

TITLE: The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel **LOCATION:** Mexico **DATE:** 1882 C.E

ARTIST: Jose Maria Velasco **PERIOD/STYLE:** Romanticism **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil on Canvas

FORM:

This version of *The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel* is perhaps the most celebrated of a dozen or so images with the same subject done by the artist between 1875 and 1892. At one point, the brushstrokes that form the peaks of the snow-covered volcanoes, the rock formations and other details were done from memory, making it possible for the artist to change and manipulate the details of the landscape as he saw fit.

FUNCTION:

When *The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel* was painted, Velasco was a romantic-era painter with an interest in liberty and Mexican independence, and his painting invited viewers to contemplate a pre-Spanish Mexico, which, as usual, was considered to be an idyllic time of harmony and stability.

CONTENT:

Velasco's *The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel* depicts a breathtakingly detailed pre-industrial Mexico City. In the painting, the mountains of Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl and Lake Texcoco can be seen in the background below a blue sky and swirl of voluminous clouds. Rocky brown crags and low brush dominate the foreground, an attention to surface detail that revealed the artist's love of geology. Two indigenous individuals are presented in transit from the city to the country, reflecting a romantic, yet difficult socio-economic relationship between people and their ancestral land. The figures' indigenous garments intrinsically relate to the national iconography displayed throughout the image.

CONTEXT:

The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel was painted just six years after the election of Porfirio Diaz, a man who held the presidency for a whopping seven terms (that's 35 years for those not in-the-know). This era was basically named after him and is now referred to as the "Porfiriato." Though he "won" each election, everyone knew the system was rigged, making the guy more of a dictator than a president. Unfortunately, that seems to happen a lot. Diaz was a capitalist through and through and a great believer in westernization. His policies, however, only benefited a very wealthy few, leaving the poor campesinos struggling. He was eventually overthrown in the Mexican Revolution in 1910, but until then, the work of Velasco contributed to the strengthening of the Porfiriato and the Mexican nation.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

After the 1821 war of independence (from Spain), Mexico sought to establish its identity through artistic endeavors. The development of the practice of national landscape painting was part of the dictator López de Santa Anna's efforts to re-establish the art academy after decades of neglect following the formation of Mexico as an independent nation. The Italian artist Eugenio Landesio (who was a well-regarded artist in Mexico) was appointed as the academy's professor of perspective and landscape painting in 1855. His mentorship and his experience uniting ancient and contemporary Roman historical subjects in his canvasses forever changed the history of Mexican landscape painting.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

This piece is one of several that Velasco completed in a series, some of which appear to be different views from this same vantage point on the hillside. While this particular piece is more literal with views of the developing city below, others contain more symbolism related to growing feelings of national pride. One notable piece includes an eagle just taking to the air from a nearby cactus. *The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel* can be viewed as a re-interpretation of the common late eighteenth-century German subject, "pastoral idylls," where a sense of poetic harmony and daily life were united.

INTERPRETATION:

The artist depicted an apolitical subject, the landscape, to really make a commentary about another, very political, topic: the nation. Sure, it's a landscape painting, but *The Valley of Mexico from the Hillside of Santa Isabel* is also more complex because it represents a trend toward a national Mexican idea of the motherland. The ills of modernity, or the social and racial divisions that had plagued Mexico since Spanish conquest, were completely undetectable in Velasco's vision. Velasco has produced an image where national pride, romantic poetry, and daily life blend to transform the Valley of Mexico into a Romantic masterpiece.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

The eagle and cactus motif, a call back to the story of how the Mexica people were first led to the area by the gods, goes back hundreds of years and also appears on the Frontispiece of the Codex Mendoza, a history of the Aztec people created so the King of Spain "understood" the nation his people had conquered.

TITLE: The Saint-Lazare Station Interior
View of the Gare Saint-Lazare, the
Auteuil Line **LOCATION:** France **DATE:** 1877

ARTIST: Claude Monet **PERIOD/STYLE:** Impressionism **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil on canvas

FORM:

Paris' Saint-Lazare Station, located in the eighth arrondissement, was one of the busiest train depots in the city. Monet (not to be confused with Manet) captured the bustle of this locomotive with a loose plein-air style, a style of open-air painting specifically developed by Monet. In *The Saint-Lazare Station*, thick smoke pervades the scene, nearly engulfing the train. The smoke ranges in color from a steel blue to a pale yellow and creates the hazy, surreal atmosphere with which Monet has become associated.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

Depicts one of the passenger platforms of the Gare Saint-Lazare, one of Paris's largest and busiest train terminals. The painting is not so much a single view of a train platform, it is rather a component in larger project of a dozen canvases which attempts to portray all facets of the Gare Saint-Lazare. The paintings all have similar themes—including the play of light filtered through the smoke of the train shed, the billowing clouds of steam, and the locomotives that dominate the site. Of these twelve linked paintings, Monet exhibited between six and eight of them at the third Impressionist exhibition of 1877, where they were among the most discussed paintings exhibited by any of the artists.

