

CREATING AND UNDERSTANDING ART

*T*ake a moment to study the painting created by Gabriele Münter. Do you think this is a successful work of art? To gain information from and about works of art, you must know the right questions to ask. In the pages that follow, you will discover what those questions are—and learn how to use them to defend your own decisions about the meaning and value of art.



Web Museum Tour Visit art.glencoe.com and explore works of more than 250 women artists at the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Activity Search the collection by artist or period. Read the profile about Gabriele Münter and view another painting by this progressive artist. What historical events influenced her career?

Gabriele Münter. *Staffelsee in Autumn*. 1923. Oil on board. 34.9 × 48.9 cm (13¾ × 19¼"). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

ART AND YOU

Have you ever painted a picture or shaped a piece of clay? What are some of the types of artforms you have seen? Why do you think artists create art? The visual arts are a universal language. Through the arts, people have portrayed their world and expressed their dreams, ideas, and feelings. Every work of art reflects the time and place in which it was created. For this reason, art offers us a unique opportunity to journey into the past. There, we can linger a moment to gaze into the eyes of *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Figure 1.1), and imagine what her life might have been like. What meaning might the painting have held for the artist, Jan Vermeer?

FOCUS ON READING

Read to Find Out As you read this chapter, make connections between the works of art and the people, places, and events in your life. Look at the young girl shown in Figure 1.1. Who do you think she was? Perhaps her expression reminds you of someone you know. What emotions does her facial expression suggest?

Focus Activity *Girl with a Pearl Earring* was painted around 1665–1667. What do you think life was like in seventeenth-century Holland? On a separate sheet of paper, write a caption that tells something about the girl in the painting. Making connections between a work of art and your own life will enhance your appreciation of the visual arts.

Using the Time Line The Time Line shows details of some of the artworks you will study in this chapter. Locate the images on the time line as you read, and consider the time and place in which each artist worked.



c. 1425 B.C.

Ancient Egyptian wall paintings in tombs depict customs in Egyptian life



1542

Titian paints *Ranuccio Farnese*



c. 1633

Judith Leyster paints *The Concert*



c. 1665–1667

Jan Vermeer paints *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Detail)

1500 B.C.

A.D. 1500

1600

1800

Art from ancient civilizations

Paintings from European artists



FIGURE 1.1 Jan Vermeer. *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. c. 1665–1667. Oil on canvas. 46.5 × 40 cm (18¼ × 15¼")
Royal Cabinet of Paintings, Mauritshuis, The Hague, The Netherlands. Scala/Art Resource, NY.



1934

Uemura Shoen creates *Mother and Child*, exploring the theme of beautiful women in Japanese art



1940

Marie Apel creates bronze sculpture *Grief* (credit p. 8)



1954

Jacob Lawrence creates *Man with Flowers* (Detail. Credit p. 22)

TIME & PLACE
CONNECTIONS

Refer to the Time Line on page H11 in your *Art Handbook* for more details.

1930

Art from many cultures

1940

Art in a variety of media

1950

1960

Exploring Art

Vocabulary

- visual arts
- fine arts
- applied arts

Discover

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify the difference between fine arts and applied arts.
- Discuss why cultures and artists create art.
- Explain the benefits of studying art.
- Identify art sources within a community.

Why do people choose to make, perform, and respond to art? After all, it is not necessary to create or experience art in order to ensure physical survival. Art is not needed to maintain life in the way that food, clothing, and shelter are. Yet, humans have persisted in creating every form of art since earliest times (**Figure 1.2**). The desire to create, perform, and appreciate works of art is universal among humans. Just what is it that has made, and continues to make, art so special in the lives of all people? To answer that question we must first arrive at a definition for art in general and then, more specifically, for the visual arts.

What Is Art?

The arts are a basic form of human communication. The visual arts, music, literature, and poetry may be considered the means by which people, past and present, express themselves in unique sights and sounds that capture the interest, imagination, and appreciation of others.



■ **FIGURE 1.2** Paintings on the walls of tombs tell us a great deal about life in ancient Egypt over three thousand years ago. **Can you identify the different kinds of tribute or payment being made? For whom do you think it is intended?**

Presentation of Nubian tribute to Tutankhamun (restored). Detail from a wall painting from the Tomb of Amenhotpe Huy, XVIII Dynasty. Egyptian, Thebes, Qurnet Murai. c. 1360 b.c. 182 × 524 cm (71¾ × 206¼"). Egyptian Expedition of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1930. 30.4.21.



■ **FIGURE 1.3** This American artist has been immensely popular since 1948, when he exhibited his famous painting entitled *Christina's World*. **Do you feel that the artist succeeded in creating a lifelike picture? What features do you find especially realistic?**

Andrew Wyeth. *Soaring*. 1950. Tempera on masonite. 130 × 221 cm (48 × 87"). Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont.

