

**TITLE:** Vietnam Veterans Memorial **LOCATION:** Washington, D.C., U.S. **DATE:** 1982 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Maya Lin **PERIOD/STYLE:** Minimalism **PATRON:** The Commission of Fine Arts

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Granite

**FORM:**

Highly reflective black granite with incised names of 58,000 names of Vietnam Veterans who sacrificed their lives during the conflict. The name is an abstraction that means more to the family and friends than a pictorial representation. The two walls start very short and get progressively taller until they meet at an oblique angle at the monument's center. One wall points towards the Washington Monument; the other points to the Lincoln Memorial.

**FUNCTION:**

It functions as a memorial to the soldiers that died during the Vietnam War. It is an ideal place for people to come and spend quiet time reflecting on the names and perhaps leaving mementos to the deceased.

**CONTENT:**

The walls are made of a dark igneous rock called gabbro, a type of granite, which is highly reflective when polished. The surface of the monument is etched with the 58,195 names of the Americans who died or remained missing in action in the Vietnam War. The names are listed in the order in which they were reported killed or missing in action. This makes the names harder to find, and requires a listing and numeric system of organization for visitors.

**CONTEXT:**

There were 1400 anonymous entries for this commission. There was a real backlash once her identity was known because of latent racism in the post Vietnam era. She defended her design in front of the United States Congress, who eventually reached a compromise: A group of more "traditional" sculptures, called "The Three Soldiers," was erected near the monument. Another nearby group of sculptures honors the women who died in the war effort, most of whom were nurses. "As we descend along the path that hugs the harsh black granite, we enter the very earth that, in another place, has accepted the bodies of our sons and daughters. Each name is carved not only in the stone, but by virtue of its highly polished surface, in our own reflection, in our physical substance. We are not observers, we are participants. We touch, we write, we leave parts of ourselves behind. This is a woman's vision--to commune, to interact, to collaborate with the piece to fulfill its expressive potential." Lois Fichner Rathus

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

What makes this monument so unique is that it exists as a cut or wound in the landscape. Instead of being "on top of the ground," as most memorials are, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is "within" the earth. The viewer is invited to walk alongside it, psychologically entering the wounded space to experience both grief and healing. In order to read the names, we must descend gradually into the earth, and then just as gradually work our way back up. This progress is perhaps symbolic of the nation's involvement in Vietnam.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The names are the reality of the monument, but the reflective granite opened up another world that we could not enter, but which was there for us to see. The public expects a certain heroic quality in its monuments to commemorate those fallen in battle. Lin's work is anti heroic and anti-triumphal. Whereas most war monuments speak of giving up our loved ones to a cause, her monument speaks only of giving up our loved ones.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Some critics thought of this monument as a "black scar" in a hole as if in shame. Maya Lin intended the meaning to be "It would be an interface between our world and the quieter, darker, more peaceful world beyond. I chose black granite in order to make the surface reflective and peaceful. I never looked at the memorial as a wall, an object, but as an edge to the earth, an opened side. The mirrored sect would double the size of the park creating two worlds; one we are part of and one we cannot enter." "The Memorial is not an object inserted into the earth but a work formed from the act of cutting open the earth and polishing the earth's surface--dematerializing the stone to pure surface, creating an interface between the world of the light and the quieter world beyond the names."

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

I had a simple impulse to cut into the earth, I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth, opening it up and the initial violence and pain that in time would heal.", "My work originates from a simple desire to make people aware of their surroundings and this can include not just the physical but the psychological world that we live in."

**TITLE:** The Gates      **LOCATION:** New York City, U.S.      **DATE:** 1979-2005 C.E

**ARTIST:** Christo and Jeanne-Claude      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Conceptual Earth/Site Art      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Christo is Bulgarian, Jean-Claude is French)

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed-media installation.

**FORM:**

Each gate, a rectilinear three-sided rigid vinyl frame resting on two steel footings, supported saffron-colored fabric panels that hung loosely from the top. The gates themselves matched the brilliant color of the fabric. The statistics are impressive: 7,503 gates ran over 23 miles of walkways; each gate was 16 feet high, with widths varying according to the paths' width. The estimated cost of the project, borne by the artists alone was \$20 million.

**FUNCTION:**

The saffron color in *The Gates* was used to create "a golden ceiling creating warm shadows" for the visitor walking along the Central Park path. For a brief 16 days, the billowy nylon fabric fluttered and snapped and obscured and enframed our favorite park perspectives. The couple sought to intensify a viewer's awareness of the space and features of rural and urban sites.

**CONTENT:**

"The temporary quality of the projects is an aesthetic decision. Our works are temporary in order to endow the works of art with a feeling of urgency to be seen, and the love and tenderness brought by the fact that they will not last. Those feelings are usually reserved for other temporary things such as childhood and our own life. These are valued because we know that they will not last. We want to offer this feeling of love and tenderness to our works, as an added value (dimension) and as an additional aesthetic quality." They have described the square, right angles poles as referring to the grid of city streets surrounding the park. In contrast, they saw the loose hanging fabric moving fluidly in the wind as evoking the curved park walkways and the bare tree branches.

**CONTEXT:**

*The Gates* respond to spaces designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux within the dense urban grid of Manhattan. The artists complicate an environment that was, in fact, entirely invented in the mid-19th century to express the Victorian ideal of the pastoral and picturesque landscape. *The Gates* reinforce and highlight pre-existing routes within this manmade environment. Critiques of *The Gates* that are rooted in the issue of the artwork's relationship with nature are therefore curious since the Park itself is not an untouched natural space.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Known for their large-scale environmental works in which they "wrap" things (islands, historical buildings, trees, or bridges) with brightly-colored polyester fabric, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have been startling the public for decades with their incursions into the natural world. Their public art projects involve many players, from city or rural zoning commissioners to the individuals who build or wrap the objects in question. Their art is a collaborative effort—not only among all these stakeholders, but also between the viewers, the object, and the natural environment.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

*The Gates* were tied to the paths that meander through the park. This was done for two reasons: to avoid drilling thousands of holes into the soil and potentially harming the root systems of adjacent trees, and because Christo and Jeanne-Claude were inspired by the way the city's pedestrians navigate its paths. It is important to remember that Christo and Jeanne-Claude's favorable turn with the powers that be was 26 years in the making. The artists submitted proposals, attended meetings, and made presentations throughout this period, persisting even after they received a 251-page official rejection only three years into their campaign. Many consider the 2001 mayoral election of Michael Bloomberg—a Christo and Jeanne-Claude collector—as the turning point in this saga. "The temporary quality of their projects is an aesthetic decision that endows the works of art with a feeling of urgency to be seen." Christo

**INTERPRETATION:**

What was the point of *The Gates*? Some theorize it was a way of drawing attention to the artificial quality of Central Park, a natural environment that was, in fact, entirely designed and constructed by man. For many viewers, the artists' works call into question the relationship between the natural and built environment. However, Christo and Jeanne-Claude have always contended that their work has no "deeper meaning." According to the artists, they simply wanted to make art that brings joy and beauty to the viewer by providing new ways to see familiar things

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

*The Gates* cost 21 million dollars and both the artists and the supporting institutions (the City of New York and the Central Park Conservancy) were quick to emphasize that Christo and Jeanne-Claude financed the project themselves and that the installation was free to the public. The artists sold preparatory drawings related to *The Gates*, and other works, before the exhibition opened; they rely on this method to independently fund their projects since they do not accept sponsors.

**TITLE:** Summer Trees **LOCATION:** Korea **DATE:** 1983 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Song Su-nam **PERIOD/STYLE:** "Sumukhwa," or the Oriental Ink Movement **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Ink on paper

**FORM:**

In Song Su-nam's Summer Trees, broad, vertical parallel brush strokes of ink blend and bleed from one to the other in a stark palette of velvety blacks and diluted grays. The feathery edges of some reveal them to be pale washes applied to very wet paper, while the darkest appear as streaks that show both ink and paper were nearly dry. The forms overlap and stop just short of the bottom edge of the paper, suggesting a sense of shallow space—though one that would be difficult to enter.

**FUNCTION:**

This movement "Sumukhwa" revitalized ink painting in a modern context.

