



American Heroes Student Art Contest

American Art Styles 1776-2026

Learning Resource for Teachers and Students

Colonial Art

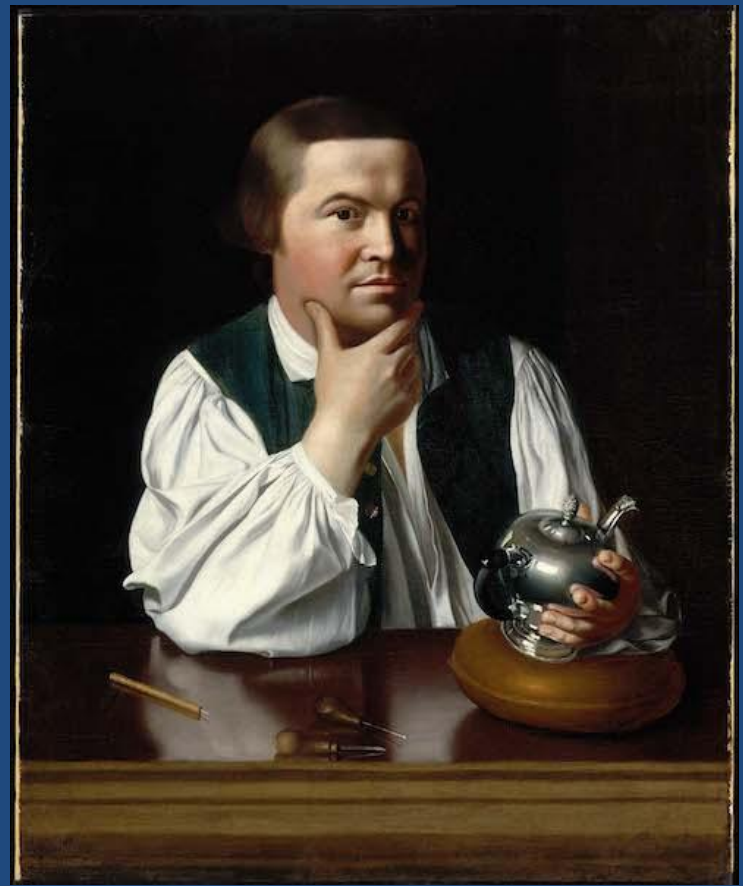
(c. 1600s-1770s)

- Consisted mostly of portraiture and history paintings
- Influenced by practical, restrained, classical European art
- Notable Artists: **John Singleton Copley, Charles Willson Peale, Gilbert Stuart**
- Purpose: record social station, individuals, families, civic life, and history

Look carefully at the artwork examples and consider: Can you imagine a world without cameras? How would you think about art differently if the only way to record history visually was to create a piece of art by hand?



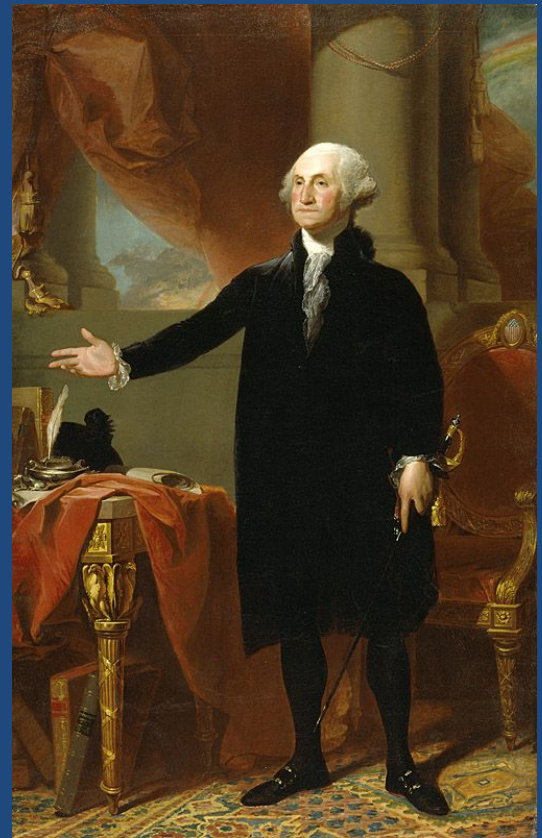
Charles Willson Peale, *The Convention Portrait of George Washington* (1787), oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art



John Singleton Copley, *Paul Revere* (1768), oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts Boston



John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark* (1778), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art



Gilbert Stuart, *George Washington (The Lansdowne Portrait)*(1796), oil on canvas, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art

Neoclassicism

(late 1700s-early 1800s)

- Inspired by the golden age of Athens & the Roman Republic
- Focus shifted from the individual/family to the nation
- Sought to ground the American Republic in timeless principles of democracy, order, and sacrifice
- Notable Artists: **Benjamin West, John Trumbull, Emanuel Leutze**
- Themes: virtue, reason, heroism, selflessness, and civic duty

Look carefully at the artwork examples and consider: What is each group doing, and why? What virtues (such as selflessness, courage, wisdom) are being revealed in the scenes depicted in these paintings?