Arriving at a more specific definition for the visual arts may not sound too difficult at first—until you realize that this task has challenged scholars throughout history. Great philosophers, including the ancient Greeks Plato and Aristotle, have attempted to define the nature of art and understand its unique contribution to human life. In their efforts to define art, scholars have tried to establish the qualities that identify an object as a work of art. You may find that your own ideas about art take into account some of the same qualities noted by scholars:

- Art should mirror reality. It must look like something seen in the real world (**Figure 1.3**).
- Art must be pleasing to the eye, even if it is not realistic (**Figure 1.4**).
- Art should express the artist's ideas, beliefs, and feelings so that others can understand them (**Figure 1.5**, page 8).

Perhaps you feel that *all* these qualities are important, although they need not all be



■ **FIGURE 1.4** This sculpture is made with colored metal parts that have been welded together. **Does this work remind you of anything found in the natural world? Do you think it may have been inspired by something seen in the natural world? If so, what might that be?**

Nancy Graves. *Palpable Interconnection*. 1990. Iron, bronze, aluminum, stainless and carbon steel with polychrome patina. 154 × 134.6 × 53.4 cm (60¾ × 53 × 21"). The Lowe Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia. © Nancy Graves Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



■ **FIGURE 1.5** The artist has created an expressive work that attempts to show the isolation and grief accompanying the loss of a loved one. **What features do you find especially effective in communicating this feeling of sorrow?**

Marie Apel. *Grief*. 1940. 50.8 × 17.8 × 15.2 cm (20 × 7 × 6"). Bronze. National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. Gift of the artist's daughter.

■ **FIGURE 1.6** The warm, intimate relationship of mother and child is captured in this wood carving. **What do you consider to be the most impressive feature of this work: its visual appeal, or its powerful expression of emotion? Do you think the work's appearance and its emotional impact are equally important?**

Elizabeth Catlett. *Mother and Child*. 1933. Mahogany. 171.5 × 41.9 × 39.4 cm (67½ × 16½ × 15½"). Collection of the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York. © Elizabeth Catlett/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.



evident in the same work. After all, some works are successful because they do look real. Others do not mirror reality, but are still pleasing to the eye. Still others do not look lifelike and are not visually appealing, but succeed in communicating ideas or feelings. If you take into account all these qualities, you can define **visual arts** as *unique expressions of ideas, beliefs, experiences, and feelings presented in well-designed visual forms*.

Various Forms of Art

Artists use their imaginations, creativity, and skills to express themselves in a tangible, visually appealing way. Whenever you paint a picture, sculpt a figure with clay, or express

yourself in a song, a dance, or a poem, you are creating art. However, art can take different forms. Two primary forms are fine arts and applied arts.

Fine Arts

In the visual arts, **fine arts** refers to *painting, sculpture, and architecture, arts which have no practical function and are valued in terms of the visual pleasure they provide or their success in communicating ideas or feelings (Figure 1.6)*. The one exception is architecture, which involves designing structures that strive to be *both* attractive and functional. A building's primary purpose, however,

is to provide shelter and service other human needs. Therefore, architecture is also considered a form of applied arts.

Applied Arts

There is no clear dividing line between fine arts and applied arts. The term **applied arts** is most often used to describe *the design or decoration of functional objects to make them pleasing to the eye*. Made either by hand or by machine, works of applied art are intended primarily to serve a useful function (**Figure 1.7**). Artists who create applied arts or crafts are usually referred to as designers, artisans, or craftspeople.



■ **FIGURE 1.7** The designs created by craftspeople are often highly complex and skillful. **What impresses you most about this work, its design or its practical usefulness?**

Maria and Julian Martinez. Black-on-black storage jar. 1942. Clay shaped by Maria and design painted by Julian. 47.6 × 56 cm (18¾ × 22"). Courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico. School of American Research Collection.

Why Art Is Created

Art of some kind has been created by cultures throughout the course of history. This prompts the question: Why do cultures create art? Although it would be impossible to list all the reasons, the following warrant consideration:

- **Aesthetics.** Some cultures create art simply for its visual appeal and for the pleasure it brings to those who understand and appreciate the creative efforts of artists. In Chapter 4 you will learn to identify the various aesthetic qualities inherent in works of art. These aesthetic qualities must be taken into account to understand and judge works of art.
- **Morals/Ethics.** In many cultures art is used to depict people and behaviors that are considered noble and good. (See Figure 20.7, page 451.)
- **Spirituality.** Works of art are often created for religious purposes, enabling people to connect with the spirit world. For example, a carved head from an island in the Pacific Ocean (**Figure 1.8**) was made for a festival to commemorate the death of a community member. These figures played an important role in the funeral ceremonies of this culture. Other cultures rely on art to tell stories and provide lessons associated with their religious beliefs.
- **History.** Many artworks provide valuable information about important people, places, and events. (See Figure 10.25, page 234.) Paintings and sculpture often reveal how people looked and dressed, and they even record their behavior and accomplishments. Pictures also illustrate places and significant events and reveal how artists felt about them.
- **Politics.** Art serves as a tool of persuasion or propaganda when it is used to convince people to adopt a certain point of view or to enhance the power of a ruler or political party. (See Figure 21.3, page 468.) The power of art to inspire patriotism or cultural spirit is undeniable. (See Figure 5.2, page 107.)



