photographs of homosexual acts, Andres Serrano’s “sacrilegious” photograph of a crucifix, *Piss Christ*, and Karen Finley’s performance art that featured her smearing her nude body with chocolate. Until then, funding for the NEA had steadily risen since its inception in 1966 under President Johnson.

Congress created the NEA with a specified mission to “foster the excellence, diversity, and vitality of the arts in the United States.” The NEA funds support art organizations involved with visual arts, dance, theater, music, and art education. The NEA also funds exhibits and grants to individual artists. These two funding areas have landed the NEA in hot water. Some of the aforementioned were included in exhibits funded by the NEA. Ironically, only 4% of the NEA budget goes to funding individual artist grants (Degelmen 1, 2). However, these two areas have stirred up quite a lot of controversy over the years, and corresponding funding issues.

Interestingly enough, the selection process for funding under the NEA is a group effort. Except for the final year or nay, no one person decides what is funded by the NEA. Different peer panels are made up of approximately 800 members with diverse geographical, cultural, and ideological viewpoints who are required to have expertise and leadership in the area they are reviewing. The peer panels make recommendations to the National Council of the Arts (a 26-member committee appointed by the President), who in turn make recommendations to the NEA chairperson, who then makes the final decision on grant funding (Degelmen 2).

The major controversy concerning publicly funded art is whether artists should have freedom of expression when public funds are involved versus whether works of art should be censored (and who decides?) if public funding is involved. Artists and art patrons feel that art should not be censored – that it should provoke reactions and sometimes be controversial. Otherwise art becomes bland and boring. Also, art is necessary for a rich national culture and a free society. On the other hand, critics feel that their tax dollars should not fund art that is considered obscene, disgusting, or otherwise objectionable. Interestingly enough, no one is suggesting the art be banned – just the public funding of it. Another interesting point is the whole of the NEA budget would not even buy a bomber plane.

In fact, the NEA actually did not lose a large part of their funding until 1996, when their budget went from \$162 million down to \$99 million. As a result, the NEA no longer awards grants to individual artists. Fortunately, the Clinton administration supported increased funding, so the NEA's budget began increasing again. As of 2005, the NEA is up to \$121 million, which is nowhere near the \$176 million highpoint in 1992 (NEA).

Another point to consider is that the United States spends much less per capita than other nations in the world in government funding for art. Germany spends \$95, France \$47, Canada \$46, and the United Kingdom \$26 per capita on art. The United States spends \$6 per capita on art (ArtTRUSTnews).

Funding for the arts on the state level is also dropping, from a total of \$410 million in 2000 to \$350 million in 2002-2003. Overall, states spend \$.63 of every \$1,000 for state arts programs. Corporate, foundation, and individual giving are dropping from \$12.7 billion in 2001 to \$4.6 billion in 2002 according to a survey by *The Chronicles of Philanthropy* (Kaufman).

In Texas, government funding for the arts comes mainly from the Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT). The problem with this funding is that it is based on a volatile industry (tourism), and is also totally dependent on promoting tourism and hotel and convention industry. Changes in the tax code are making it more difficult for local governments to use their own discretion in allocating the resources to the various arts organizations. In turn, tighter control by the state of the HOT revenues can limit and dictate the types of art being funded, which leads to the topic of my next section (Beck).

CONTROVERSIAL ART

Controversial art has been around for as long as art has been around. As long as art is created, someone will object to it. In recent years, Michelangelo's *David* was banned from Eugene, Oregon schools for its full frontal nudity (The File Room). In more recent times, controversies over art have abounded.

In 1820, Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* caused huge outrage. Scandal erupted when a French government vessel was shipwrecked, and the 15 survivors managed to live on human meat and a few drops of wine. Then, Géricault had the audacity to paint their struggle for survival against the odds (135 others did not survive) (De La Cruz).

The Impressionists were condemned by traditional establishment art when they first exhibited their work. In particular, Edouard Manet made quite an impression with two of his paintings. *Luncheon on the Grass* showed a nude woman having a picnic on the grass in a park with several fully dressed businessmen. Apparently nudity in a classical setting was okay, nudity in a contemporary setting was not. In *Olympia*, the realistic portrayal of a prostitute outraged Parisians in 1865 (De La Cruz).