**CONTENT:**

In Chinese poetry, mountainous landscapes and the plants that grow in them serve as metaphors for the ideal qualities of the literatus himself—qualities such as loyalty, intelligence, spirituality, and strength in adversity.

**CONTEXT:**

In Korea during the 1980s there was a tension between the influence of Western art that used oil paint (whether traditional or contemporary in style), and traditional Korean art that used an East Asian style, the vocabulary of traditional motifs, and the medium of ink for calligraphy and painting. Song felt very strongly that the materials and styles of Western art did not express his identity as a Korean. The Sumukhwa movement was based on the idea that—in a world where spirituality is getting lost in the technological age—a traditional art form like ink painting could revive a sense of inner peace and connection to the natural world.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

To choose the medium of ink on paper was important for the artist, a leader of Korea's "Sumukhwa" or Oriental Ink Movement of the 1980s. Sumukhwa is the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese word for "ink wash painting," also called "literati painting." The "literatus" can be defined as a "scholar-poet" or "scholar-artist," a type of ideal man that emerged in China in the 11th century or before. Chinese poetry was considered the noblest art and "ink wash painting" was its twin, because writing a poem and making a painting used the same tools and techniques—one resulting in words, the other a picture. In their simplicity and reductiveness, the style of ink wash paintings created centuries ago often seem to match Western notions of abstraction. Even the title of the work, Summer Trees, harkens back to the kinds of titles given to traditional Chinese and Korean ink paintings. However, the way the trees are presented is quite new and reflects the kind of abstraction seen in the work of American Abstraction Expressionist artists. This creative and successful blend of the past with the present, and of tradition with innovation, is a long-running theme in Korean art history.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The piece calls to mind the relationship between art and nature as well as the relationship between traditional and modern forms of art. Su-nam takes a traditional medium, ink on paper, and teases it out, experimenting with diluting the ink to produce different shades and textures. He uses this modern take on a traditional method to produce a work that calls to mind traditional landscape imagery while also entirely subverting the conventions to which the form generally adheres.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Summer Trees may also reference a traditional theme: a group of pine trees can symbolize a gathering of friends of upright character. Summer Trees, with its allusions to friendship and a balmy season, could be Song's statement of optimism in the rediscovery of traditional values recast for modern times. The work of Song Su-nam is an example of synthesis, not just between the past and the present, but between different cultural traditions as well. The artist takes the traditional Asian art form of ink wash painting and reinvents it. Song brought ink painting to a new global stage, honoring its historic roots and connecting it to 20th-century artistic movements like Abstract Expressionism.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Horn Players      **LOCATION:** New York      **DATE:** 1983 CE.

**ARTIST:** Jean-Michel Basquiat      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Neo Expressionism      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Acrylic and oil paint-stick on three canvas panels

**FORM:**

In addition to half-length portraits on the left and right panels of this triptych (a painting consisting of three joined panels), the artist has included several drawings and words—many of which Basquiat drew and then crossed out. On each panel we also notice large swaths of white paint, which seem to simultaneously highlight the black background and obscure the drawings and/or words beneath. Most notable perhaps is the preponderance of repeated words like “DIZZY,” “ORNITHOLOGY,” “PREE” and “TEETH” that the artist has scattered across all three panels of this work.

**FUNCTION:**

In virtually all of Basquiat’s work there is a complex iconography at work. References to the black experience—from slavery to hard won successes of African American jazz musicians—pour across the canvasses in images, symbols, and strands of text. As other artists of his generation looked back to the Expressionism of Jackson Pollock, Basquiat sought to emphasize the process of painting while never losing focus of the essential role of narrative.

**CONTENT:**

On the left of the canvas, the artist has drawn the figure of Parker, holding his saxophone which emits several hot pink musical notes and distorted waves of sound. We see Dizzy Gillespie in the right panel, who holds a silent instrument alongside his torso. The words “DOH SHOO DE OBEE” that float to the left of the figure’s head call to mind the scat (wordless improvisational) singing Gillespie often performed onstage. The literal meaning of “ORNITHOLOGY” is “the study of birds,” but this is also the title of a famous composition by Parker, who named the tune (first recorded in 1946) in reference to his own nickname “Bird.” The words “PREE” and “CHAN” that we see written above and below the saxophonist’s portrait refer to Parker’s infant daughter and common-law wife, respectively.

**CONTEXT:**

Before his success as a painter, Basquiat was famous for writing on the walls of lower Manhattan as a teenager when he and a high school friend, Al Diaz, left cryptic messages in spray paint under the name “SAMO” (an acronym for “Same Old Shit”) from 1977 until 1979. Jean-Michel Basquiat was a young graffiti artist of Puerto Rican and Haitian descent. In the early 1980s, he crossed over from being a street artist to being a “neo-expressionist” easel painter who was the darling of the New York art scene. His “naïve” painting style caught on with dealers, collectors, and museum professionals, and he skyrocketed to fame and fortune at the very young age of 20. He became friends with Andy Warhol, who later became a mentor to him. The two artists even created paintings together. Sadly, Basquiat’s meteoric rise to fame came with consequences. The pressure of “being famous” and the adoration of the art world led him to make some bad choices, and he died of a drug overdose in 1988 at age 27.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

As SAMO, Basquiat and Diaz wrote maxims, jokes, and prophecies in marker and spray paint on subway trains throughout New York City as well as on the walls and sidewalks in the SoHo and Tribeca neighborhoods. Many of the locations where SAMO writings were to be found were in close proximity to prominent art galleries. Combined with these strategic positions, phrases like “SAMO AS AN END TO PLAYING ART” or “SAMO FOR THE SO-CALLED AVANT-GARDE” presented the “SAMO” persona as outside the commercial art world and critical of it. He often relied on textbooks and other sources for his visual material; most biographies of the artist note his reliance on the medical textbook Gray’s Anatomy (a gift from the artist’s mother when Basquiat was hospitalized as a child) for the anatomical drawings and references we see on many of his surfaces. Basquiat also appropriated the work of Leonardo, Edouard Manet, and Pablo Picasso into his own compositions. These appropriations were in part an homage to the great painters Basquiat admired, but they also were a way for Basquiat to rewrite art history and insert himself into the canon.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Looking again at *Horn Players*, for example, reveals several connections to Picasso’s *Three Musicians*. Basquiat’s use of the triptych format—a popular device for the artist in this period—echoes the triple subjects of the Picasso image. The figure of Parker in Basquiat’s composition is also reproduced in the same position as the standing figure (playing the clarinet) in Picasso’s work. His subject matter here is jazz music, expressed as an homage to two jazzy greats, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker. He uses a style that’s reminiscent of street art in that it’s bold, colorful, and includes words. This easel painting takes the form of a triptych—a very old format of painting that dates back to medieval times.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Many scholars have connected Basquiat’s interest in jazz to a larger investment in African American popular culture (for example, he also painted famous African American athletes) but an alternative explanation is that the young Basquiat looked to jazz music for inspiration and for instruction, much in the same way that he looked to the modern masters of painting. Parker, Gillespie, and the other musicians of the bebop era infamously appropriated both the harmonic structures of jazz standards, using them as a structure for their own songs, and repeated similar note patterns across several improvisations. Basquiat used similar techniques of appropriation throughout his career as a painter.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Basquiat was of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent. He was a boyfriend of Madonna’s. He collaborated with Andy Warhol. He was both a legend and a casualty of the superheated 80’s art scene.

**TITLE:** A Book from the Sky **LOCATION:** Originally in China, now in Wisconsin **DATE:** 1987-1999 C.E.  
AKA: "An Alalyzed Reflection of the End of This Century"  
**ARTIST:** Xu Bing **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary/Social Realist Style **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed-media installation

**FORM:**

Xu Bing Invented 1000 Chinese characters are hung above, below and on the walls of this installation. A Book from the Sky, by Chinese artist Xu Bing, consists of a large expanse of book pages laid out on platforms and scrolls hanging along the walls of a gallery. The pages are covered in graceful, block-printed calligraphy similar to what would've been used in 15th-century Ming Dynasty books. Xu Bing hand-printed all of the 4000 different glyphs on 604 pages.