■ **FIGURE 1.8** Sculptured heads like this one combine intricate carving, projecting forms, and colorful painting. **Identify any familiar creatures incorporated into this carving. How does an understanding of its purpose affect your appreciation for this work?**

Malagan sculpture, head. Oceania, New Ireland, northwestern region. Early 20th century. Wood, paint, and opercula. 97.8 × 46.4 × 31.1 cm (38½ × 18¼ × 12¼"). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. The Roberta Coke Camp Fund.

Knowing *why* an artwork was created can help you gain a better understanding of the artist as an individual and of the culture within which that artist worked.

Why Artists Create

Knowing the various purposes served by art does not explain why individuals create art. Are they motivated by the promise of great wealth? This might seem to be the case with

some very successful artists. One of these was the fifteenth-century Italian painter Titian (**tish-un**) (**Figure 1.9**). Titian's fame as a painter to kings and nobles enabled him to earn huge commissions and to live like a prince.

However, not all artists were as fortunate. The Dutch artist Rembrandt (**rem-brant**) spent his last days bankrupt, living as a lonely hide-away. His countryman, Frans Hals (**frahns hahls**), died in a poorhouse and was buried in a pauper's grave.

Do artists create as a means of gaining recognition and glory? Actually, the quest for personal recognition that we see in Western cultures today is relatively new in art. During the Middle Ages, the names of most artists were unknown. Artists wanted to create art that glorified God, not themselves.

This changed during the Renaissance, when artists hoped to gain fame through their art. Many earned the respect and admiration of society. Not all succeeded, however. For example, Judith Leyster (**lie-ster**) was completely ignored for generations after her death in 1660, because, as a woman, she was considered incapable of producing significant art. Her paintings were attributed to another Dutch artist, Frans Hals, until her signature was accidentally discovered on a work previously credited to Hals. This prompted scholars to re-examine her paintings. They recognized that paintings like Leyster's *The Concert* (**Figure 1.10**, page 12) were the work of a very accomplished artist.

■ **FIGURE 1.9** Portraits by Titian were in great demand because he used a brilliant painting technique to capture both the appearance and the character of his subjects. Here he portrays a 12-year-old boy who was a member of a powerful and aristocratic Italian family. **Based on this portrait, how would you describe this boy's personality? In what ways does he exhibit the confidence needed to assume the responsibilities of an adult?**

Titian. *Ranuccio Farnese*. 1542. Oil on canvas. 89.7 × .73.6 cm (35 ¼ × 29"). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
© 2004 Board of Trustees. 1952.2.11.

The Impulse to Create

It seems unlikely that artists create only out of a desire for either wealth or glory. Regardless of the artist's culture or nationality, all artists seem to have one trait in common: they are driven by the impulse to create. Most would admit that they continue to create art simply because they have to; they are not happy doing anything else.

Examples of this single-minded dedication are found throughout art history. The proud, restless, and irritable Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (**kah-tsoo-shee-kah ho-koo-sigh**), for example, was so consumed with the need to create that he provided illustrations for novels, poems, calendars, greeting cards, and even popular, inexpensive publications





■ **FIGURE 1.10** Today Judith Leyster is recognized as a talented artist for her skill in inventing visually appealing compositions. These compositions often show familiar subjects from a woman’s point of view. **What has the artist done to make the viewer feel a part of this merry scene?**

Judith Leyster. *The Concert*. c. 1663. Oil on canvas. 60.96 × 86.99 cm (24 × 34¼"). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay.

similar to modern comic books. It has been estimated that he illustrated 437 different volumes and enriched the art of Japan with no fewer than 30,000 pictures. (See Figure 10.34, page 239.)

Clearly, for an artist like Hokusai, art is not a means of livelihood or glory. Art is life itself—life dominated by and often complicated by the overpowering impulse to create.

Art in Your Life

You might wonder why you should involve yourself in the creation of art. When you create original works of art, you experience the creative process, and you develop your own capabilities for self-expression. Presented with a puzzling visual problem, you learn how to approach the problem and resolve it as an artist might.