Benjamin West,
*The Death of
General Wolfe*
(1770), oil on
canvas, National
Gallery of Canada



John Trumbull, *Declaration of Independence* (1818), oil on canvas, Yale University Art Gallery



Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), oil on canvas,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Hudson River School

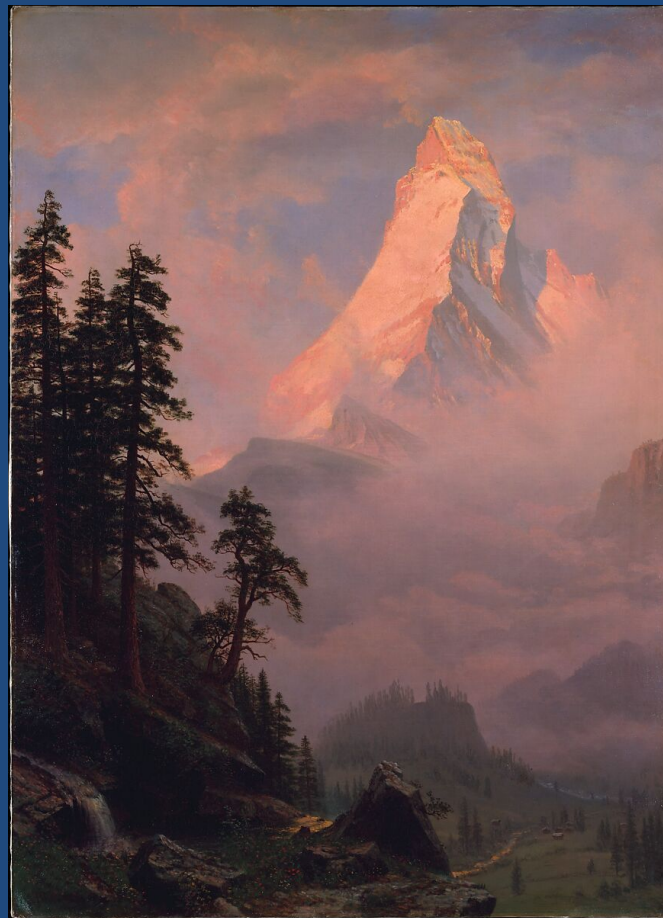
(1820s-1870s)

- America's first original art movement
- Vast landscapes reflected national identity and pride of country through grand, idealized scenes
- Artists: **Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, Asher B. Durand, Jasper Francis Copley**
- Themes: Manifest Destiny, God's Providence, awe and wonder for nature

Look for people in the following paintings and consider: Why are they so small compared to the mountains and trees? How does that make you feel about the power of nature? What else does that make you think about?



Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits* (1849), oil on canvas,
Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art



Albert Bierstadt, *Sunrise on the Matterhorn*
(1875), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Thomas Cole, *The Voyage of Life, Youth* (1840), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art



Frederic Edwin Church, *Niagara* (1857), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art

Luminism

(1850s-1870s)

- Focused on the effects of quiet, glowing light through glass-like surface and invisible brushstrokes
- Portrayed still waters, peaceful scenes, meditative moods, and silence
- Artists: **Fitz Henry Lane, Martin Johnson Heade, Sanford Robinson Gifford**
- Themes: connection to nature, quiet contemplation, realistic detail

Look carefully at the example artworks and notice how these images affect your mood. Using your five senses, if you were standing in this scene, what would you hear, see, smell, taste, and feel?



Fitz Henry Lane, *Lumber Schooners at Evening on Penobscot Bay* (1863), oil on canvas,
National Gallery of Art



Martin Johnson
Heade, *Cattleya
Orchid and Three
Hummingbirds* (1871),
oil on wood, National
Gallery of Art



Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Isola Bella in Lago Maggiore* (1871), oil on canvas,
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Genre Painting

(1840-1910)

- Depicted ordinary people doing everyday work
- Honest, realistic imagery of daily life in a changing nation
- Notable Artists: **Winslow Homer, Richard Norris Brooke, Thomas Eakins, Lilly Martin Spencer**
- Themes: social interaction, rural life, market scenes in growing American cities, character types

Look carefully at the following paintings and consider: How do these paintings of “ordinary” heroes inspire you to honor America’s famous heroes? How might everyday work make someone a hero for those around them?



Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream* (1899), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic* (1875), oil on canvas, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Lilly Martin Spencer, *Young Husband: First Marketing* (1854), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



Richard Norris Brooke, *A Pastoral Visit* (1881), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art

American Impressionism

(late 1800s-early 1900s)

- Placed emphasis on light, color, leisure scenes with visible brushstrokes
- Influenced by French Impressionism, but retained more solid forms and a sense of American sentimentality
- Notable Artists: **Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, William Merritt Chase, John Singer Sargent**
- Themes: nostalgia, peaceful scenes, outdoors, changing light

Look carefully at the artwork examples and consider: How does the use of bright, "modern" colors make these everyday scenes feel important and heroic? How do the different brushstrokes create energy or quietness?



Mary Cassatt, *The Child's Bath* (1893), oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago



Childe Hassam, *Allies Day, May 1917* (1917), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art



William Merritt Chase, *At the Seaside* (c. 1892), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



John Singer Sargent,
Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose
(1885-86), oil on canvas,
Tate Britain

American Modernism

(1900s - 1940s)

- Known for being dynamic, optimistic, and experimental
- Includes numerous art styles during the first half of the 1900s as seen on the following slides
- Reflected the nation's industrialization and urban growth
- Notable Artists: **Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Hopper, Charles Sheeler**
- Themes: urbanization, social change, distinct American identity, abstraction and nature

Look carefully at the paintings and consider: What is something unexpected or surprising in each painting? How is the style of American Modernism different from the previous styles?