CONTEXT:

The Saint-Lazare train station was one of the busiest in Paris, linking the city with Normandy to the west. While train travel wasn't completely new at the time, it was pretty novel as a subject in painting. The inclusion of a bellowing locomotive alluded to the changing landscape of the urban environment caused by the Industrial Revolution. Moreover, the train changed how people saw the world. In the 1870s Monet—along with most of the other major Impressionists including, Caillebotte, Pissarro, Renoir, Degas, Guillaumin, Raffaelli, and even Manet—had shown a steady interest in the railroad as a subject within their paintings of modern life. In his “impression” of Saint Lazare railway terminal, Monet captured the energy and vitality of Paris' modern transportation hub. The train, emerging from the steam and smoke emits, rumbles into the station. In the background are the tall buildings that were becoming a major component of the Parisian landscape.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Rather than make the painting in his studio, Monet set up shop right outside, bringing with him the newly invented tube of paint, which allowed him to carry pigment with him and mix colors on the spot. This portability was important for rendering immediate impressions of dynamic scenes—the changing light, the rush of train travel, and the plumes of smoke—right from the middle of the action. Another factor encouraging Monet and some of his contemporaries to paint outdoors was the introduction of premixed pigments conveniently sold in easily portable tubes. The “mixing” of colors by juxtaposing them directly on a white canvas without any preliminary sketch—also a break from traditional practice—produces a more intense hue than the same colors mixed on the palette.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Painting en plein air was what Monet was able to meet his goal of capturing an instantaneous representation of atmosphere and climate, which he concluded was impossible to do in the studio. Finishing as well as beginning his landscapes outdoors sharpened Monet's focus on the roles that light and color play in the way nature appears to the eye. The systematic investigation of light and color and the elimination of the traditional distinction between a sketch and a formal painting enabled Monet to paint images that truly conveyed a sense of the momentary and transitory.

INTERPRETATION:

“Like a fiery steed, stimulated rather than exhausted by the long trek that it has only just finished, the locomotive tosses its mane of smoke, which lashes the glass roof of the main hall...we see the vast and manic movements of the station where the ground shakes with every turn of the wheel. The platforms are sticky with soot, and the air is full of that bitter scent exuded by burning coal. As we look at this magnificent picture we are overcome by the same feelings as if we were really there, and these feelings are perhaps even more powerful, because in the picture the artist has conveyed his own feelings as well.” Georges Riviere

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

Monet popularized Impressionism. In fact, it was Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise* that gave the movement its name. While famous today, *Impression, Sunrise* and Impressionism in general were denounced by the Academie of Beaux Arts in Paris for being too sketch-like, and they hadn't even seen anything yet. Monet's style became increasingly sketch-like as he urgently painted his impressions.

TITLE: The Burghers of Calais **LOCATION:** France **DATE:** 1884-1885 C.E.

ARTIST: Auguste Rodin **PERIOD/STYLE:** 19th century Sculpture **PATRON:** The City of Calais

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Bronze

FORM:

FUNCTION:

In 1885, Rodin was commissioned by the French city of Calais to create a sculpture that commemorated the heroism of Eustache de Saint-Pierre, a prominent citizen of Calais, during the dreadful Hundred Years' War between England and France (begun in 1337).

CONTENT:

Six Burghers offer their lives to the English king in return for saving their besieged city during the Hundred Years War. The English king insisted that the Burghers wear sackcloths and carry the key to the city. Parallels between Paris besieged during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and Calais besieged by the English in 1347. Each figure has a different emotion, some fearful, resigned, or forlorn. The central figure is Eustache de Saint-Pierre who has large swollen hands and a noose around his neck, ready for his execution.

CONTEXT:

Rodin followed the recounting of Jean Froissart, a fourteenth-century French chronicler, who wrote of the war. According to Froissart, King Edward III made a deal with the citizens of Calais: if they wished to save their lives and their beloved city, then not only must they surrender the keys to the city, but six prominent members of the city council must volunteer to give up their lives. The leader of the group was Eustache de Saint-Pierre, who Rodin depicted with a bowed head and bearded face towards the middle of the gathering. To Saint-Pierre's left, with his mouth closed in a tight line and carrying a giant set of keys, is Jean d'Aire. The remaining men are identified as Andrieu d'Andres, Jean de Fiennes, and Pierre and Jacques de Wissant. This piece was rejected by the town council of Calais as being inglorious; they wanted a single allegorical figure instead.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Because the patrons wanted a heroic quality, with a raised pedestal that would place the figures in a God-like status high above the viewers, Rodin presented the city of Calais with The Burghers of Calais complete with a pedestal. However, the raised pedestal did not allow an audience to view the work of art as Rodin had intended. Therefore, he created a second version, one lacking a pedestal, to be placed at the Musée Rodin at the Hôtel Biron in Paris. Rodin's goal was to bring the audience into his sculpture of The Burghers of Calais, and he accomplished this by not only positioning each figure in a different stance with the men's heads facing separate directions, but he lowered them down to street level so a viewer could easily walk around the sculpture and see each man and each facial expression and feel as if they were a part of the group, personally experiencing the tragic event.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Unbeknownst to the six burghers, at the time of their departure, their lives would eventually be spared. However, here Rodin made the decision to capture these men not when they were finally released, but in the moment that they gathered to leave the city to go to their deaths. Instead of depicting the elation of victory, the threat of death is very real. Furthermore, Rodin stretched his composition into a circle causing no one man to be the focal point which allows the sculpture to be viewed in-the-round from multiple perspectives with no clear leader. The burghers were not meant to be viewed in the form of a hierarchical pyramid with Eustache de Saint-Pierre at the top, which would have been typical in a multi-figure statue, but as a group equal in status. By bringing these men down to 'street level,' Rodin allowed the viewer to easily look up into the men's faces mere inches from his/her own; enhancing the personal connection between the viewer and the six men.