Self-Expression

Assume for a moment that you want to express an idea or emotion in a work of art. As you paint, draw, or sculpt, you look for ways to convey this idea or feeling to others. This task involves more than manipulating material with your hands; it also requires that you use your mind and draw upon your emotions. To illustrate this point, suppose that two artists decide to paint the same subject—a landscape that both identify with the same title: *Starry Night*. However, the completed paintings have little in common. Why? Because each artist created a version of the scene that reflected his own personal ideas and feelings.

One artist used his painting to communicate personal emotions in a subtle and poetic manner (**Figure 1.11**). With limited colors and simplified forms, he pictured a world marked by the melancholy and loneliness he experienced throughout his life.

The other artist used vigorous brush strokes, pure colors, and the distortion of natural forms to illustrate a different emotional reaction to the night sky (**Figure 1.12**). His painting captures the energy and creative forces of nature—stars spinning and swirling violently above a quiet, unsuspecting village.

Creating art offers you the opportunity to express your own ideas and emotions. Studying the art created by others enables you to share



■ **FIGURE 1.11** Munch sold few paintings during his lifetime. He left nearly all his works to his native city of Oslo, Norway. **What color dominates in this painting? How does this color help express the mood of the work?**

Edvard Munch. *Starry Night*. 1893. Oil on canvas. 135 × 140 cm (53 3/8 × 55 1/8"). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California. © 2004 The Munch Museum/ The Munch Ellingsen Group/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the ideas and emotions expressed by others—and in the process to recognize and appreciate the differences that distinguish us all as unique individuals.

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Whenever you create art or examine the art created by someone else, you engage in two important activities: decision making and problem solving. Creating a work of art involves decision-making tasks for all artists. These are some of the decisions you face:

- What subject should I paint or sculpt?
- Which medium and technique should I use?
- What colors, shapes, lines, and textures should I emphasize?
- How can I arrange those colors, shapes, lines, and textures most effectively?
- How will I recognize that the work is finished and the creative process has ended?

You have already seen how two artists painting the same subject—the night sky—arrived at two different solutions after making these kinds of decisions. Consider all the

decisions both artists made before setting aside their paints and brushes. These are the same kinds of decisions you must face every time you become involved in making art.

Creating art also requires problem-solving skills. Artistic creation involves the exploration of an open-ended problem that has no “right” answer. With every drawing, every sculpture, and every work you create, you try to solve the problems involved in clarifying, interpreting, and communicating what is important to you.

Critically examining a work of art involves similar decision-making and problem-solving activities. These are some of the tasks of the serious viewer:

- Identify the subject depicted in the artwork.
- Determine the medium and technique used.
- Identify the colors, shapes, lines, and textures, and note how they are organized.
- Decide whether the work is successful, and be prepared to defend that judgment with good reasons.

■ **FIGURE 1.12** Like Munch, van Gogh received little public recognition during his lifetime. He sold only one painting. **In what ways is this painting similar to the painting with the same title by Munch? How are the two paintings different?**

Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 × 92.1 cm (29 × 36¼"). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.



Real-World Connections

There is another, more practical reason for creating and critically viewing art—a reason expressed more and more frequently in the workplace. Leaders in business and industry point to a need for creativity in the modern workplace. They note that the arts help build ideas and nurture a place in the mind for original ideas to take hold and grow. Businesses today require knowledgeable and sensitive workers with a wide range of higher-order thinking skills, the kind of thinking skills one gains when creating and viewing art.

An art education helps build a variety of important thinking skills that can be applied to real-world situations. It provides important experience in following each step in the problem-solving process:

- Clarify the problem.
- Identify possible solutions.
- Test each possible solution.
- Select the solution that seems most appropriate.
- Apply the chosen solution.
- Determine whether the solution resolves the problem.

An art education also nourishes an appreciation of differing points of view, flexible thinking, and self-discipline. Further, it helps you recognize the importance of collaboration and teamwork. Art experiences can help you become a decision maker, a problem solver, and an imaginative and creative thinker. These are precisely the kinds of skills that businesses value today. These skills explain why an arts education is now generally regarded as basic and vital.

Arts in Your Community

Art is more popular today than ever. Every day, people visit galleries and museums to see works created by famous—and not-so famous—artists. Movies and television programs feature the lives of artists, and newspapers regularly record the sale of

noteworthy artworks. Many people report that viewing art provides them with a sense of pleasure and adds meaning to their lives.

It is not surprising, then, that almost every community offers opportunities to view and learn about art. These opportunities include museums, exhibits, libraries, and other sites.

Museums

Museums provide space for preserving, exhibiting, and viewing works of art. Often the museum building itself is a work of architectural beauty. Visitors to museums will find a variety of opportunities to learn about the



■ **FIGURE 1.13** Museums today enable people to become personally involved with actual works of art representing every age and time period. **What are some of the things you can learn during a museum visit?**

J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center, Los Angeles, California.