**FUNCTION:**

The written word became his art, his weapon, and the means for his critique of Chinese art and culture.

**CONTENT:**

The piece fills a large exhibition hall. Museum-goers wander among 400 handmade books scattered on the floor, admiring Xu Bing's traditional Chinese typesetting, binding, and stringing techniques. They walk beneath 50-foot-long printed scrolls which hang from the ceiling, and they stand before wall panels printed in the style of Chinese outdoor newspapers. Visitors stare at his hand-printed calligraphy, each character carved from its own pear wood block; they discover that although it looks like written Chinese, it is utterly without meaning. Apart from it's political statement, Book from the Sky is a masterpiece of the bookmaker's craft and beautiful to behold. The volumes vary from one to another; volume two suggests traditional medical reference texts in its format, whole the design of volume three is more appropriate to literary subject matter.. The four volume set is accompanied by a hand carved storage box.

**CONTEXT:**

Xu Bing grew up surrounded by books at Beijing University, where his father was a historian and his mother an administrator in the department of library sciences. Between 1966 and 1976, China underwent a dramatic Cultural Revolution, in which educated people like Xu Bing's parents were seen as threats to communism and their intellectual activities were suppressed. Xu Bing was separated from his family as a teenager and forced to work as an agricultural laborer. Looking back on that time, Xu Bing has noted that Chairman Mao's effort to radically transform Chinese culture was "most deeply rooted [in] his transformation of language" and that "to strike at the written word is to strike at the very essence of the culture." His skill as a calligrapher was harnessed in the service of the state as a propaganda artist. He was put to work creating banners by hand during Mao's regime for holidays and wedding where he was asked to combine modern and traditional forms of calligraphy.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The text he invented makes anyone who tries to read it illiterate, as though the written word itself becomes a weapon, a means of critiquing his country's history. Interestingly enough, while A Book from the Sky is all about modern politics and the use—or abuse—of language, there's also a connection to ancient Daoist philosophy, which suggests the deepest truths cannot be described by words alone. It has been interpreted as both a stinging critique of the meaninglessness of contemporary political language and as a commentary on the illegibility of the past. Xu himself has characterized the work as intentionally ambiguous.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

He carved each character out of wooden blocks harking back to the ancient Chinese system of movable type. Mao considered wood block prints to be the most non-elitist forms of art and communication because it was direct and mass produced. In 2014, Xu Bing created the opposite of A Book from the Sky. This new book, Book from the Ground, contains pictures and symbols that everyone can read, no matter what language they speak.

**INTERPRETATION:**

X A Book from the Sky receives approval, even from official critics, who declare its blending of the ancient and the new as an important advance in Chinese art. In February 1989, Xu Bing's piece is included in the government-sanctioned group exhibition at Beijing's National Museum, China/Avant-Garde. Four months later, the massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square begins a period of political retrenchment. Now, the Chinese press criticizes the avant-garde movement for its "bourgeois liberalism." Critics single out A Book from the Sky, whose meaninglessness, they believe, may hide subversive intent. A member of the Ministry of Culture delivers a severe reprimand. He likens the piece's ambiguity to a character in an old Chinese folk tale who wanders aimlessly, searching for his way home like a "ghost pounding on walls." As Xu Bing later admits, "The reason why people have so many reactions to A Book from the Sky is because it didn't say anything."

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Xu Bing is placed under surveillance, which he later describes as creating a difficult atmosphere for producing art. He emigrates to the United States in 1990. The first new work he shows in the States is the last he produced while still in China, a hand-rubbed impression of a three-story-high stretch of the Great Wall of China. Xu Bing calls the piece Ghosts Pounding the Wall.



**TITLE:** Pink Panther      **LOCATION:** New York      **DATE:** 1988 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Jeff Koons      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Postmodernism/Kitsch      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Glazed porcelain

**FORM:**

The sculpture is made of glazed porcelain in a range of colors including pale blue, pink, and yellow-gold.

**FUNCTION:**

To challenge the art market, and to create an art of the commercial world, for the 1%. It is a comment on celebrity romance, sexuality, commercialism, stereotypes, pop culture and sentimentality. This was part of a series called “Banality” at a show in the Sonnenbend Gallery in NY 1988. He intends his work to draw attention to everything that he believes is wrong with contemporary American Society.

**CONTENT:**

It depicts a smiling, bare-breasted, blond woman scantily clad in a mint-green dress, head tilted back and to the left as if addressing a crowd of onlookers. The figure is based on the 1960s B-list Hollywood star Jayne Mansfield—here she clutches a limp pink panther in her left hand, while her right hand covers an exposed breast. From behind one sees that the pink panther has its head thrown over her shoulder and wears an expression of hapless weariness. It too is a product of Hollywood fantasy—the movie of the same name debuted the cartoon character in 1963.

**CONTEXT:**

Hummel figurines and other popular collector’s items are the basis for the art in “Banality.” Koons rendered these saccharine and sentimental little figural groupings—cartoonish emblems of childhood innocence—at a life-size scale as an assault upon sincerity but also as an assault upon taste, and it is here that even the most daring of postmodern advocates drew a line in the sand. Like the modernist distinction between art and an everyday object drawn by Greenberg, Pink Panther challenged the distinction between an ironic appropriation of a mass-culture object and the object itself (seemingly without critical distance) thereby challenging the whole critical enterprise of postmodernism itself.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Koons has commissions for artworks that parallel the Renaissance patronage system where the patron finances the creation of the work in advance. This allows Koons to spend tremendous amounts in the fabrication process. He was originally a commodities broker on Wall Street so there is a connection between his work and the financial aspect of the art market during the affluent 80’s. His prominence in the art world is based on his acute understanding of the dynamics of consumer culture.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Jeff Koons sent the specs for this sculpture and others with similar “kitschy” themes to ceramic artisans in Germany and Italy, who made each work in triplicate for him.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Koons named this entire series of sculptures Banality, which means trite, vapid, and unoriginal. The collection is an exploration of contemporary culture—but is he making fun of it or glorifying it? Maybe both. Koons’ Pink Panther and other works in the Banality series reflect the influence of “mass media” on popular culture. Koons uses sarcasm and irony in subtle ways, asking us to consider why Michael Jackson is gold-plated or why a half-naked movie star is holding a pink panther. Jeff Koons is known as a master of “appropriation” and “borrowing.” He takes familiar icons from contemporary culture—like the Pink Panther or Michael Jackson—and shows us something about our society that might make us feel a bit uncomfortable. With Pink Panther, is he condoning the objectification of women, or is he showing how absurd it is? There are many different interpretations, and that’s exactly what Koons and similar artists want to offer their viewers.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Kitsch, a word of German origin, refers to mass-produced imagery designed to please the broadest possible audience with objects of questionable taste (think of objects and images with popular, sentimental subject matter and style). Koons holds the record for the highest priced art sale for a living artist at \$53 million for his balloon animal.

**TITLE:** Untitled (#228) **LOCATION:** U.S. **DATE:** 1990 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Cindy Sherman **PERIOD/STYLE:** Contemporary Feminist Art **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Photograph

**FORM:**

She is dressed in red, the color of lust and seduction, as well as the color of blood. She fills the entire length of the 7' tall photograph. While her face is resolute, "Holofernes" is grotesque and comedic. This image, #228, is from a series of 35 images that Cindy Sherman made in 1989 and 1990 called the History Portraits.

**FUNCTION:**

Although the sham self-portraits seem like narcissistic role-playing, they are "pictures of emotions personified." Sherman insisted. "I'm trying to make other people recognize something of themselves rather than me."

**CONTENT:**

The Contemporary Master, Cindy Sherman—known for embodying and enacting images from popular media—has imagined a Renaissance interpretation of the Old Testament hero Judith, and photographed herself in the part. This image by Cindy Sherman is not a Baroque painting. It's not a painting at all. It's a photograph staged to look like an old painting. Cindy Sherman dressed up to evoke the image of Judith with the Head of Holofernes and then took her own picture. In the picture, she's holding a mask of a man's face and wearing strange prosthetic foot extenders. Sherman often enhanced certain body parts with prosthetic devices. Cindy Sherman appears as the photographer, subject, consumer, hairdresser and makeup artist in each of her works.