INTERPRETATION:

Rodin refused to use stock poses and ancient classical statuary for his works but instead opted for live models. "I have always endeavored to express the inner feelings by the mobility of the muscles." This emphasis on personal experience as the source of art differed drastically from academic art but fit perfectly with the Impressionists' focus on responding directly to the modern world. Rodin revolutionized sculpture just as his impressionist contemporaries did painting. He is considered the first modern sculptor and is described as portraying psychological complexity and making sculpture a vehicle for personal expression.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

TITLE: The Starry Night **LOCATION:** France **DATE:** 1889 C.E.

ARTIST: Vincent Van Gogh **PERIOD/STYLE:** Post Impressionism **PATRON:**

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil on canvas

FORM:

Swirls of blue and yellow paint pulse through the sky like waves in an ocean. Broad strokes of dark green flourish into the leaves of the cypress tree at left. Royal Blue Mountains open into a small village with a church tower that juts into the sky. What's more, van Gogh's brushstrokes are frenetic, suggesting a dynamic sky.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

The picture conveys surging movement through curving brushwork, and the stars and moon seem to explode with energy. "What I am doing is not by accident. But because of real intention and purpose. "For all the dynamic force of "Starry Night", the composition is carefully balanced. The upward thrusting cypresses echo the vertical steeple, each cutting across curving, lateral lines of hill and sky. The dark cypresses also offset the bright moon in the opposite corner for a balanced effect. The forms of the objects determine the rhythmic flow of brush strokes, so that the overall effect is of expressive unity rather than chaos.

CONTEXT:

Van Gogh had had the subject of a blue night sky dotted with yellow stars in mind for many months before he painted The Starry Night in late June or early July of 1889. It presented a few technical challenges he wished to confront—namely the use of contrasting color and the complications of painting en plein air (outdoors) at night—and he referenced it repeatedly in letters to family and friends as a promising if problematic theme. "A starry sky, for example, well – it's a thing that I'd like to try to do," Van Gogh confessed to the painter Emile Bernard in the spring of 1888, "but how to arrive at that unless I decide to work at home and from the imagination?" In 1888, he checked himself into the St. Paul de Mausole psychiatric facility where he was able to paint freely (except in his bedroom!). He painted The Starry Night during the day in a downstairs studio while the view is of a nighttime scene from his bedroom window. With nothing much to do other than paint (he was allowed paints in the rest of the facility) and ponder his mental state, van Gogh painted at least 21 pieces based on the surrounding landscape.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Post-Impressionists were responding to Impressionism by exploring deeper themes and more radical experimental techniques in their works. Arguably, it is this rich mixture of invention, remembrance, and observation combined with Van Gogh's use of simplified forms, thick impasto, and boldly contrasting colors that has made the work so compelling to subsequent generations of viewers as well as to other artists. Inspiring and encouraging others is precisely what Van Gogh sought to achieve with his night scenes.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Besides his private room, from which he had a sweeping view of the mountain range of the Alpilles, he was also given a small studio for painting. Since this room did not look out upon the mountains but rather had a view of the asylum's garden, it is assumed that Van Gogh composed The Starry Night using elements of a few previously completed works still stored in his studio, as well as aspects from imagination and memory. It has even been argued that the church's spire in the village is somehow more Dutch in character and must have been painted as an amalgamation of several different church spires that Van Gogh had depicted years earlier while living in the Netherlands.

INTERPRETATION:

Although Theo Van Gogh felt that the painting ultimately pushed style too far at the expense of true emotive substance, the work has become iconic of individualized expression in modern landscape painting.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

In spite of his struggles, he painted obsessively, producing nearly two thousand works of art in a ten-year span. During this time, he evolved to become a glorious colorist. Sadly, in 1890, at the young age of 37, van Gogh died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. "We take a train to reach a city, death to reach a star."

Where Do We Come From?

TITLE: What Are We? Where Are We Going?

LOCATION: Tahiti

DATE: 1897-1898 C.E.