In 1864, John Singer Sargent painted *Madame X*, and upset Parisians by painting a society lady with sexual overtones. Her pose was sexually suggestive, her skin was pale and pasty, and

her ear was pink. Sargent returned to the US, and never fully regained his exalted position in the art world in France after that (De La Cruz).

Then, in 1937, a small Basque village in Spain was used as bombing practice by Hitler's war machine (with Franco's approval), and 1600 citizens were senselessly shot or bombed over a three-hour period. When Pablo Picasso painted *Guernica* as a protest to this slaughter, he was called a madman, but now the painting is venerated (De La Cruz).

The list continues up to today. The *Sensation* exhibit in New York had then-Mayor Guiliani try to pull city funding from the Brooklyn Museum. In essence, Mayor Guiliani felt the art was anti-religious and that taxpayer money should not be supporting art that children were not "allowed" to see (actually, the disclaimer said children under 17 should view the exhibit with an adult). He then tried to have the Brooklyn Museum evicted from the premises and withheld promised payments to the museum. The entire funding from the city was to be withheld over this one exhibit, notwithstanding the 125,000 school children served by the museum each year and the amount of public art education the museum participates in (PBS).

Other instances of outrage and controversy toward art include a flag sewn with human skin pieces, a flag in a toilet (America Gone to Pot), Plastinated Corpses (with fully informed donors providing the corpses) (Finn), Chris Olfile painting the Virgin Mary with elephant dung (he won the Turner Prize for that one), Damien Hirst pickling sheep (he also won the Turner Prize for that), and last but not least, Tony Kaye made an attempt to win the Turner Prize by submitting a real live homeless steelworker as his entry ("Controversial Art Prize").

Suffice it to say, controversy about art was, is, and will always be. And, so it should be. According to Freeland:

The art world is a competitive place, and artists need any edge they can get, including shock value. John Dewey pointed out in *Art as Experience* in 1934 that artists must strive for novelty in response to the market:

Industry has been mechanized and an artist cannot work mechanically for mass production...Artists find it incumbent ... to betake themselves to their work as an isolated means of 'self-expression.' In order not to cater to the trend of economic forces, they often feel obliged to exaggerate their separateness to the point of eccentricity. (6)

LESSON PLANS

Lesson One

A summary of 20th Century Art History is included above. The bulk of the information provided comes from three sources (books by Kleiner, Phaidon Press Editors, and Klaus Richter). I plan to use that information along with images from the Internet to put together Power Point presentations that will be in 15-minute segments. Students will take notes and formally critique selected art works during the semester.

During the semester, students will select an artist that has had an impact on them. For their final exam, they will research the artist using at least three primary sources (books and magazines); the rest can be Internet sources. Then students will put together a written presentation as well as a plan for an artwork using something they have learned about that artist. During the final exam session, students will do an oral presentation on the work of their artist and show their outcome artwork based on that artist. Because these are teenagers, who, therefore, might have a tendency to procrastinate, it is a good idea to have checkpoints and due dates prior to the final exam session to ensure that the work is in progress.

The end result of this activity is two-fold. First, the student becomes familiar with an artist and his or her work and second uses higher order thinking skills to analyze this information to

come up with the outcome artwork. The success of the presentation and the outcome art is an immediate assessment of the thought and effort that went into the project.

Lesson Two

The second activity is designed to promote independent thinking. The idea is to debate issues in public funding for art. Then, students will switch sides and argue the opposite viewpoint. This lesson can take place as a one-time event or it can happen on a regular basis throughout the semester. This would be up to each individual teacher and their time constraints. There are several scenarios on how to set up this lesson.