**CONTEXT:**

Cindy Sherman's Untitled #228 is part of her series of photographs, History Portraits. This body of work was completed from 1988-90, while the artist was living in Rome. In Untitled #228, Sherman has drawn upon Renaissance and Baroque images of Judith with the head of Holofernes. The Book of Judith (included in some versions of the Bible), tells of the devout widow Judith—a heroine who saves the Israelites from a conquering Assyrian general by befriending him and visiting his tent one night while he is drunk. She takes advantage of his unfit state and decapitates him. The Assyrians, shocked by the assassination of their leader, retreat. The Israelites are saved. Because she uses her sexuality to kill Holofernes and because she is a woman who is able to murder a man, Judith has always been a heroine that engendered great anxiety. *OR...it explores the theme of Salome decapitating St. John the Baptist.*

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Sherman is well known for making photographic images that allow us to ponder images of women. She has opened up our interpretation of how Western art and culture depicts women. Throughout her career, Sherman has created "fake" film stills, images from classic art (like #228), and many other kinds of visual narratives in which women appear as both the protagonist of the story as well as "the object of the male gaze." For the greater part of Western art history, men did the making and the looking while women were made and looked at. Sherman has worked at uprooting, shaking up, and throwing out this idea. Her portraits of women, in which she is the main actress, have certainly raised the question: Shouldn't women be in charge of how they are portrayed in art? Since the 1980s, artists like Sherman have taken control of the depiction of the female form and of "Woman" as she is made, shown, and included in visual culture.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Cindy Sherman is a photographer who works like a painter. "I had all this makeup. I just wanted to see how transformed I could look. It was like painting in a way."

**INTERPRETATION:**

Her work is about art history, the history of women in art, and the ways women are viewed today.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"I feel I'm anonymous in my work. When I look at the pictures, I never see myself; they aren't self-portraits. Sometimes I disappear."

**TITLE:** Dancing at the Louvre, from the series The French Collection, Part I **LOCATION:** Harlem, NY **DATE:** 1991 C.E.

**ARTIST:** . Faith Ringgold **PERIOD/STYLE:** Narrative Feminism **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border

**FORM:**

Combining representational painting and African-American quilting techniques with the written word, *Dancing at the Louvre* is the first in Ringgold's series of twelve "story quilts" called The French Collection. Ringgold's "story quilting" is a blend of traditional painting techniques, Western art icons, the "women's craft" of quilting, and the written word. The first "episode" shows a group of four little girls and a grown woman dancing together in the Louvre, with three famous Leonardo da Vinci paintings lining the background wall.

**FUNCTION:**

Ringgold's technique positions her work more in the world of folk art and craft than European traditions of fine art. Associated with women's domestic work, quilt making has historically been important to maintaining female relationships. Quilting is often done collectively, allowing women time to gather and have conversations away from men or others outside their community. Young girls watch and participate in the activity in order to learn family stories, cultural background, shared knowledge, and technical skills associated with their maternal and domestic roles. Although quilts are common in a number of cultures, Ringgold's African-American heritage recalls their historical role, especially within the Underground Railroad, to communicate codes and hidden messages that remain unrecognized by outsiders to the community. These quilts do not function as blankets.

**CONTENT:**

The series shares the fictional story of a young black woman, Willa Marie Simone, who moves to Paris in the early 20th century seeking fame and fortune as an artist. The hand-written text bordering each quilt tells Marie's story, which is a rather epic tale of a determined young woman who meets a number of well-known individuals (Pablo Picasso and Rosa Parks included) on her way to becoming a successful artist and businesswoman.

**CONTEXT:**

Ringgold has been a dedicated activist since the 1970s, working with other feminist artists and art critics to recognize women in the art world. She helped found the National Black Feminist Organization and "Where We At" Black Women Artists collective. Ringgold's story quilts rewrite the past and the present and promote the recognition of black female artists by combining the Western canon with modern art, African American culture, and her personal biography. In deliberate contrast to Modernism's emphasis on autonomy and universal meaning, artists like Ringgold highlighted the implicit biases in accepted forms of art, especially in their treatment of race and gender. Characteristic is her use of appropriation, narrative, biographical references, and non-Western traditions. Through these devices, Ringgold offers an alternative to the European and masculine perspectives that are prevalent in art history.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The central image of *Dancing at the Louvre* is paint on canvas, a traditional painting technique using traditional painting materials. From there, any notion of tradition is turned on its head. The central image is surrounded by patchwork fabric and pieces of fabric covered in handwriting. The whole thing is stitched together using transitional quilting methods with a layer of cotton batting in the center. True to the genre of quilting, the artist uses her skills to patch together the myths and stories of different peoples in a nation composed of diverse ethnic groups.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Ringgold's story-quilting technique is important to meaning in her work. She creates the central image using acrylic paint on canvas, reflecting her knowledge of western art history in both style and subject matter, and surrounds it with a patchwork cloth border that includes her hand-written text. She combines the traditionally female art of quilt making with the traditional use of oil paint.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Ringgold's art is a perfect example of "appropriation," or the blending, borrowing, and recombining of techniques that's so popular in postmodern art. Her use of quilting also challenges the notion that fabric work, a "woman's craft," can't be considered real "Art." Through borrowing and repurposing artistic techniques and motifs, Ringgold critiques modern culture. The French Collection shows how culture has limited people based on race and gender but also—through Ringgold's own success—how artists have gotten past these barriers. She challenges us to consider expectations of gender and race, as well as traditional expectations and values of what art might be. Through image and text, Ringgold rewrites history to make a place for women like herself in its historical development.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**



**TITLE:**Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People) **LOCATION:**New Mexico, American Southwest **DATE:** 1992 C.E.

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**ARTIST:**Jaune Quick-to-see Smith **PERIOD/STYLE:**Global Contemporary **PATRON:**

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil and mixed media on canvas

**FORM:**

The three large panels of Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People) are reminiscent of a medieval altarpiece. Newspaper articles from the tribal paper Char-Koosta, old photos, tobacco and gum wrappers, fruit carton labels, ads, and pages from comic books with stereotypical images of Native Americans all cover the canvas. There are also images of deer, buffalo, and Native American men in historic dress. The red symbolizes bloodshed, warfare, anger, and sacrifice. The bold, raw brushstrokes that speak of the chaos and emotion of modern life are reminiscent of the Abstract Expressionist style of the 1940s and 1950s

**FUNCTION:**

She created the work for the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in North America in 1492 as part of her cleverly-titled series, "The Quincentenary Non-Celebration." Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People) restates the standard narratives of the history of the United States, specifically the desire to expand beyond "sea to shining sea," as encompassed in the ideology of Manifest Destiny (the belief in the destiny of Western expansion), and raises the issue of contemporary inequities that are rooted in colonial experience.

**CONTENT:**

Divided into three large panels, the triptych (three part) arrangement is reminiscent of a medieval altarpiece. Smith covered the canvas in collage, with newspaper articles about Native life cut out from her tribal paper Char-Koosta, photos, comics, tobacco and gum wrappers, fruit carton labels, ads, and pages from comic books, all of which feature stereotypical images of Native Americans. She mixed the collaged text with photos of deer, buffalo, and Native men in historic dress holding pipes with feathers in their hair, and an image of Ken Plenty Horses—a character from one of Smith's earlier pieces, the Paper Dolls for a Post Columbian World with Ensembles Contributed by US Government from 1991-92. These cheap goods, besides being stuff unsuspecting tourists buy by the armful, show how the image of Native Americans has been stereotyped and usurped by mainstream American culture.