Georgia O'Keeffe,
Jimson Weed (1936),
oil on linen,
Indianapolis
Museum of Art



Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks* (1942), oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago



Charles Sheeler, *River Rouge Plant* (1932), oil and pencil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art

Ashcan School

(early 1900s)

- Depicted working-class, urban life, often set in New York City
- Sought to show that there is beauty and truth in the harsher, gritty realities of the modern American city
- Notable Artists: **Robert Henri, George Bellows, John Sloan**
- Themes: showing life's struggle, crowded tenements, boxing matches, laundry-filled alleys and dirty street scenes, messy and human

Look carefully at the example paintings and consider: What might be the stories these artworks are telling us? What qualities might we admire in these everyday people and scenes?



Robert Henri, *Snow in New York* (1902), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art

John Sloan,
*Sunday, Women
Drying Their
Hair* (1912), oil on
canvas, Addison
Gallery of
American Art





George Bellows, *Cliff Dwellers* (1913), oil on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Precisionism

(1910s-1930s)

- Used clean lines and perspective to focus on the importance of industrial America, often with a feeling of coolness and distance
- Featured factories, bridges, and skyscrapers
- Notable Artists: **Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth, Ralston Crawford, Georgia O’Keeffe** (New York paintings)
- Themes: the monumental impact of industry and technology, precise lines and shapes, machinery, neatness and tidiness

Look carefully at the example paintings and consider: What catches your eye in these images? Who (or what) might be the “hero” in each artwork?



Charles Sheeler,
Classic Landscape
(1931), oil on
canvas, National
Gallery of Art

Charles Demuth, *My Egypt*
(1927), oil, fabricated
chalk, and graphite pencil
on composition board,
Whitney Museum of
American Art





Ralston Crawford, *Grey Street* (1940), color screen print on wove paper, National Gallery of Art

Regionalism

(1930s)

- Sought to tell clear stories of rural America and heartland values found in small towns and farms
- Reacted against European modernism, which some saw as abstract and confusing
- Notable Artists: **Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry**
- Themes: American identity, tradition, southwest art, hard work and community spirit, people coming together to help one another

Look carefully at the paintings and consider: What makes this style look like it is telling a story? How do these artists make an everyday job look like a grand achievement?

Thomas Hart Benton,
Cradling Wheat (1938),
tempera and oil on
board, Saint Louis Art
Museum





Grant Wood, *American Gothic*
(1930), oil on board, Art
Institute of Chicago



John Stuart Curry,
Baptism in Kansas
(1928), oil on canvas,
Whitney Museum of
American Art

Harlem Renaissance

(1920s-1930s)

- Showcased a surge of African-American art centered in Harlem, New York
- Challenged racism and promoted cultural pride
- Artists: **Aaron Douglas, Archibald Motley, James Van Der Zee**
- Themes: African heritage, modernist style, warmth and movement of the community

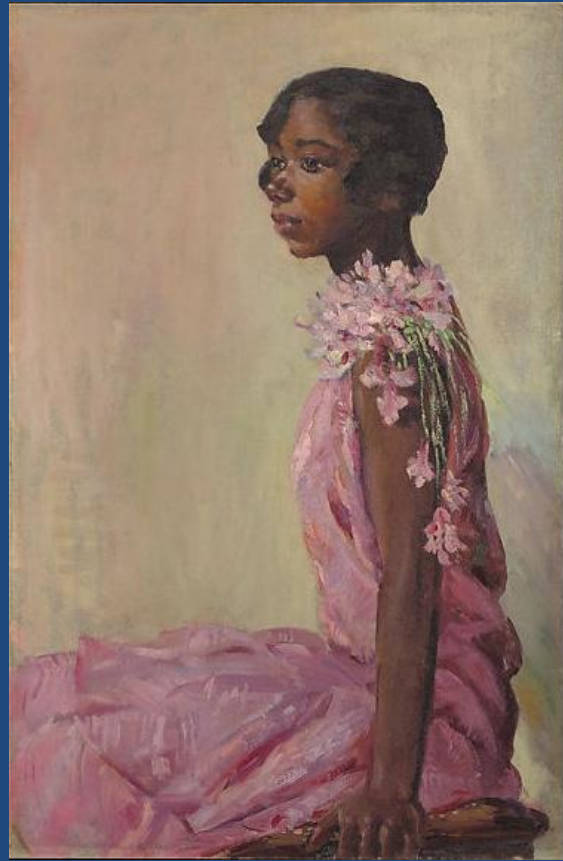
Look carefully at the paintings and consider: How do these artists use dignified poses and elegant clothing to challenge the stereotypes of the time?

Can you "hear" the rhythm of jazz in the jagged shapes of Douglas's painting?

How can you use shapes in your art to engage the senses?



Archibald John Motley Jr., *Portrait of My Grandmother* (1922), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art



Laura Wheeler Waring, *Girl in Pink Dress*, (1927), oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art



James Van Der Zee, *The Heiress, Harlem* (1938), photograph, National Gallery of Art