ARTIST: Paul Gauguin

PERIOD/STYLE: Post Impressionism/Symbolist

PATRON: _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil on Canvas

FORM:

"Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to one another. An enormous crouching figure, out of all proportion and intentionally so, raises its arms and stares in astonishment upon these two, who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the center is picking fruit. Two cats near a child. A white goat. An idol, its arms mysteriously raised in a sort of rhythm, seems to indicate the Beyond. Then lastly, an old woman nearing death appears to accept everything, to resign herself to her thoughts. She completes the story! At her feet a strange white bird, holding a lizard in its claws, represents the futility of words....So I have finished a philosophical work on a theme comparable to that of the Gospel."-Gauguin

FUNCTION:

Gauguin thought of this painting as a summation of his artistic and personal expression.

CONTENT:

The viewer, according to the painter, is meant to pan from right to left, at first noticing the infant on the right, finally identifying the crouched, aged woman on the left. The progression of the narrative mirrors the title, a series of existential and unanswered questions that everyone asks himself or herself at one point or another. The background of Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? is a mix of deity-like forms (representing the otherworldly) and landscapes of lakes, vines, and mountains all loosely based upon the landscapes he saw. The composition is surreal and metaphorical. Gauguin wanted to give viewers the freedom to interpret the forms themselves. The Impressionists had influenced him early on, but mostly, he was driven to depict dream-like scenarios instead of those he might have witnessed first hand. As a result, he became one of the first symbolists.

CONTEXT:

Primitivism was a romantic tendency that Western painters like Gauguin initiated. Non-westerns were pre-industrial, and so they were not as far along the Western timeline of progress. As a result, Gauguin thought that they symbolized a primitive and subconscious state of mind. Where are we going? represents the artist's painted manifesto created while he was living on the island of Tahiti. The French artist transitioned from being a "Sunday painter" (someone who paints for his or her own enjoyment) to becoming a professional after his career as a stockbroker failed in the early 1880s. He visited the Pacific island Tahiti in French Polynesia staying from 1891 to 1893. He then returned to Polynesia in 1895, painted this massive canvas there in 1897, and eventually died in 1903, on Hiva Oa in the Marquesas islands.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

"a picture, before being a warhorse, a nude woman, or some sort of anecdote--is essentially a surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." Maurice Denis. This piece features several non traditional influences: Egyptian figures used for inspiration (likely the mummy on display at the Paris exhibition.), Japanese prints in the solid fields of color and unusual angles. and Tahitian imagery in the Polynesian idol which represents the "beyond".

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

He rendered Tahitian forms in a more childlike way, shunning academic principals for a style that he thought embodied the primitivism he saw in the Tahitians. "Where are we going? Near to death an old woman,,What are we? Day to day existence...Where do we come from? Source, child. Life Begins...Behind a tree two sinister figures, cloaked in garments of somber color, introduce, near the tree of knowledge, their note of anguish caused by that very knowledge in contrast to some simple beings in virgin nature, which might be paradise as conceived by humanity, who give themselves up to the happiness of living." -Gauguin. After completing this work, Gauguin attempted suicide with arsenic, but failed in his attempt, only to die 3 years later in the Marquesas Islands.

INTERPRETATION:

The painting is a deliberate mixture of universal meaning—the questions asked in the title are fundamental ones that address the very root of human existence—and esoteric mystery. Although Where do we come from? is painted on a large scale similar to the decorative public panels created by the French artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (an artist Gauguin admired), Where do we come from? is essentially a private work whose meaning was likely known only to Gauguin himself.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

He painted where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? In between stints in the hospital after contracting syphilis. By 1936, many years after his death, the painting sold for \$80,000.

TITLE: The Scream **LOCATION:** Norway **DATE:** 1893 C.E

ARTIST: Edvard Munch **PERIOD/STYLE:** Symbolist/Expressionism **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Tempera and pastels on cardboard

FORM:

In this painting by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, the sky is a raging orange and the sea swirls up to meet it, ignoring gravity. The only straight line in this chaos is the bridge's railing, which runs diagonally through the image. The railing helps to define perspective, or a sense of depth, when everything else seems to meld together in disarray. In the middle of it all, the body of the central figure appears ghost-like, its mouth agape and its hands raised in pure terror. Outside the fray, two figures can be seen on the far side of the bridge.

FUNCTION:

Munch sought to express internal emotions through external forms and thereby provide a visual image for a universal human experience. His goal was to describe the conditions of modern psychic life. This piece was to become part of an autobiographical series titled "The Frieze of Life". It is described by Oslo's Munch Museum as the "actual mental image of the existential angst of civilized man."