**CONTEXT:**

As a response to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in North America in 1992, the artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Nation, created a large mixed-media canvas called Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People). Trade, part of the series "The Quincentenary Non-Celebration," illustrates historical and contemporary inequities between Native Americans and the United States government. Trade references the role of trade goods in allegorical stories like the acquisition of the island of Manhattan by Dutch colonists in 1626 from unnamed Native Americans in exchange for goods worth 60 guilders or \$24.00. Though more apocryphal than true, this story has become part of American lore, suggesting that Native Americans had been lured off their lands by inexpensive trade goods.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

She was inspired by both Native and non-Native sources, including petroglyphs, Plains ledger art, Diné saddle blankets, early Charles Russell prints of western landscapes, and paintings by twentieth-century artists such as Paul Klee, Joan Miró, Willem DeKooning, Jasper Johns, and especially Kurt Schwitters and Robert Rauschenberg. In Trade, Smith calls our attention to the fact that historically, Native Americans and European settlers didn't have the same view of "ownership of land." Her work makes visible the inequities between Native and non-native peoples that have occurred in the past and that unfortunately persist even today. With the emphasis on prominent brushstrokes and the dripping blocks of paint, Smith cited the Abstract Expressionist movement from the 1940s and 50s with raw brush strokes describing deep emotions and social chaos. The artist grew up on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana and uses a full vocabulary of Native American geometric motifs and organizes images from the rich pictorial culture of her ancestors.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

She applied blocks of white, yellow, green, and especially red paint over the layer of collaged materials. The color red had multiple meanings for Smith, referring to her Native heritage as well as to blood, warfare, anger, and sacrifice. For a final layer, she painted the outline of an almost life-sized canoe. The canoe suggests the possibility of trade and cultural connections—though this empty canoe is stuck, unable to move. The trinkets hanging above the canvas perpetuate stereotypes that cheapen Native American culture. Some are replicas of real Native American items that have been made into children's toys, while others show how Native American culture has been exploited and misused in the sports world.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Above the canvas, Smith strung a clothesline from which she dangled a variety of Native-themed toys and souvenirs, especially from sports teams with Native American mascots. The items include toy tomahawks, a child's headdress with brightly dyed feathers, Red Man chewing tobacco, a Washington Redskins cap and license plate, a Florida State Seminoles bumper sticker, a Cleveland Indian pennant and cap, an Atlanta Braves license plate, a beaded belt, a toy quiver with an arrow, and a plastic Indian doll. Smith offers these cheap goods in exchange for the lands that were lost, reversing the historic sale of land for trinkets. These items also serve as reminders of how Native life has been commodified, turning Native cultural objects into cheap items sold without a true understanding of what the original meanings were. Poverty, unemployment, disease and alcoholism are associated with European occupation.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"Why won't you consider trading the land we handed over to you for these silly trinkets that so honor us? Sound like a bad deal? Well, that's the deal you gave us." Jaune Quick to See Smith

**TITLE:**Earth's Creation **LOCATION:** Australia **DATE:** 1994 C.E.

**ARTIST:**Emily Kame Kngwarreye **PERIOD/STYLE:** Aboriginal Art **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

**FORM:**

At nearly twenty feet wide and nine feet high, Emily Kame Kngwarreye's painting Earth's Creation is monumental in its scale and impact. Patches of bold yellows, greens, reds and blues seem to bloom like lush vegetation over the large canvas. Comprised of gestural, viscous marks, each swath of color traces the movement of the artist's hands and body over the canvas, which would have been laid horizontally as she painted, seated on (or beside) and intimately connected to her art. It features the "dump dot" technique, a method of painting where the brush is used to pound paint into the canvas rather than brush it onto the surface.

**FUNCTION:**

Earth's Creation was created as part of the larger Alhalkere Suite which contains twenty-two panels, and is still considered one of the most virtuosic of Kngwarreye's immense and prolific artistic output.

**CONTENT:**

These works reference the changing atmospheric character of seasonal cycles. Earth's Creation documents the lushness of the "green time" that follows periods of heavy rain, and makes use of tropical blues, yellows and greens. The piece has often been likened to Claude Monet's studies of seasonal and temporal change, and given its formidable, room-filling scale, a comparison to the artist's Water Lilies of 1914-26 (MoMA) might be remarkably apt.

**CONTEXT:**

Kngwarreye was virtually unknown to the world outside her small desert community in the Australian country of Alhalkere. A self-taught artist who was trained in ceremonial painting, she rose to international prominence only in her eighties, and enjoyed a flourishing career at the end of her life. The arc of Kngwarreye's career runs alongside a period of tremendous change in Australia, moving from the end of a phase of colonial settlement through to a more ethical embrace of Aboriginal culture by the nation's Western population. Yet the period in which she came to prominence also reflects changes taking place in the contemporary art world internationally, as the 1980s and 1990s saw a notable expansion within the mainstream to include non-Western or minority artists.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Aboriginal culture has long been intimately connected to the landscape of Australia; inhabited by humans for over 40,000 years, the region is characterized by deserts, grasslands and dramatic arched rock formations. Kngwarreye was an established elder of her community and was trained to create ceremonial sand paintings inspired by her ritual "dreamings," as well as to paint decorative motifs on women's bodies as part of a ceremony called Awelye. These visual forms were connected to cultural expressions in song, storytelling and dance. While her paintings have never been figural, they remain influenced by the culture in which she grew up as well as the natural environment. Emily Kngwarreye's paintings are a response to the land and the spiritual forces which imbue it; the contours and formations of the landscape, climatic changes, the parched earth and flooding rains, the shapes and patterns of seeds and plants.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

**INTERPRETATION:**

Her rapid success marked the recognition of contemporary artists from all over the world, not just Europe and America. Before passing away in 1996, Kngwarreye created over 3000 paintings in six years—that averages to about one work of art per day. We hope she signed up for the customer loyalty program at her local art supply store.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The work made records at auction when it was sold in 2007 for over \$1,000,000—the highest price ever fetched for a work by a female artist in Australia.

**TITLE:** Rebellious Silence, from the Women of Allah series **LOCATION:** Nomadic Artist in Exile from Iran **DATE:** 1994 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Shirin Neshat (artist); photo by Cynthia Preston **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Ink on photograph

**FORM:**

In *Rebellious Silence*, the central figure's portrait is bisected along a vertical seam created by the long barrel of a rifle. Presumably the rifle is clasped in her hands near her lap, but the image is cropped so that the gun rises perpendicular to the lower edge of the photo and grazes her face at the lips, nose, and forehead. The woman's eyes stare intensely towards the viewer from both sides of this divide. In this series guns or flowers are frequently juxtaposed with vulnerable though rebellious faces and hands that emerge from beneath the veil. The exposed flesh is overwritten with sensual or political texts by Iranian women in the native tongue of Farsi.

**FUNCTION:**

For audiences in the West, the "Women of Allah" series has allowed a more nuanced contemplation of common stereotypes and assumptions about Muslim women, and serves to challenge the suppression of female voices in any community. She battles against misconceptions of the west regarding her religion and her image, and he also battles against the extremist Islamic regime of Iran today.

**CONTENT:**

Most of the subjects in the series are photographed holding a gun, sometimes passively, as in *Rebellious Silence*, and sometimes threateningly, with the muzzle pointed directly towards the camera lens. With the complex ideas of the "gaze" in mind, we might reflect on the double meaning of the word "shoot," and consider that the camera—especially during the colonial era—was used to violate women's bodies. The gun, aside from its obvious references to control, also represents religious martyrdom, a subject about which the artist feels ambivalently, as an outsider to Iranian revolutionary culture. The text on her face is from a poem by Tahereh Saffarzadeh about the bravery of martyrs titled "Allegiance with Wakefulness." The work reminds viewers that a strong woman exists under the veil and that no one—neither Iranian nor Westerner—should judge her because of her traditional Islamic clothing. Neshat works with the idea that Iranian women are strong and powerful, able to choose their own allegiances and their own outfits.