Aaron Douglas, *The Judgement Day* (1939),
oil on board, National Gallery of Art



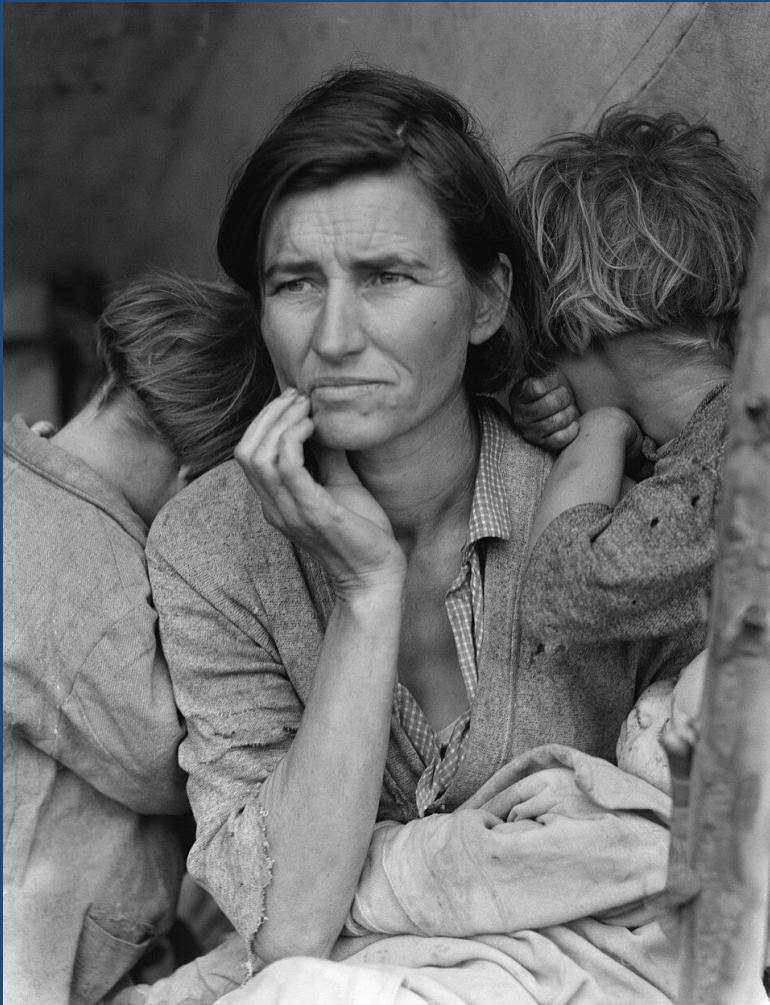
William H. Johnson, *Blind Singer* (1940),
screenprint with tempera, Museum of Modern Art

Realism

(1930s-1940s)

- Focused on workers, labor, and poverty
- Often tied to the Great Depression
- Notable Artists: **Ben Shahn, Jacob Lawrence, Dorothea Lange, Norman Rockwell, Andrew Wyeth, Edward Hopper**
- Themes: labor and industry, American scene painting, economic struggle, loneliness

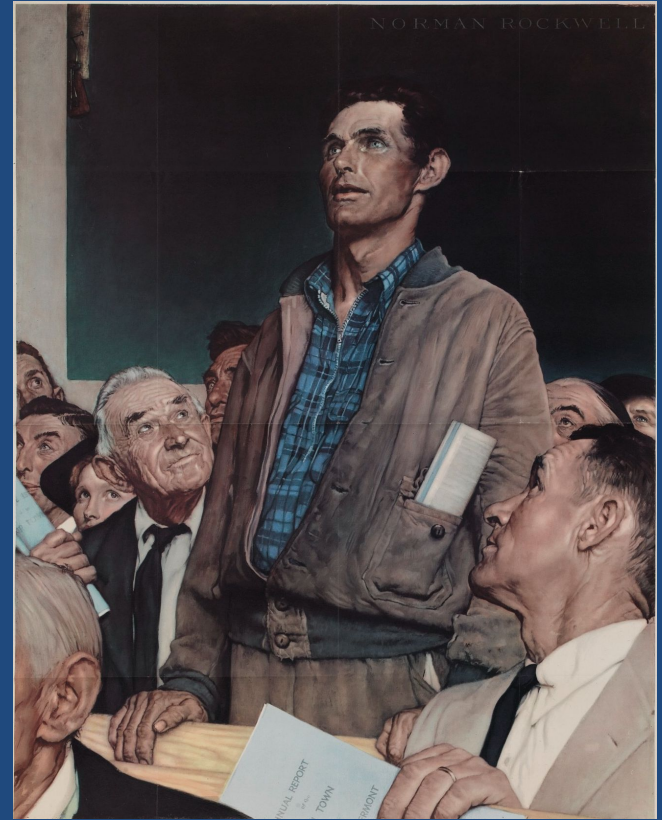
Look at the images and consider: Who in our society today is often overlooked despite their steady, quiet strength? How can adding detail into a portrait help tell a deeper story about the challenges and sacrifices someone has faced?



Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother* (1936), photograph, Museum of Modern Art



Jacob Lawrence, *The Builders* (1947), tempera on board, White House Historical Association



Norman Rockwell, *Freedom of Speech* (1943), lithograph on paper, Smithsonian Museum of American Art



Andrew Wyeth, *Christina's World* (1948), egg tempera on panel, Museum of Modern Art

Abstract Expressionism

(1940s-1950s)

- Shifted the global art center of influence from Paris to New York City
- Aimed to declare the cultural independence of this new generation of artists by using grand gesture, emotional expression, and large scale
- Notable Artists: **Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler**
- Themes: individualism, personal freedom, emotional expression, human condition, and search for meaning in an increasingly chaotic world

Look carefully at the painting examples and consider: How do you feel when you look at each painting? How can abstract paintings evoke certain feelings in the viewer even without recognizable images? How can you use elements of this style to evoke feelings through your own artwork?