First, the specific topics need to be chosen by the teacher. In doing so, the issue of how to pair up the students comes up. This is a difficult issue because the bottom line is that you want the students to really think about their topic, not just visit with their friends. Should the teacher pair up the students, should the students pick their own partners, or should names be drawn? And, how do you pair up students with special needs – i.e. Special Education, English as a Second Language, and Gifted/Talented? These questions need to be thought out ahead of time by the teacher. I plan to teach this lesson in an upper level art class, but I still have the special needs students I specified above. I am going to draw names, and then closely monitor how the pairs are working out.

Some ideas for sample topics are as follows: How should the memorial for 9/11 be funded and/or designed? How should Houston respond to requests for an African American museum? Should public funds be used for exhibits that include erotic art? What about religious art (separation of church and state)? Who should determine what art should be funded with taxpayer money? Should art have rules; why or why not? Should artists have complete freedom of expression, why or why not?

The next item will be to set the parameters for the debate. What is expected? How in depth do students need to go? How will the debate be structured? How long will they actually debate? What are the rules for debate? I plan to assign a topic to each team. They will have three minutes (arbitrary time frame) to present their case. Then after each side presents his or her view, they each get one minute to address the other person's argument. A rubric will have to be developed by the teacher to determine how effective the debate is. The debate can be judged by the teacher or by fellow students using the rubric. The structure of the judging can be decided by each individual teacher.

Then, the research required for the debate needs to be specifically addressed. Considering the fact that these are fairly current or recent issues, Internet sources will probably be the main sources of information. The teacher may want to require that a list of sources be turned in before the debate. This is also a great opportunity to slip in a quick lesson on evaluating websites and information obtained from the Internet. The next question will be how many points students need to address in their debate. I would recommend setting a minimum and a maximum for this – for example, five main points for and five against the topic assigned, with research backing up these points.

After the debate is finished, then the students switch sides. I would run through the debates of all the pairs before switching sides. This gives a little bit of breathing room for the students to unwind and think so they can argue the opposite view of what they just debated.

This entire lesson can be set up as teams as well. It can be set up as a tournament with semi-finals and finals. It can be set up as a game show. There are an infinite number of ways the teacher can structure this lesson to make it challenging and interesting to the students.

The end result is that students should/will see both sides of the issue. When students take a position contrary to their beliefs, they have to see another point of view. This teaches them that there may be many solutions, not just one. This lesson encourages organization of thought and ideas, independent thinking, and tolerance. It is also an opportunity to improve public speaking skills.

Lesson Three

The third activity will be for students to choose a controversial artist, and create and present an imaginary dialog between the artist and his worst critic. This lesson will encourage students to examine and formalize questions such as “What is Art?” and “Who says so?” along with a host of other questions and issues about art. This lesson is also a very good writing exercise, which never hurts.

This activity can be a one-time event, or ongoing throughout the semester or year. It can be written only (so only the teacher sees it) or oral as well (so as to polish the public speaking skills again) – however the teacher wants to structure it.

The biggest issue for this lesson is to carefully choose classroom appropriate material. Much of the controversial art may be offensive to students and/or parents, so you will need to tread carefully for this lesson. Personally, I plan to come up with a list of artists for students to choose from. Then, I will talk to my principal (or assistant principal) about the lesson and the possible issues that might arise, along with a sample letter to be sent home to parents (to be returned with parent signatures) outlining subjects that would be broached (i.e. animal rights, religion, sexuality, politics, etc.). I would also have a backup plan for students who are not comfortable with this project. A good backup plan might be controversial art from times gone by – for example, *Guernica* by Picasso. If too many students or parents object, then controversial art from the past can be used instead.

This lesson teaches students a lot about the purpose of art and evaluating art. It also teaches them how to look at their own art and to see what messages they are intending to communicate to the viewer. In defending the artist, they have to convey what the artist is trying to say. In being the critic, they have to look at how someone might see their art. In organizing their thoughts for both artist and critic, students end up formalizing and verbalizing what makes art successful. This lesson also can be used to examine controversial art, and whether or not it is successful. Controversy changes over time. What was controversial in the 1960s may be pretty tame by today’s standards. All in all, this lesson can be used to help students to focus on art and how it fits into the world around them.

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