**CONTEXT:**

The Women of Allah series confronts this "paradoxical reality" through a haunting suite of black-and-white images. Each contains a set of four symbols that are associated with Western representations of the Muslim world: the veil, the gun, the text and the gaze. While these symbols have taken on a particular charge since 9/11, the series was created earlier and reflects changes that have taken place in the region since 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Shirin Neshat was born in 1957 in the town of Qazvin. In line with the Shah's expansion of women's rights, her father prioritized his daughters' access to education, and the young artist attended a Catholic school where she learned about both Western and Iranian intellectual and cultural history. She left, however, in the mid-1970s, pursuing her studies in California as the environment in Iran grew increasingly hostile. It would be seventeen years before she returned to her homeland. When she did, she confronted a society that was completely opposed to the one that she had grown up in.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Iranian-American photographer and video artist Neshat came to the United States as a teenager, before the Shah was removed from power, and returned in 1990 to witness a nation transformed by Islamic Clergy. She was particularly concerned about how life had changed for Iranian women, who now had limited opportunities outside the home and were veiled behind black chadors. Many feminist artists have used the action of "gazing back" as a means to free the female body from this objectification. The gaze, here, might also reflect exotic fantasies of the East. In Orientalist painting of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, Eastern women are often depicted nude, surrounded by richly colored and patterned textiles and decorations; women are envisaged amongst other beautiful objects that can be possessed. In Neshat's images, women return the gaze, breaking free from centuries of subservience to male or European desire.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

One of the most visible signs of cultural change in Iran has been the requirement for all women to wear the veil in public. While many Muslim women find this practice empowering and affirmative of their religious identities, the veil has been coded in Western eyes as a sign of Islam's oppression of women. This opposition is made more clear, perhaps, when one considers the simultaneity of the Islamic Revolution with women's liberation movements in the U.S. and Europe, both developing throughout the 1970s. Neshat decided to explore this fraught symbol in her art as a way to reconcile her own conflicting feelings. In *Women of Allah*, initiated shortly after her return to Iran in 1991, the veil functions as both a symbol of freedom and of repression. Most of the texts are transcriptions of poetry and other writings by women, which express multiple viewpoints and date both before and after the Revolution. Some of the texts that Neshat has chosen are feminist in nature. However, in *Rebellious Silence*, the script that runs across the artist's face is from Tahereh Saffarzadeh's poem "Allegiance with Wakefulness" which honors the conviction and bravery of martyrdom.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Shirin Neshat's photographic series "Women of Allah" examines the complexities of women's identities in the midst of a changing cultural landscape in the Middle East—both through the lens of Western representations of Muslim women, and through the more intimate subject of personal and religious conviction. To a non-Arabic speaking Westerner, the calligraphic writing may first appear to be little more than a melange of elegant and mysterious patterns and designs. Yet there is no mistaking its purpose as one of resistance. The photos are unlikely to be seen and "decoded" by the eyes of Iranians living in Iran, but the message of the artist to the world outside is clear. Westerners view the work as an expression of female oppression. Iranians could view the work as an obedient right-minded woman who is ready to die defending her faith and customs.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

In the artist's own words, "every image, every woman's submissive gaze, suggests a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface." "Art is our weapon. Culture is a form of resistance." Chador: A type of outer garment like a cloak that allows only the face and hands of Iranian women to be seen.

**TITLE:** En la Barberia no se Lloro **LOCATION:** Puerto Rican in Connecticut and New York **DATE:** 1994 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Pepon Osorio **PERIOD/STYLE:** Installation **PATRON:** Real Art Ways (RAW) from Hartford, Connecticut

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed-media installation

**FORM:**

A mixed-media installation located in the Puerto Rican community of Park Street in Hartford. Video screens on the headrests depict men playing, a baby being circumcised, and men crying.

**FUNCTION:**

While *En la barberia no se llora* (No Crying Allowed in the Babershop) challenges definitions of masculinity, it also brings up—in a more subtle way—the relationship between machismo and homophobia, violence, and infidelity, and the ways in which popular culture, religion, and politics help craft these identities and issues.

**CONTENT:**

Osorio is best known for large-scale installations that address street life, cultural clashes, and the rites of passage experienced by Puerto Ricans in the United States. Inspired from his first haircut in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Osorio recreates the space of the barbershop as one that is intensely packed with “masculine” symbols like barber chairs, car seats, sports paraphernalia, depictions of sperm and a boy’s circumcision, phallic symbols, and male action figurines. Osorio boldly challenges the idea of masculinity, and particularly of machismo (a strong sense of masculine pride), in Latino communities. Spanish for trinkets or knick-knacks, and known to art historians as kitsch (mass produced objects characterized by—or ironically admired for—their bad taste), *chucherías* overpopulate Osorio’s work. These include Puerto Rican flags, religious ornaments, plastic toys, dolls, ribbons, beads, etc., all of which function—to quote art historian Anna Indych-Lopez—as a “gesture of cultural resistance,” presented as something universal yet personal.

**CONTEXT:**

No Crying Allowed in the Barbershop represents an early memory of Osorio’s: being taken by his father for his first haircut. As he describes it, what was supposed to be a celebration of sorts turned into a “disastrous event.” The barber didn’t know how to cut curly hair, and Osorio remembers feeling frightened by the sound of the razor and the barber pulling on his hair. He cried and felt ashamed for not being more “macho.”

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The Puerto Rico born artist, Pepón Osorio trained as a sociologist and became a social worker in the South Bronx. His work is inspired by each of these experiences and is rooted in the spaces, experiences, and people of American Latino culture, particularly Nuyorican communities (Nuyorican refers to the Puerto Rican diaspora living in New York, especially New York City). The art itself is visually lavish—his installations have often been dubbed “Nuyorican Baroque” (a reference to the seventeenth-century style characterized by theatricality and opulence and found in both Europe and Latin America). Osorio explores machismo tendencies in Puerto Rican culture and how society, religion, and politics all fuel the inherent contradictions in the American notion of masculinity.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Osorio included older men from the retirement home, Casa del Elderly, presenting the issue of machismo as multi-generational and deeply ingrained in Nuyorican culture. As a foil to this construction, the artist also included videos of men crying, with the public reacting both in sympathy and disgust.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Just as women artists like Cindy Sherman and Shirin Neshat have explored the role of femininity, Pepon Osorio explores the myth of masculinity in his installation, recreating and questioning the sacred “man cave” that is the local barber shop.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Pisupo Lua Afe **LOCATION:** New Zealand **DATE:** 1994 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Michel Tuffery **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed media

**FORM:**

Sculpture of a bull made from hundreds of flattened corned beef tins, riveted together to form a series of life-sized bulls.

**FUNCTION:**

To bring awareness to the food sovereignty problem of New Zealand and the Samoan Islands where canned meat is a major contributor to Polynesian obesity and a fall in cultural skills such as fishing, cooking and agriculture. Tuffery's work raises the issue of whether foreign intervention encourages independence or actually fosters dependency. 'My corned beef bullock talks about the impact of global trade and colonial economies on Pacific Island cultures. Specifically it comments on how an imported commodity has become an integral part of the Polynesian customs of feasting and gift giving.'

**CONTENT:**

There are wheels in the feet for mobility, and several were used in a performance with fireworks. The work combines the art of recycling with a light-hearted and ironic comment on the value of colonial economics.

**CONTEXT:**

Pisupo is the Samoan language version of "pea soup," which was the first canned food introduced into the Pacific Islands. Pisupo is now a generic term used to describe the many types of canned food that are eaten in the Islands—including corned beef. Not only is corned beef a favorite food source in the Islands, it has also become a ubiquitous part of the ceremonial gift economy. At weddings and birthdays, and other important life events both in the Islands and in Islander communities in New Zealand, gifts of treasured textiles like fine mats and decorated barkcloths are made alongside food items and cash money. Food sovereignty is the right of a nation and its peoples to decide who controls how, where and by whom their food is to be produced, and what that food will be. For Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, food and the environment are sacred gifts. There cannot be food sovereignty without control over food production and ownership, and without appropriate care of the environment.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Tuffery uses a well-known object as his 'genre,' but expresses something new. By using cans of corned beef in the bulls and in the parade, Tuffery is asserting that these foods now have a place in the realms of boisterous celebration. As a living descendant of Samoan ancestry, Tuffery situates himself in contemporary society in which individuals decide for themselves how they will incorporate corned beef into their lifestyles. Tuffery is not challenging or affirming the food as legitimate, but rather depicting it as a timeline of change. His work and the incorporation of his work in the parade demonstrate a commitment to viewing culture as a dynamic, ever-changing reality. In Pisupo Lua Afe and Povi Christkeke, Tuffery proposes that today, corned beef is as much a part of Samoan society as the drumming and dancing that existed long before it. One is not more indicative of "Samoan culture" than the other—to day, the tins are fused to the bull in more than just their physical composition. Art like Tuffery's bulls helps us understand such contact zones not just in regards to the Pacific Islands, but in the broader scope of colonization and commercialization.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Encouraged instead to express himself through drawing, he now aims artworks like Pisupo Lua Afe primarily at children, hoping to engage their curiosity and inspire them to care for both their own health and that of the environment. Tuffery has also brought his "tinned beef" bulls to smoky life in various performative installations throughout the world, by installing fireworks inside their heads to give them the appearance of breathing fire. Mounted on castors with their necks articulated so their heads can be turned, he has staged bullfights with his fire breathing monsters, accompanied by drummers and groups of human performers issuing fierce challenges.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Pisupo Lua Afe also critiques serious issues of ecological health and food sovereignty. Tuffery is interested in the introduction of cattle to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands and how they impact negatively on the plants, landscapes and waterways of these countries, as well as how industrialized approaches to farming disrupt traditional food production. Tuffery is gesturing rather obviously towards the challenge of rubbish disposal in Island economies where creative "upcycling" of materials into new objects is often more common than the civic recycling regimes of larger cities and countries