CONTENT:

This piece exemplifies his style and remains to this day one of the most potent symbols of the unbearable pressures of modern life. Conceived as part of Munch's semi-autobiographical cycle "The Frieze of Life," The Scream's composition exists in four forms: the first painting, done in oil, tempera, and pastel on cardboard, two pastel examples and a final tempera painting. Munch also created a lithographic version in 1895. The various renditions show the artist's creativity and his interest in experimenting with the possibilities to be obtained across an array of media, while the work's subject matter fits with Munch's interest at the time in themes of relationships, life, death, and dread. The scene takes place in Ekerberg a suburb north of Oslo that was home to the city's slaughterhouse as well as the insane asylum where his sister was incarcerated with schizophrenia.

CONTEXT:

The artist painted this scene on Ekerberg Hill, just south of the city of Oslo. The painting was inspired by a walk Munch took one evening, a walk that was so inspiring it led to a total of four versions of The Scream as well as a poem, which Munch wrote on the frame of the 1895 version of the piece (which he completed using pastels). That version sold at auction at Sotheby's for \$120 million in 2012. "I was walking along the road with two friends—the sun went down—I felt a gust of melancholy—suddenly the sky turned a bloody red. I stopped, leaned against the railing, tired to death—as the flaming skies hung like blood and sword over the blue-black fjord and the city—My friends went on—I stood there trembling with anxiety—and I felt a vast infinite scream [tear] through nature."

This painting has been stolen twice, once in 1994 and once in 2004.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

He enrolled in the Royal School of Art and Design in Christiania (now known as Oslo), and first dabbled in Impressionism. However, upon starting a "soul diary," the artist realized that Impressionism wasn't a sufficient visual language for digging into the psyche. He staked out new territory in the genre of Symbolism. Inspired by Gauguin, Munch's approach to painting signaled the beginning of the avant-garde movement. In avant-garde, the artist was less concerned with physical appearances and more concerned with charting inner states, like anxiety. Technically, symbolism was a trend that writers introduced in the 1880s, but artists found the idea easy to translate to their visual work. The Scream represents a key work for the Symbolist movement as well as an important inspiration for the Expressionist movement of the early twentieth century. Munch was influential to subsequent generations of German Expressionist painters.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Repetition enabled the artist to fully capture a sense of overwhelming endlessness. He wrote about the painting in his diary explaining that the blood red sky evoked a feeling of exhaustion and anxiety. The fjord, or inlet between the high points he describes, can somewhat be seen in the distance, but the painting really isn't supposed to be geographically accurate. Instead, Munch hoped to convey the hellish nature of the environment and its effect on the human psyche. The symbolists were exploring the idea of "synesthesia", the concept of "listening to colors", or "looking at sounds", a mixture of sensations. Munch uses color in his work as a form of synesthesia to express the feeling of anxiety and the great cry of nature.

INTERPRETATION:

Shared by painters and writers alike, symbolism delved into symbols of mortality, sexuality, anxiety, love, jealousy, and pretty much every other emotional aspect of human existence. Symbolism was especially popular because the writings of Freud, who said that humans are motivated by their libidos. Experimental artists and writers, wanted to explore the subconscious through imagery. Establishing himself as a symbolist gave him license to completely cast off realistic portrayals of the world around him. He believed it was the inner self, not the exterior world, that provided grist for painting, and when he fully embraced this notion, Munch finally started to see his hard work pay off. Some believe that the red sky may be the result of a volcanic eruption of the Krakatoa causing red twilights.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

In 1877 as a teenager, her had to endure the painful, slow death of his sister to tuberculosis. His mother also died of the same disease a decade later. He, like van Gogh, had a stint in a mental health clinic around 1908, which, surprisingly, made his work a bit more cheerful than before. A gun exploded in his hand disfiguring it. He may have been pointing it at an X girlfriend turned stalker. He became a Knight of the Order of St. Olav He was dubbed a degenerate by Hitler. He lived to be 80 years old, wealthy and honored.

TITLE: The Coiffure **LOCATION:** France **DATE:** 1890-1891 C.E.

ARTIST: Mary Cassatt **PERIOD/STYLE:** Impressionism **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Drypoint and aquatint

FORM:

In contrast to her painting style, which employed broad brushstrokes and created dimensional forms, she adopted the simple lines and blocks of color she saw in Japanese prints. She also stylized (abstracted) the lines of the wallpaper and upholstery and stayed true to the “flat” quality of Japanese woodblocks, using a monochromatic, almost washed out, color palette.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

The woman in Cassatt’s *La Coiffure* sits in a plush armchair in front of mirror, her head focused downward, her back arched, as she adjusts her bun. The voyeuristic element to the scene is drawn from precedents in works by Rembrandt (*Bathsheba at Her Bath*, 1654) and Ingres (*La Grand Odalisque*, 1814), which Cassatt studied at the Louvre when she was a young student in the mid 1860s.