Discover the wealth of art available at your fingertips. Click on Web Links at art.glencoe.com. Choose from dozens of museum links and art sites. Explore your favorite artists' works and visit collections from museums around the world.

works on display. Tours are often available either with a guide or through the use of audio listening devices. Museums also invite guest speakers and sponsor classes and special workshops, many of which include studio activities.

Online Resources and Libraries

Today you will find exciting ways to explore the art world using computers and online resources. With a computer you can view CD-ROMs that feature museum art collections. You can also access the Internet to obtain information on specific artists and artworks. It is easy to visit Web sites of museums and galleries in cities anywhere in the world. You can even take virtual studio tours at artists' personal Web pages.

Another important source of information about art and artists is your school's media center or the local library. In addition to extensive collections of reference books, libraries are often equipped with computers available to the public. Using library resources, you can locate facts about artists' lives and works. For more in-depth information, biographies are also available. Beginning

and advanced students can find books that explain various techniques for using art media. History and art history books present different approaches to the study of art, from prehistoric times to the present. Magazines and art periodicals feature articles about artists, art periods, and art styles. Find examples of these articles in the TIME Art Scene features in this book.

In addition to their permanent collections, museums frequently present special exhibits that feature the works of a particular artist or artworks borrowed from other collections. These special exhibits usually include presentations made by artists, art historians, art critics, or other speakers who share information and insights about the works on display.

Exhibits

Many different kinds of art exhibits are provided in almost every community. Local artists may exhibit their works in galleries, shopping malls, schools, libraries, office buildings, and other locations. Visiting these exhibits gives you a chance to see what subjects artists choose to paint and how they work with various media to interpret those subjects.

LESSON ONE REVIEW

Reviewing Art Facts

1. **Explain** How do fine arts differ from applied arts?
2. **Recall** What valuable kinds of activities does one engage in when creating or examining works of art?
3. **Explain** Why is an arts education valued by today's leaders in business and industry?
4. **Identify** Name three places where a person can obtain information about art and artists.

Visual Arts Journal

Determine Function and Meaning The question of why cultures and artists create art is one that has been studied throughout history. The five reasons listed in your text—*Aesthetics, Morals/Ethics, Spirituality, History, and Politics*—serve as a good starting point to begin your exploration of this topic.

Activity Choose five works of art from your text that represent different artists, time periods, and subjects. Record the credit line information of each work in your journal along with a thumbnail sketch. Using your text, determine the reason each was created and record your answer in your journal.

Understanding Art

Vocabulary

- aesthetics
- criteria

Discover

After completing this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the distinction between art media and art process.
- Explain what art criticism and art history involve.
- Discuss the benefits of including studio experiences in a study of art.

Creating a work of art that succeeds in expressing your ideas and feelings can be fulfilling and satisfying. Gaining an understanding and appreciation for a work of art created by another artist can be equally satisfying. However, both kinds of experiences require preparation, the kind of preparation this book is designed to provide.

The Visual Vocabulary of Art

This book will help you acquire the skills necessary to understand, judge, and support your personal decisions about a variety of visual art forms. You will have opportunities to engage in decision-making and problem-solving activities as you create your art forms. However, in order to do both, you must first learn the vocabulary of art.

Artists use many different colors, values, lines, textures, shapes, forms, and space relationships to create their artworks. These are called the *elements of art*, and they are used by artists in countless combinations. If you are to fully understand a painting, a sculpture, or a building, you will need to recognize the elements of art within each and discover for yourself how they are being used (**Figure 1.14**). In Chapter 2 you will learn how to do this. This knowledge will not only add to your understanding of how others create, it will also help you express yourself through art. A visual vocabulary then, is essential when you are trying to do the following:

- Gain insights into the artworks produced by others.
- Create your own artworks with different media and techniques.

Media and Processes

In order to create art, artists use a variety of different materials. Almost any material can function as an art medium, provided artists are able to mark with it, bend it, or shape it to suit their purposes. Art media are usually distinguished by whether they can be used to make marks on a two-dimensional surface, as in drawing or painting, or can be manipulated as a three-dimensional form, as in sculpture. Pencils, charcoal, paint, clay, stone, and metal are all common art media. Computers give artists many more options for creativity.