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

He didn't read, write or speak until he was 6 years old. After completing Pisupo lua afe Tuffery wanted to push the ideas that brought it about even further. He developed a multi-media performance piece Povi Tau Vaga (The Challenge) involving over 80 performers and two motorised cattle in combat.



**TITLE:** Electronic Superhighway     **LOCATION:** Korean Artist in the US     **DATE:** 1995 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Nam June Paik     **PERIOD/STYLE:** Video installation     **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

Mixed media installation (49-channel closed-circuit video installation, neon, steel,

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** and electronic components)

**FORM:**

Electronic Superhighway, was a towering bank of TVs that simultaneously screened multiple video clips (including one of John Cage) from a wide variety of sources. There are 313 monitors and each state has a separate video feed. A camera is turned on the viewer making them a participant in the content for the state of New York.

**FUNCTION:**

Paik's goal was to reflect upon how we interact with technology, and to imagine new ways of doing so. He has appropriated video as his medium in the creation of works of art--video art. Video art is to be distinguished from the commercial efforts of the television establishment.

**CONTENT:**

Placing over 300 TV screens into the overall formation of a map of the United States outlined in colored neon lights (see image at the top of the page and the detail below). Roughly forty feet long and fifteen feet high, the work is a monumental record of the physical and also cultural contours of America: within each state, the screens display video clips that resonate with that state's unique popular mythology. For example, Iowa (where each presidential election cycle begins) plays old news footage of various candidates, while Kansas presents the Wizard of Oz.

**CONTEXT:**

Currently on display in the Smithsonian American Art Museum. When Nam June Paik came to the United States in 1964, the interstate highway system was only nine years old, and superhighways offered everyone the freedom to "see the U.S.A. in your Chevrolet." Walking along the entire length of this installation suggests the enormous scale of the nation that confronted the young Korean artist when he arrived. Neon outlines the monitors, recalling the multicolored maps and glowing enticements of motels and restaurants that beckoned Americans to the open road.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

In the 1960s he was one of the very first people to use televisual technologies as an artistic medium, earning him the title of "father" of video art. By using video as an expressive medium, Paik opened up a whole new world for the many artists who followed in his footsteps. Paik augmented the flashing images "seen as though from a passing car" with audio clips from The Wizard of Oz, Oklahoma, and other screen gems, suggesting that our picture of America has always been influenced by film and television. Today, the Internet and twenty-four-hour broadcasting tend to homogenize the customs and accents of what was once a more diverse nation. Paik was the first to use the phrase "electronic superhighway," and this installation proposes that electronic media provide us with what we used to leave home to discover. But Electronic Superhighway is real. It is an enormous physical object that occupies a middle ground between the virtual reality of the media and the sprawling country beyond our doors.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Being an outsider to the U.S. himself, Paik realized that there are a multiplicity of characters, myths, legends, and situations that make up the country. The artist acknowledges and finds footage referring to each state, then presents it simultaneously in the giant map format. It's a multi-layered statement that there's not just one way to talk about all of America. Nam June Paik is hailed as the father of video art and is credited with the first use of the term "electronic superhighway" in the 1970s. He recognized the potential for people from all parts of the world to collaborate via media, and he knew that media would completely transform our lives. Electronic Superhighway — constructed of 336 televisions, 50 DVD players, 3,750 feet of cable, and 575 feet of multicolored neon tubing — is a testament to the ways media defined one man's understanding of a diverse nation.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Whereas the highways facilitated the transportation of people and goods from coast to coast, the neon lights suggest that what unifies us now is not transportation, but electronic communication. Thanks to the TVs and home computers that became popular in the 1990s, as well as the cables of the internet (which transmit information as light), most of us can access the same information at anytime and from any place. Electronic Superhighway which has been housed at the Smithsonian American Art Museum since 2002, has therefore become an icon of America in the information age. This work also can be read as posing some difficult questions about how that technology is impacting culture. The physical scale of the work and number of simultaneous clips makes it difficult to absorb any details, resulting in what we now call "information overload," and the visual tension between the static brightness of the neons and the dynamic brightness of the screens points to a similar tension between national and local frames of reference.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** The Crossing      **LOCATION:** American Artist born in NY      **DATE:** 1996 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Bill Viola      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Video Installation      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Video/sound installation

**FORM:**

Bill Viola's *The Crossing* is a room-sized video installation that comprises a large two-sided screen onto which a pair of video sequences is simultaneously projected. This piece is hard to experience as a still image, because its meaning comes from its temporal nature and the changes that occur as the action unfolds. A man appears on a double-sided projection screen, walking in slow motion toward the viewer out of the blackness. He's gradually consumed by flames on one side and by a torrent of water on the other side. When the conflagration and deluge cease—which takes a mere 10 minutes—the man's gone. All that's left is a tiny flickering flame and some drops of water coming from above. Then, the action starts over: the man emerges, the flame and water arrive, and the man is perpetually consumed.

**FUNCTION:**

Viola's *Crossing* is a video/sound installation that engulfs and attempts to transport the viewer into a spiritual realm.

**CONTENT:**

A male figure walks slowly towards the camera, he pauses near the foreground and stands still, a small fire alights below the figure's feet. He stands calm and completely still as his body is immolated, only moving to raise his arms slightly before his body disappears in an inferno of roaring flames. On the opposite screen, the event transpires not with fire but with water. Beginning as a light rainfall, the sporadic drops that shower the figure build up to a surging cascade of water until it subsumes him entirely.

**CONTEXT:**

In this piece the artist simultaneously projects two video channels on separate 16 foot high screens or on the back and front of the same screen. The sound tracks accompany the screenings with audio images of torrential rain and of a raging inferno. The dual videos wash over the viewer with the contrast of cool and hot colors and their encompassing sound.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

It was shot using high-speed film capable of registering 300 frames per second. In postproduction, Viola reduces the speed of playback to an extreme slow motion—further enhancing the level of definition to a dramatic and scrutinizing effect. Viola has been inspired by a rich variety of spiritual traditions, including Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism. As early as the 1970s, Viola was one of the first visual artists to make use of new video technologies. He was exposed to the work of Nam June Paik and Peter Campus, artists who were early innovators in the emerging field of video art. Over the last 20 years, Bill Viola has used video to create metaphors for spiritual phenomena. His video environments immerse the viewer in image and sound; through these works, Viola encourages viewers to contemplate what he sees as the universal truths that form the basis of both Eastern and Western religious traditions.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Viola's use of slow-motion is meant to invite a meditative and contemplative response, one that requires the viewer to concentrate for a longer duration of time and simultaneously to increase his or her own awareness of detail, movement and change.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The elemental forces of fire and water often symbolize change, redemption, transformation and renewal—common themes in Viola's oeuvre. While *The Crossing* can be interpreted in light of a host of religious associations, the act of "self-annihilation" represented in the figure's disappearance at each conclusion also serves as a metaphor for the destruction of the ego. In the artist's words, this action "becomes a necessary means to transcendence and liberation," especially in the face of life's inevitable unpredictability. Like Zen Buddhism and other philosophies of the East, Viola questions the notion of opposites. According to this mindset, things we think of as "opposite"—such as creation and destruction—actually rely on each other for their very meaning and purpose. Critics speak about the spiritual nature of Viola's work, but it is also about the here and now reality of the sensory experiences created by his artform.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"We have to reclaim time itself, wrenching it from the "time is money" maximum efficiency, and make room for it to flow the other way – towards us. We must take time back into ourselves to let our consciousness breathe and our cluttered minds be still and silent. This is what art can do and what museums can be in today's world." —Bill Viola