CONTEXT:

Cassatt was born in Pennsylvania and began studying art as a teenager, moving back and forth between the U.S. and France between the 1850s and 1870s and then moving to France permanently thereafter. Mostly, she moved to France because the artistic and social environment was much freer for a woman in the arts, in contrast to the U.S. at the time. She was able to take on a painting teacher, Jean Leon Gerome (the same teacher who taught American painter Thomas Eakins), and throughout the later decades of the 19th century began a fruitful working relationship with Edgar Degas. In April of 1890, the École des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts) in Paris showcased an exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints. These ukiyo-e images, “pictures of the floating world,” as they were evocatively called, were comprised mostly of scenes of urban bourgeois pleasure—geishas, beautiful women, sumo wrestlers, kabuki actors—and pictures of the natural beauty around Edo (present day Tokyo)—the mists of Mount Fuji, cherry blossoms, rain showers, and surging waves along the port of Kanagawa.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

This drypoint etching, *The Coiffure*, of a woman adjusting her hair is one of the hundreds that Mary Cassatt made in her in-home studio in the summer and fall of 1890 and in the winter of 1891. It was inspired in part by a woodblock print in her personal collection, Kitagawa Utamaro’s boudoir image of the daughter of a prosperous Edo businessman, Takashima Ohisa Using Two Mirrors to Observe Her Coiffure (above). *La Coiffure* also has its art historical roots in Old Master paintings of women bathing and the odalisque though it departs from those conventional models to become a tightly crafted exercise in form and composition. Her canvases retain Monet’s same indistinct and generously painted quality. In regard to her subjects, Cassatt typically portrayed women (her mother and sister were ready models), and many of her painting feature either the act of reading or the theme of motherhood.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

When comparing Cassatt’s prints to her paintings, the differences are clear. As a painter, she was an impressionist, rendering the qualities of light on surfaces while modeling facial features in detail. Her prints show something altogether different, sharing more in common with the Japanese prints of the time, which were flat, used blocks of color. First, Cassatt carved her designs onto a smooth copper plate with a fine metal needle. Then the plate would be dusted with a powdered resin and heated until the resin melted in tiny mounds that hardened as they cooled. Acid was then added on to the metal plate biting the channels along the resin droplets. The deeper penetration of acid produced richer, darker tones, while a lighter application of acid produced lighter shades of color and a variety of nuanced gradients could be generated within a single print. Once Cassatt had replicated a certain number of images from a plate, she would incise the plate with a needle so that no one could use the same image again.

INTERPRETATION:

In Cassatt’s prints, the time-honored boudoir scenes we see in Titian and Bellini become de-eroticized and re-appropriated as skilled exercises in form, shading, and line. In the spirit of ukiyo-e and Impressionism, these prints capture fugitive, fleeting moments of the busy lives of the Parisian bourgeois and working class.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

“You who want to make color prints wouldn’t dream of anything more beautiful. I dream of doing it myself and can’t think of anything else but color on copper...P.S. You must see the Japanese—come as soon as you can.”

TITLE: Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building **LOCATION:** Chicago, Illinois, U.S. **DATE:** 1899-1903 C.E.

ARTIST: Louis Sullivan **PERIOD/STYLE:** 19th century Architecture **PATRON:** Carson, Scott and Pirie

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Iron, steel, Glass, and terra Cotta

FORM:

The first two floors are composed of an iron and steel framework that's functional, strong, and artistic, showcasing the architect's eye for utility and design. The upper floors are made of light-colored terra cotta that contrasts with the dark metal also featured in the building. The entrance explodes with vine-like forms that overcrowd the arches. The upper cornice level of the building boasts some stellar floral molded forms, or reliefs.

FUNCTION:

Architect Louis Sullivan actually built the Carson, Pirie, Scott and Company Building for a manufacturer of dry goods (pretty much anything you can buy at a department store) called Schlesinger Mayer. First, there should be a base level with a ground floor for businesses that require easy public access, light, and open space, and a second story also publicly accessible by stairways. These floors should then be followed by an infinite number of stories for offices, designed to look all the same because they serve the same function. Finally, the building should be topped with an attic story and distinct cornice line to mark its endpoint and set it apart from other buildings within the cityscape.

CONTENT:

A synthesis of industrial structure and ornamentation that perfectly expresses the spirit of late 19th century commerce. It is a minimal structural steel skeleton to achieve the goal of broad, open, well illuminated display spaces. He gave over the lowest two levels to an ornament in cast iron (of his invention) made of wildly fantastic motifs. He regarded the display windows as pictures, which merited elaborate frames. As in the Guaranty building, Sullivan revealed his profound understanding of the maturing consumer economy and tailored the Carson, Scott, Pirie building to meet the functional and symbolic needs of its users.