Jackson Pollock, *No. 1, 1950 (Lavender Mist)*, oil on fiberboard, National Gallery of Art



Mark Rothko, *Orange and Yellow* (1956), oil on canvas, Buffalo AKG Art Museum



Helen Frankenthaler, *Mountains and Sea* (1952), oil and charcoal on unsized, unprimed canvas, National Gallery of Art



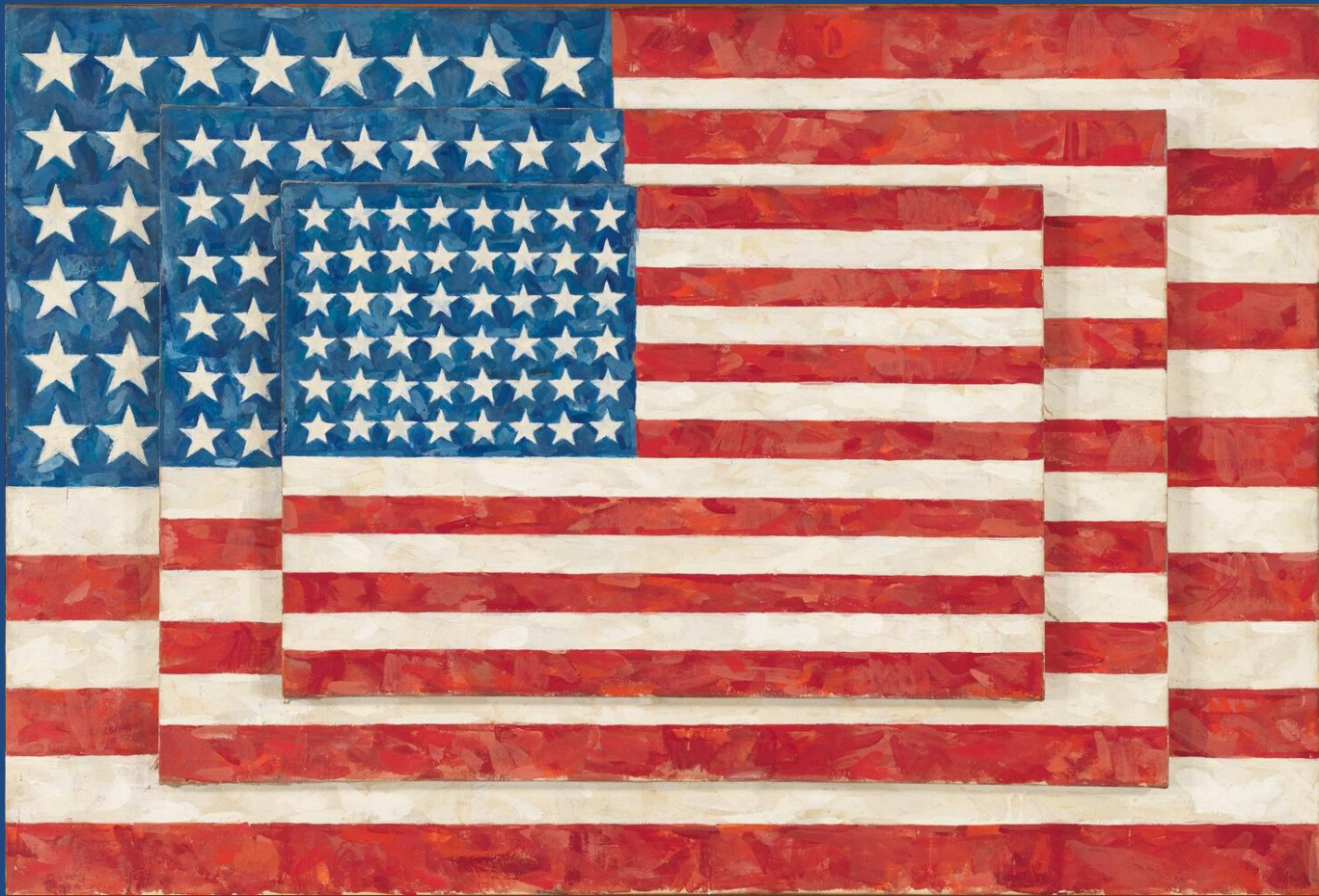
Richard Diebenkorn, *Seawall*, (1957), oil on canvas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Pop Art

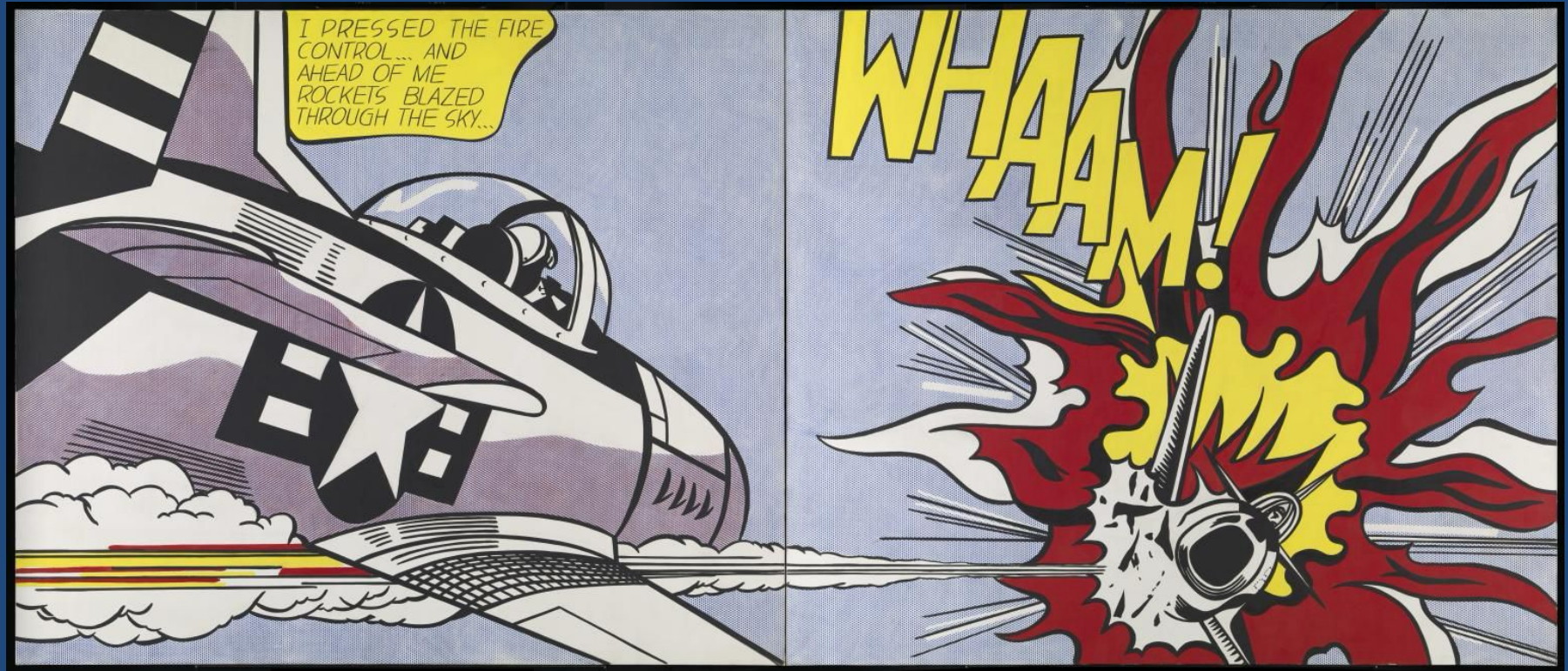
(1950s-1960s)