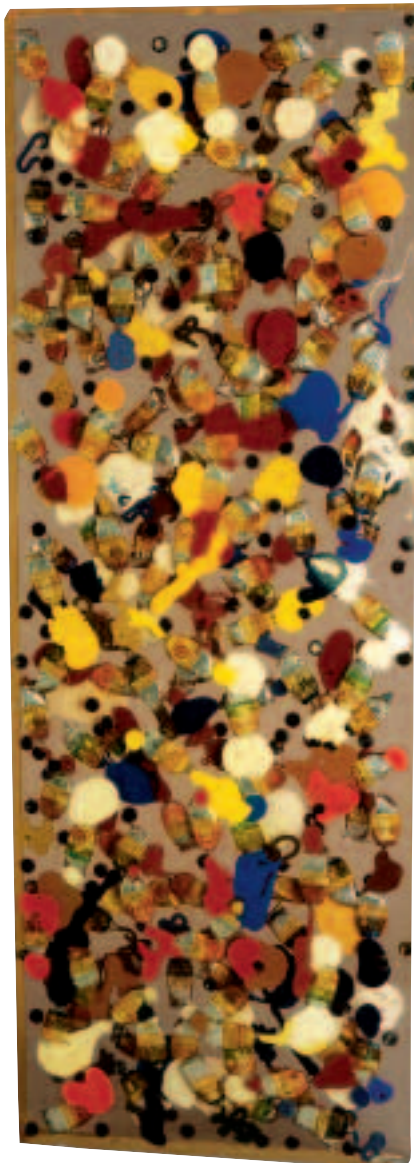
■ **FIGURE 1.14** This artist successfully combines traditional and contemporary features in her paintings of beautiful women—long a popular subject in Japanese art. **How many art elements can you identify in this painting? Is any one more important than the others?**

Uemura Shoen. *Mother and Child*. 1934. Color on silk. 170 cm × 117 cm (67 × 46"). National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan.

Almost anything can be used by artists to express themselves in visual form (Figure 1.15).

The difference between art media and art process is important. Art media consist of the *materials* the artist uses to create artworks. Art process is the *action* involved in making art. Examples of art processes include drawing, painting, printmaking, modeling, weaving, digitizing, and casting.

Once you have mastered a vocabulary of art and gained a knowledge of the various art media and processes, you will be prepared to learn how aesthetics, art criticism, and art history can be used to gather information from and about works of art.



■ **FIGURE 1.15** This artist is noted for creating works of art with unusual materials. Here he uses paint tubes and paint embedded in synthetic resin. **What do you think he was trying to say with this unusual work?**

Arman. *Tubes*. 1966. Paint tubes and paint in synthetic resin. 84.45 × 29.85 cm (33¼ × 11¾"). Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest, 1981 (86.145).

Understanding Aesthetics

What is meant by the term *aesthetics*?

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy concerned with identifying the criteria that are used to understand, judge, and defend judgments about works of art. An *aesthete* is a scholar who specializes in identifying the criteria to be used in determining the significance of artworks.

Aestheticians share a concern for the study of art with art critics and art historians. However, art critics and art historians operate from two different points of view. Art critics direct their attention to a thorough examination of works of art. They ask and then answer questions that enable them to gain information from those works. With this information, they can make intelligent judgments about the success of artworks. Art historians, on the other hand, seek objective facts about works of art and the artists who created them. Their efforts include gathering information on major art periods and on styles of different times and places. Historians research the lives and works of leading artists, and chronicle the development of art from the distant past to the present day.

Studying Art Criticism

Have you ever been asked to express your opinion about a work of art? Imagine that, while visiting an art museum with a friend, you stop to look closely at a particular painting. Noticing your interest, your friend asks, “Well, what do you think of it?” In situations like this, when you are asked to provide a judgment about a work of art, you are cast in the role of an art critic. You assume this role whenever you try to learn as much as you can from an artwork in order to determine whether or not it is successful.

The Art Criticism Operations

Many people seem to think that art criticism is very complicated and difficult. This is simply not true. Art criticism can be easily learned and will add a great deal of interest

and excitement to your encounters with art. You can think of art criticism as an orderly way of looking at and talking about art. It is a method used to gather information *from* the work of art itself.

To gain information from a work of art, you must know two things: what to look for and how to look for it. In Chapter 4, you will become more familiar with the aesthetic qualities you should be prepared to look for when examining a work. Those qualities represent the **criteria**, or *standards of judgment*, you will need when making and supporting decisions about art. You will also learn to use a search strategy that will make the task of finding those qualities in works of art much easier. The search strategy for art criticism consists of four operations, or steps. These operations will be introduced in Chapter 4.

The Value of Art Criticism

Using the art criticism operations enables you to examine and respond to a variety of visual art forms with a more critical eye. You can discover for yourself the aesthetic qualities that elevate certain artworks above others, and experience the satisfaction and pleasure those artworks can provide. At the same time, you will find yourself less likely to accept passively the judgments of others. Instead, you will make and explain your own judgments.

Studying Art History

Have you ever encountered a work of art that you wanted to know more about? Use your imagination to put yourself in the following scene. While helping clean out an attic, you find a picture hidden from view in a dark corner. By examining it closely, you see that it is a portrait of an elegant young woman who returns your gaze with a smile (**Figure 1.16**). A number of questions come to mind: Who painted the picture? When and where was the work painted? Is it an important work? In situations like this, when you seek to learn more about a work of art and the artist who created it, you assume the role of an art historian.