CONTEXT:

State Street, where the Sullivan building was erected, was a growing shopping district at the turn of the century. Other grand stores such as Marshall Fields, a giant department store like Macy's, were located on this street, and Schlesinger Mayer hoped to capitalize on its hip location with an eye-catching building. Schlesinger and Mayer initially believed that constructing what is now known as the Sullivan Building was their ticket to financial success. Their plan crashed and burned, however, when Schlesinger Mayer quickly went into bankruptcy shortly after the store's doors opened. The building fell into the hands of another company, Carson, Pirie, and Scott, from which the building now takes its name. Sullivan had taken such a long time to come up with the original plans (nearly three years) that Carson, Pirie, and Scott turned to a new pair of architects, Burnham and Root, to get the job done.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Sullivan is thought of as the first truly modern architect. He used the latest technological developments to create light filled, well ventilated office buildings and adorned both exteriors and interiors with ornate embellishments. Such decoration served to connect commerce and culture, and imbued these white collar workspaces with a sense of refinement and taste. The greatest advances in architecture were made by the Chicago School, formed shortly after the Great Fire burned much of the city to the ground in 1871. This disaster exposed not only the faults of building downtown structures out of wood, but also demonstrated the weaknesses of building with iron, which melts and bends under high temperatures. Building ceramic (steel or iron that is wrapped in terracotta outercasings) survived the best.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

The windows on the ground floor, displaying the store's products, are much larger than those above. The three doors of the main entrance were placed within a rounded bay on the corner of the site, so that they are visible from all directions approaching the building. The corner entryway and the entire base section are differentiated from the spare upper stories by a unified system of extremely ornate art nouveau decoration. The cast-iron ornament contains the same highly complicated, delicate, organic and floral motifs that had become hallmarks of Sullivan's design aesthetic. For Sullivan, the decorative program served a functional project as well, to distinguish the building from those surrounding it, and to make the store attractive to potential customers.

INTERPRETATION:

By the mid-1890s, Sullivan struck out on his own and wrote his treatise on skyscraper architecture, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," in 1896. In it, Sullivan analyzed the problem of high-rise commercial architecture, arguing with his famous phrase "form must ever follow function" that a building's design must reflect the social purpose of a particular space.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

the Sullivan Building stayed operational until 2007 under Carson, Pirie, and Scott. It's now simply called the "Sullivan Center" and is the site of many contemporary retailers.

TITLE: Mont Sainte-Victoire **LOCATION:** France **DATE:** 1902-1904 C.E.

ARTIST: Paul Cezanne **PERIOD/STYLE:** Post Impressionism **PATRON:**

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil on Canvas

FORM:

In this work, Cézanne divides his composition into three roughly equal horizontal sections, which extend across the three-foot wide canvas. Our viewpoint is elevated. Closest to us lies a band of foliage and houses; next, rough patches of yellow ochre, emerald, and viridian green suggest the patchwork of an expansive plain and extend the foreground's color scheme into the middleground; and above, in contrasting blues, violets and greys, we see the "craggy mountain" surrounded by sky. The blues seen in this section also accent the rest of the work while, conversely, touches of green enliven the sky and mountain.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

Mont Sainte Victoire is a landscape painting featuring the geographic features of the mountain as seen from his property in Aix-en-Provence.

CONTEXT:

Cézanne bought an acre of land on this hill in 1901 and by the end of the following year he had built a studio on it. From here, he would walk further uphill to a spot that offered a sweeping view of Mont Sainte-Victoire and the land before it.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Cézanne paved the way for all sorts of optical experiments that appeared to cut up real space into single shapes. For now, Cézanne's painting was radical enough. Even if there were references to trees, houses, the sky, and the mountain, the painting was not realistic in any measure. He didn't try to make paint look like something else (a realistic landscape, say). Paint was paint, and he used the qualities of the medium to create a truly unique optical effect. His way of painting surfaces from different temporal and spatial angles heralded the upcoming experiments in Cubism. His art in addition to being great in its own right may be said to bridge impressionism and modern abstract painting.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Cézanne was in part inspired by new scientific theories, including Einstein's theory of relativity, which brought together the dimensions of space and time in a heavenly union. His aim was not truth in appearance, especially not photographic truth, nor was it "impressionistic" truth. He sought a lasting structure behind the formless and fleeting visual information that the eyes absorb. He studied the capacity of lines and planes to create the sensation of depth, the intrinsic qualities of color, and the power of colors to modify the direction and depth of lines and planes. By applying to the canvas small patches of juxtaposed colors, some advancing and some receding, Cezanne created volume and depth in his works.

INTERPRETATION:

Cezanne organized this composition into a pattern of planes by means of color. He achieved perspective not by converging lines but by intersecting and overlapping planes of color. He builds complementary balance between a vertical rise and a horizontal viaduct or a lush green foreground with the cool blues and purples of the background. His landscapes are interpreted by a highly individualized temperament. Cezanne desired to mold nature into a meaningful pattern in order to unite the inanimate world of things and the animate world of the human mind. He remarked that "Nature reveals itself in the forms of the cylinder, the sphere and the cone.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

In several texts, this image is considered the first example of modernism.

TITLE: The Kiss **LOCATION:** Vienna, Austria **DATE:** 1907-1908 C.E.

ARTIST: Gustav Klimt **PERIOD/STYLE:** Art Nouveau and Symbolism **PATRON:** _____

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: Oil and gold leaf on canvas

FORM:

The two figures in the painting float in a sea of gold, from which only arms, faces, and hair emerge from the current. Decorative rectangles and circles grace their robes as the two kneel on a patch of green pasture near a cliff. It has a pattern of rectangles in his clothing that represent masculinity, while the circles in her clothes represent femininity.