- Driven by mass media and consumer culture, TV, billboards, and magazines
- Used irony and bold imagery to evoke humor and detachment
- Notable Artists: **Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns**
- Themes: everyday objects, brands, bold colors, comic books, signage, and commercial printing

Look carefully at the paintings and consider: How does seeing the same thing many times change how we think about it? Think about the messages in the artworks. Did Pop Art *celebrate* American consumer culture, or did it *criticize* the tendency to value material things and a fast-pace, over deeper meanings and virtues?



Jasper Johns, *Three Flags* (1958), encaustic on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art



Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam!* (1963), acrylic and oil on canvas, Tate Britain



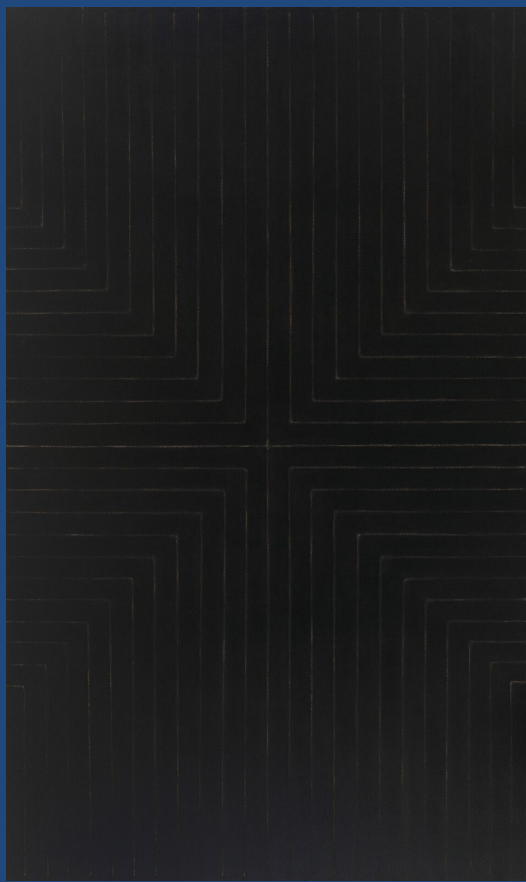
Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), acrylic with metallic enamel paint on canvas, 32 panels, Museum of Modern Art

Minimalism

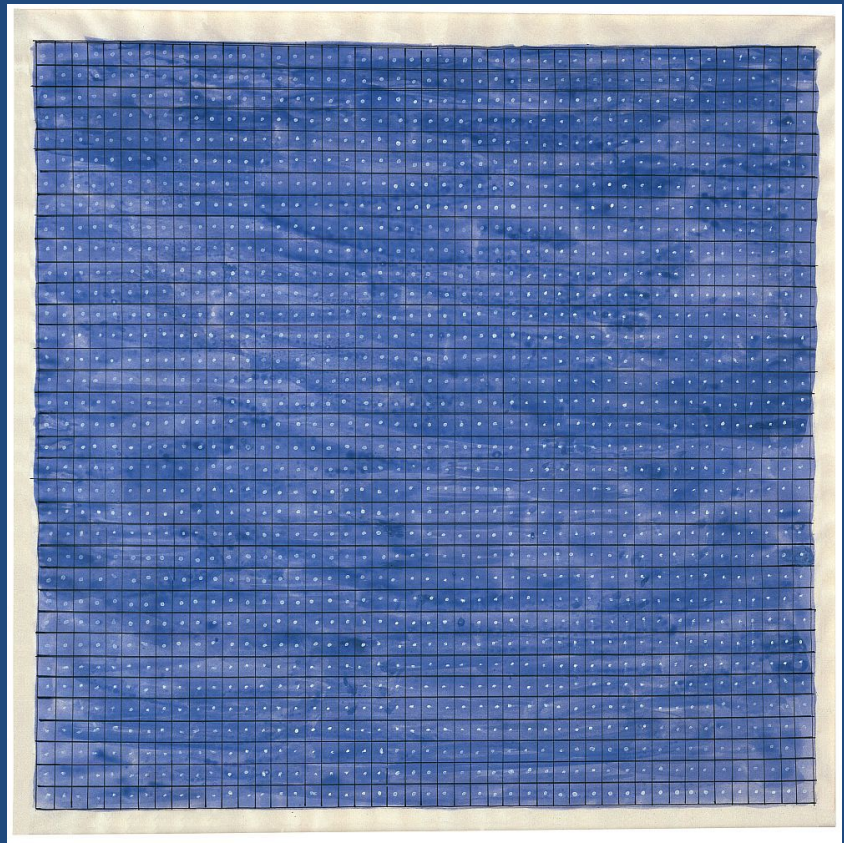
(1960s-1970s)