■ **FIGURE 1.16** Angelica Kauffmann was one of the few artists of her era to create paintings with classical and medieval subjects. **Why do you think paintings like this one made Kauffmann such a successful portrait painter?**

Angelica Kauffmann. *Portrait of a Young Woman (Duchess of Kurland)*. 1785. Oil on canvas. 76.84 × 63.5 cm (30¼ × 25"). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California. Gift of Zacharie Birtschansky. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VBK, Vienna.

The Art History Operations

Works of art are not created in a vacuum. Your understanding of them cannot be complete unless you determine who made them, as well as when, where, how, and why they were made. A complete understanding of a work requires that you learn as much as possible about the artist and the circumstances that caused that artist to paint certain subjects in certain ways.

Most people looking at the hills surrounding the town of Aix-en-Provence in southern France would find them uninteresting. The artist Paul Cézanne (say-**zahn**), however, painted those mountains over and over again (**Figure 1.17**). Why? Because he saw something in those mountains that others failed to see. Repeated efforts to capture what he saw

enabled him to arrive at a new style of painting. If you look closely, you will see that Cézanne used overlapping patches of color to give his picture a solid, three-dimensional appearance. This had never been done before.

While most people would attach little importance to a group of marching peasants (**Figure 1.18**), José Clemente Orozco (hoh-**say** cleh-**men**-tay oh-**ross**-coh) recognized the significance of such a scene taking place in Mexico in the early 1930s. For him, these people symbolized the courageous effort of an oppressed people determined to overcome tyranny.

To fully understand and appreciate these two works—or any other work—you must learn about the circumstances that influenced the sight and the insight of the artists who created them.

A search strategy can be just as useful in gathering art history information as it is in gathering art criticism information. The search strategy for art history also consists of

four operations or steps. It is important to keep in mind, however, that when it is applied to art history, this search strategy operates from a different point of view. It is used to gather information *about* a work of art rather than information *from* the work. The four operations used in art history will be fully explained in Chapter 5.

The Value of Art History

Art is often considered a kind of mirror to the past, a way of gaining valuable insights into bygone eras. After all, how could anyone fully understand the civilization of ancient Egypt without studying the pyramids? Similarly, a study of the Renaissance would be, at best, incomplete without reference to the works of Michelangelo (**my**-kel-**an**-jay-lo), or Leonardo da Vinci (lay-oh-**nar**-doh da **vin**-chee).

If we agree that an understanding of the present can be enhanced by a study of the past, then a chronological examination of art makes



■ **FIGURE 1.17** Cézanne concentrated on using carefully placed brushstrokes to structure his compositions, making the scenes he painted look firm and solid. **Why do you think he chose to paint the same subjects repeatedly?**

Paul Cézanne. *Mountains in Provence*. 1886–90. Oil on canvas. 63.5 × 79.4 cm (25 × 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ "); National Museum and Gallery of Wales, Cardiff/Bridgeman Art Library.

good sense. By starting at the beginning and observing the development of art from year to year, decade to decade, century to century, we can see that the origins of today's art are to be found in the art of the past. Every period in history is a blend of the past and the present, and the proportions of past and present within that mixture determine the quality of the world at any given moment in time. Art history offers us one way of measuring those proportions—and gaining a better understanding of our time, our place, and ourselves.

Combining Art Criticism and Art History

In Chapter 5 you will learn how to combine the art criticism operations and the art history operations to create a comprehensive search strategy. When examining a work of art, you will begin by drawing on your knowledge of art criticism to gain information *from* the artwork. Then you will turn to art history to gain information *about* the work and the artist who created it. Combining information from both art criticism and art history will enable you to make a final judgment about the artwork.

Why Study Art?

In addition to the satisfaction and pleasure it affords, a study of art will help you gain a better understanding of yourself and those around you. You can begin by studying works created by artists representing cultures and periods different from your own. By studying the creative expressions of artists from all backgrounds, you can become aware of the beliefs, ideas, and feelings of people of various ethnic origins, religions, or cultures.

■ **FIGURE 1.18** This painting shows determined peasants marching forward to participate in the revolution under the leadership of Zapata. **How did the artist suggest the relentless forward movement of these peasants?**

José Clemente Orozco. *Zapatistas*. 1931. Oil on canvas. 114.3 × 139.7 cm. (45 × 55"). Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York. Given anonymously. © Estate of José Clemente Orozco/Licensed by VAGA, New York, New York.

It may surprise you to learn that by studying art, you prepare yourself for an active role in keeping your culture alive. Artists, writers, and musicians cannot hope to accomplish this task alone. They require your support as part of a knowledgeable and appreciative audience.

As you use this book, you will discover that art has the power to enrich, inspire, and enlighten. It has the power to stir the imagination, arouse curiosity, instill wonder and delight—and even incite strong emotional reactions. Can there be any better reason for studying it?