FUNCTION:

CONTENT:

This is the kiss of artist Gustave Klimt himself and his lover Emile Floge. The man's face bends over a woman, his face turned away from the viewer as he presses his lips against her cheek. The woman, her head bent at an unnatural right angle, seems to swoon in his arms. The two are clothed in gold and kneel on a flower covered ground.

CONTEXT:

Klimt was once part of a conservative group of artists that promoted academic values. When he finally broke away from the strict world of academic painting, he formed the Vienna Secessionists, a group of avant-garde artists devoted to the creation of exciting, modern art. This was no ramshackle gathering. With Klimt at the helm, the group organized over twenty exhibitions that included the likes of Cézanne, van Gogh, and Manet. The Vienna Secession also published numerous exhibition catalogues from 1898 forward.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

The Kiss stands out for a few reasons, one being the fact that it's made from real gold leaf. An artist hadn't used this much gold in a work since the Byzantine era, when gold was the go-to for demonstrating religious devotion. Unlike the Byzantine artists, Klimt used gold to express romantic love instead of religious love. It seems Klimt's love affair with the precious metal began at an early age; his father was a gold engraver. The patterning has clear ties to Art Nouveau and the Arts and Crafts movement. There is a conflict between 2 and 3 dimensional space intrinsic in the work of other modernists such as Degas.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

Klimt decided to move away from the more conservative Neoclassical style with which he was originally recognized to a more modern avantgarde style.

INTERPRETATION:

The patterning unites the two lovers into a single formal entity, underscoring their erotic union. Many feminists have criticized this piece as a portrayal of women as passive objects of men's desire; they note that the man in the Kiss overpowers the woman, who must cling to him for support. Yet most audiences interpret the painting simply as representing love and passion in a fantasized golden and flower covered world.

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

The outbreak of WWI limited his production and then he suffered a stroke on January 11, 1918. Partially paralyzed he was moved to a hospital, where he came down with pneumonia and died on February 6th.

TITLE: The Kiss **LOCATION:** Romanian in Paris **DATE:** 1907-1908 C.E.

ARTIST: Constantin Brancusi **PERIOD/STYLE:** Symbolist/Cubist Sculpture **PATRON:** John Quinn

MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE: limestone

FORM:

A Cubist rendition of a couple in an embrace. They are intertwined and fully enveloped. Two eyes become one almost like that of a cyclops. They are interlocked. The forms are very abstracted and simplified to capture the emotion of the moment rather than the naturalism. The woman is slightly smaller and her eye is slightly smaller.

FUNCTION:

Completed as part of a commission (one of four versions). It is the 4th variation of the theme. Brancusi's objective was to free the sculpture from everything non-essential and get down to ultimate essences.

CONTENT:

The only indication the sculptor gives that one of the figures is female is a slight curve of a breast and crimped hair runs down the back of the stone where two arms clasp.

CONTEXT:

Rodin was Brancusi's teacher. He was part of a longstanding folk tradition for wood carving and stone carving in Romania. Many early 20th century sculptors rejected the notion that reproducing the physical world of nature was the purpose of sculpture. Instead, they championed abstraction as the sculptors proper goal. Among those who not only produced enduring masterpieces of abstract sculpture but also wrote eloquently about them were Constantin Brancusi.

INNOVATION/CONVENTION:

Brâncuși was very much a part of the shift regarding what art could and couldn't be. Abstraction was an emblem of the avant-garde, and Brâncuși's sculptures stretched the imaginations of onlookers. He created forms that were merely suggestive of things you might encounter on a day-to-day basis, like two people embracing. His Bird in Flight is a perfect example of a sculpture that was inspired by the movement of a bird but that looks nothing like a bird at all.

ARTISTIC DECISIONS:

The piece was so important to Brâncuși that he couldn't stop after just one version. He copied it several times in plaster, making the composition simpler and simpler each time. Brancusi was eager to produce works emphasizing the natural or organic. He sought to move beyond surface appearances to capture the essence or spirit of objects in rhythmic, elegant sculptures. "All of my life I have sought the essence of flight. Don't look for mysteries. I give you pure joy. Look at the sculptures until you see them. Those nearest to God have seen them." Brancusi accepts his materials for what they are--marble for its smoothness and roughness, metal for its hardness or softness. Whatever the material, he tries to understand its nature and fulfill its potentialities without forcing it to simulate something else. "What is real" Brancusi once remarked, "is not the external form, but the essence of things."

INTERPRETATION:

"Simplicity is not an objective in art, but one achieves simplicity despite oneself by entering into the real sense of things." "What is real is not the external form but the essence of things. Starting from this truth it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface."

DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:

In fact, his sculptures were subject to one of the most famous legal battles of the 20th century because they didn't make sense to less avant-garde eyes.