- Emphasized the elements of art, such as color, line, shape, and value, and repetition of forms
- Sought to remove the meaning-making, storytelling, symbolism, and personal emotion often found in works of art
- Notable Artists: **Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly**
- Themes: geometric abstractions, rejection of emotion or narrative, industrial materials

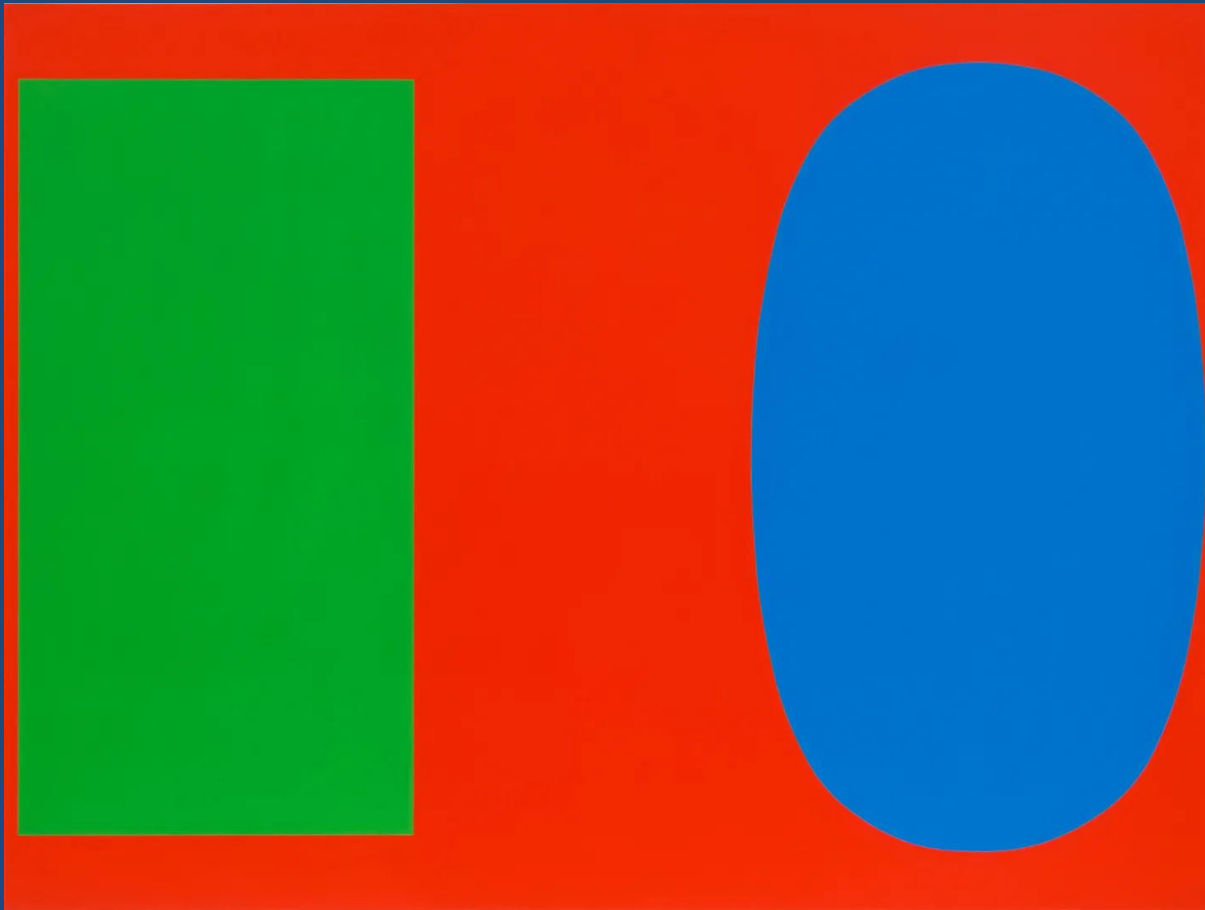
Look carefully at the artwork examples and consider: What do you see? What does this make you think about? What does it make you wonder?



Frank Stella, *Die Fahne Hoch!* (1959),
enamel on canvas, Whitney Museum of
American Art



Agnes Martin, *Untitled* (1965),
watercolor, ink, and gouache on paper,
estate of Agnes Martin



Ellsworth Kelly, *Green Blue Red* (1963), oil on canvas, The Broad, Los Angeles

Conceptual Art

(1960s-early 1980s)

- Focused on the idea represented in the art as being more important than the physical artwork or artist's hand
- Challenged the definition of art itself, suggesting that a masterpiece could exist purely as a thought or a written statement; “the concept is the art”
- Notable Artists: **Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, John Baldessari**
- Themes: anti-commercialism, using language and logic, process-based

Look carefully at the images and consider: Can an idea be a masterpiece even if it never becomes a physical object? When an artist chooses to make something simple or repetitive instead of “beautiful” or “meaningful,” what might he or she aim to communicate to the viewer?