Studio Production

Learning in art is not limited to examining the artworks produced by others. It also involves planning, testing, modifying, and completing your own artworks with a variety of materials and techniques (Figure 1.19, page 22). In this book, you will find studio lessons that provide these kinds of experiences at the end of each chapter. It is hoped that they will serve as a springboard for further exploration. Remember that, if your efforts with these studio experiences are to be successful and satisfying, you must make





■ **FIGURE 1.19** Lawrence received his first art lessons in Harlem during the Depression. **What adjectives would you use to describe the colors and shapes in this painting?**

Jacob Lawrence. *Man with Flowers*. 1954. 40 × 29.8 cm (15¾ × 11¾"). Tempera on gessoed masonite. Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, Florida. © 2004 C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

maximum use of your imagination and enthusiasm. These are as essential to the creative process as paints, brushes, clay, and the skill required in manipulating these and other kinds of art media.

Knowledge and skill in aesthetics, art criticism, and art history will serve you well during efforts to create your own art. Aesthetics and criticism will help you measure the quality of your creations. Each studio exercise includes a series of art criticism questions that will help you evaluate your work.

Knowledge of art history will enable you to identify artists who have faced—and solved—the same kind of problems you will confront when creating art. References to art history will also help you find ideas for subject matter, illustrate how other artists used and organized the elements of art, and point out the different techniques they used to communicate their ideas and feelings.

Careers in Art

If you enjoy studying or creating art, you will want to become familiar with the many career opportunities in the art field. Schools, museums, art galleries, small businesses, and large corporations look for creative people to fill a variety of art and art-related positions. An awareness of some of these opportunities may help you as you think about your own career plans. For this reason, information concerning career opportunities in the visual arts is provided in the *Careers in Art Handbook* at the back of this book.

LESSON TWO REVIEW

Reviewing Art Facts

1. **Explain** What is the difference between art media and art process?
2. **Define** the term *aesthetics*.
3. **Recall** What two things must a person know before attempting to gather information from a work of art?
4. **Explain** How does the approach of an art critic differ from the approach of an art historian?

Beyond the Classroom

Art Careers Every item we use in our everyday lives has been touched by an artist at some point. The packages that contain products we use were designed by artists. Thousands of products and services are identified by symbols called logos that are created by artists. These identifying symbols are a part of our everyday lives.

Activity Logos are designed by artists called graphic designers. Collect examples of logos from newspapers, magazines, the Internet, or other media. Create a logo that is a visual symbol for an imaginary product. Describe your logo to your class.

Reviewing the Facts

Lesson One

1. What are visual arts?
2. In your own words, define the word *artist*.
3. Name one trait all artists have in common.
4. What are your reasons for studying art?

Lesson Two

5. What are art media? Give three examples.
6. What are art processes? Give three examples.
7. Who are aestheticians and what do they do?
8. How can a knowledge of art history aid you in efforts to create artworks of your own?

Thinking Critically

1. **EXTEND.** Look at Orozco's *Zapatistas* (Figure 1.18). How might this scene change if a rifle shot was suddenly heard? Share your ideas with other members of your class. Then research to determine if the followers of Zapata faced opposition in their quest for justice. Were they successful?

2. **ANALYZE.** Study Lawrence's *Man with Flowers* (Figure 1.19) carefully tracing a finger along the *horizontal, diagonal, and vertical* lines in the picture. Explain how these lines help guide the viewer's eye around the painting.

YOUR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Keep your best artworks in your portfolio to maintain a record of your growth and development as an artist. Choose entries for your portfolio that exhibit your strongest works and demonstrate your best skills and use of different media. As you create artworks for the lessons in this text, keep in mind which ones you would like to add to your portfolio. Include your name and the date you completed each artwork. Digital portfolios are described in your *Art Handbook*, page H8.

Standardized Test Practice

Reading & Writing

Read the paragraph below regarding Figure 1.6, page 8, and then answer the questions that follow.

Elizabeth Catlett's sculpture tells a warm and tender story. It is a story of the unbreakable bond that unites a mother and her child. Like a good storyteller, Catlett is economical in her use of imagery. There are no visual frills or adornments, no reliance on gaudy color or superfluous detail. There is little more than fluidity of line and grace. Yet the sculpture speaks volumes about the deepest and most profound of all human relationships.

1. Which statement best sums up the main idea of this passage?
 - A The bond between mother and child cannot be broken.
 - B Catlett's sculpture tells a story.
 - C The sculpture has few adornments.
 - D Catlett should be a writer.
2. Personification is a literary device in which human qualities are ascribed to a nonhuman subject. Which statement best captures the personification in the passage?
 - E The bond between mother and child is described as unbreakable.
 - F A sculpture is described as speaking.
 - G The artist is described as a storyteller.
 - H A sculpture is without frills.