I will not make any more boring art.
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John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* (1971), lithograph, Whitney Museum of American Art



Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #370*, (1982), Metropolitan Museum of Art

Photorealism

(1960s-1970s)

- Meticulously replicated the appearance of photographs with painting and drawing materials
- Attempted to erase all signs of the artist's hand
- Notable Artists: **Chuck Close, Audrey Flack, Charles Bell**
- Themes: commonness of everyday life, emotional detachment and “coolness,” reflections and light

Look carefully at the artworks and consider: When viewing these images do you think more of the patience of the artist or the perfection of the image? Why might the artist make something by hand that looks like a photograph?



Chuck Close, *Phil* (1969), acrylic and graphite pencil on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art



Audrey Flack, *Queen* (1976), acrylic on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum



Charles Bell, *Gum Ball
No. 10: "Sugar Daddy"*
(1975), oil on canvas,
Guggenheim New York

Neo-expressionism

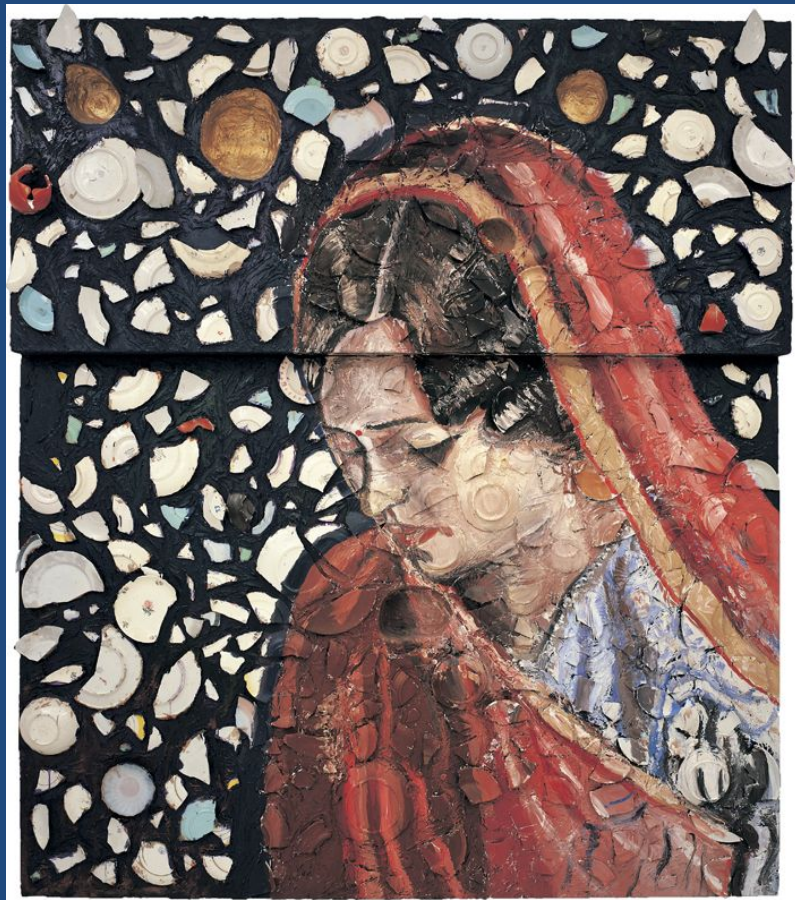
(1970s-1980s)

- Emphasized movement, expressive brushwork, and raw emotion
- Often used primitive application of paint and non-traditional materials, such as finger painting or household objects
- Notable Artists: **Susan Rothenberg, Julian Schnabel, Alma Thomas**
- Themes: storytelling, texture and mixed media, intense emotion

Look carefully at the paintings and consider: Does the painting look like it was made with joy, anger, frustration, or another emotion? Why might an artist leave the marks of his or her process in the final work?



Susan Rothenberg, *Chix* (2003), oil on canvas,
University of Michigan Library



Julian Schnabel, *Portrait of a Girl*
(1980), oil, plates, and bondo on wood



Alma Thomas, *Blast Off* (1970), acrylic on canvas, National Air and Space Museum

Contemporary Art

(1990s-present)

- No single style
- Diverse and interdisciplinary approach
- Notable Artists: **Alex Katz, Bill Cunningham, María Berrío, Julio Reyes, David Kassan, Makoto Fujimura**
- Themes: personal expression, cultural heritage, memory and time, technology, political perspectives, experimental media and techniques

Look carefully at the paintings and consider: What do you notice here that you might try in your own art practice? How might you use color, composition, and/or pattern to show the strength and inner beauty of your subject?



Bill Cunningham, “Woman in the Rain” (c. 1990s), photograph, New York Historical Society



Alex Katz, *Bicycle Rider* (1982), lithograph, Metropolitan Museum of Art



David Kassan, *Love and Resilience, Louise and Lazar Farkas, Survivors of the Shoah* (2017), oil on panel



Makoto Fujimura, *The Still Point - Morningstar* (2003), Mineral Pigments, Kumohada on Canvas



Julio Reyes, *Kaleidoscope* (2020), egg tempera on panel



Maria Berrio, *A Sunburst Restrained* (2019), mixed media on canvas, National Gallery of Art



Next Generation of American Artists

YOU!

How can your art influence the people who view it?

What will you say with your visual voice?

How will you portray an American Hero so that his or her legacy lives on through the work of your hands?

Every great artist started exactly where you are sitting. You are not simply studying art and history—you are the next chapter of it.

Create something that matters.