**TITLE:** Guggenheim Museum **LOCATION:** Bilbao, Spain **DATE:** 1997 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Frank Gehry **PERIOD/STYLE:** deconstructivism/Postmodern architecture **PATRON:** The Basque Government

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Titanium, glass, and limestone

**FORM:**

Arriving visitors cross over concealed railroad tracks and descend through a broad stepped limestone plaza passing from a slender notch into a soaring 165-foot atrium. A complex and somewhat chaotic interior, this twisting glass-and-steel volume combines irregularly-shaped limestone and plaster walls, glazed elevator shafts, and vertigo-inducing catwalks. The central atrium serves as a circulation hub and orientation gallery, providing access to approximately 20 galleries on three levels. While the sequence of “classic” galleries are predictably rectangular, other exhibition spaces have surprising shapes, with angled or curving walls and occasional balconies. Particularly memorable is the so-called “boat gallery.”

**FUNCTION:**

Not only did it provide the Guggenheim with a large exhibition venue for 20th century and contemporary art but it shifted the direction of museum design. With over a hundred exhibitions and more than ten million visitors to its recognition. Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao not only changed the way that architects and people think about museums, but also boosted Bilbao's economy with its astounding success

**CONTENT:**

The plates of titanium that line the exterior are shiny. They reflect the flowing water, making the whole building a dynamic, moving canvas. Fixing clips make a shallow central dent in each of the .38mm titanium tiles, making the surface appear to ripple in the changing light and giving an extraordinary iridescence to the overall composition.

**CONTEXT:**

From the riverside, the building resembles a boat, referencing the Bilbao's past as a shipping and commercial center. This building revitalized the port area of the city. The “Bilbao Effect” refers to the impact that a museum can have on a local economy.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Comparisons to the Guggenheim Museum in New York would be inevitable. Krenn urged Gehry to “make it better than Wright” and the Bilbao museum recalls the earlier building in various subtle ways. From the absence of historical references to the focus on a central rotunda or atrium—albeit in Bilbao on a much larger scale—both architects produced unrestrained modern spaces of great architectural force and energy. Deconstructivism is characterized by the fragmentation of forms and the manipulation of the exterior of the structure to emphasize non-rectangular shapes. In 1997 Frank Gehry transformed architectural design with the use of titanium in the same way that reinforced concrete altered the look of the exterior “skin” of buildings in the 1950's and 60's. His Guggenheim museum in Bilbao, Spain set a new artistic course for Gehry in terms of his own style and nurtured the adaptation of high tech metals by architects worldwide. Because of their mathematical intricacy, the twisting curves were designed using a 3-D design software called CATIA, which allows for complex designs and calculations that would not have been possible a few years ago. Essentially, the software digitizes points on the edges, surfaces, and intersections of Gehry's hand-built models to construct on-screen models that can then be manipulated in the manner of animated cartoons.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Gehry reportedly designed the building from the inside out, focusing on the needs of the individual exhibit spaces first and then melding them all together in a one building, arranging them to create a pleasing form that was less architecture and more sculpture. This flew in the face of years of architectural tradition where the facade and overall exterior aesthetic of a building was prioritized above the interior. When designing the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Frank Gehry worked with digital software used in aviation design to help him create the innovative structure. Gehry's preliminary designs are a hodgepodge of shapes and surfaces and sizes leading in his mind, to the sense that the completed whole will seem more like an “organic city, and less like a single vision project.”, “Breaking it down and making it look like a city it has a sense of belonging and a sense of choice. You're not saying everybody's got to live in the same thing.”

**INTERPRETATION:**

Aided by sophisticated computer software, his most daring projects evoke aspects of the Italian Baroque style. Like the drapery folds that animate some pieces of 17th century figurative sculpture, Gehry's more striking works juxtapose elements that bend, ripple and unfurl. Frank Gehry has referred to his work as “a metallic flower”. Others have found the billowing, curvilinear shapes to be reminiscent of ships, linking the machine tooled structure that is perched on the water's edge to the history of Bilbao as an international seaport.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Deconstructionist: Architecture that seeks to create a seemingly unstable environment with unusual spatial arrangements.

**TITLE:** Pure Land      **LOCATION:** Japanese Artist      **DATE:** 1998 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Mariko Mori      **PERIOD/STYLE:** 3D video installation      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Color photograph on glass

**FORM:**

Set within a golden landscape, a female figure serenely floats above a lotus blossom while six alien musicians whirl by on bubbly clouds. Her pink robes mirror the predominantly pale orange, yellow and pink of the water, land and sky—firmly embedding her within the tranquil scene.

**FUNCTION:**

**CONTENT:**

Pure Land, a photograph set within glass, is the counterpart of Mori's 3D video installation, Nirvana, 1997. Nirvana animates the imagery we see in Pure Land. Viewed within a darkened room with the aid of 3D glasses, Nirvana's audience was limited to a group of 20 people at a time. During the seven minute video, the central female figure would hum and whisper echoed rhythms as if meditating, while the little musicians floated around her. At the conclusion, a fan came on and blew cool, scented air into the audience's faces. Through the integration of sensory elements such as 3D imagery, sound, scent, and the gentle touch of a breeze, combined with the limited viewing audience, Nirvana created an immersive, intimate experience. As its photographic counterpart, Pure Land captures a moment of this experience, enabling the viewer a longer, perhaps more meditative, relationship with the work.

**CONTEXT:**

Pure Land, is the paradise of Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha who descends to greet devotees at the moment of their death and takes them back to his "Pure Land of Perfect Bliss." Amida Buddha, resting on a lotus blossom and holding his hands in a symbolic gesture known as a mudra, is typically surrounded by celestial attendants in a sea of swirling clouds. These attendants are bodhisattvas, enlightened beings who act out of great compassion to help others achieve enlightenment. In Mori's version, these celestial attendants are pastel-colored alien figures with large pointy heads and delicate bodies. The central female figure is the artist herself, wearing an elaborate costume and headdress, both of her own design. In her left hand she holds a hojyu, or magical wishing jewel, in the shape of a lotus bud. This figure is inspired by Kichijoten, originally the Indian goddess, Shri Lakshmi, who was eventually incorporated into Buddhism, and typically represents fertility, fortune, and beauty. A beautiful, elegant woman was seen to embody the ideas of good fortune and prosperity and became an object of worship.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

It is a merging of consumer entertainment fantasies with traditional Japanese imagery.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Moriko poses as if in a vision in the guise of the Heian deity Kichijoten. Kichijoten is the essence of beauty and harbinger of prosperity and happiness. She holds a wish granting jewel, a nyoi hoju, which has the power to deny evil and fulfill wishes. The jewel symbolizes Buddha's universal mind.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Pure Land is set during sunrise in the landscape of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, called "dead" because the high salinity of its water does not support fish or plant life. In Shinto tradition, salt is used as an agent of purification. Floating in the water is a lotus blossom—symbol of purity and rebirth into paradise. On the right hand side of the background of Pure Land is a fantastical object which resembles a playful futuristic spacecraft with arms. This may be a variation of a Tibetan stupa—a sacred Buddhist monument originally used as a burial mound. Through her imaginative reinterpretation of symbols steeped in tradition, the artist creates a timeless setting appropriate for meditation on death, purification, and rebirth.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Lying with the Wolf **LOCATION:** US, New York City **DATE:** 2001 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Kiki Smith **PERIOD/STYLE:** Post Modernism **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Ink and pencil on paper

**FORM:**

Lying with the Wolf is one in a short series of works executed between 2000 and 2002 that illustrates women's relationships with animals, drawing from representations found in visual, literary, and oral histories. The drawing is actually quite large, 7 feet wide by 6 feet tall, so it certainly confronts the viewer with its unusual subject matter.

**FUNCTION:**

**CONTENT:**

The pair as depicted in Lying with the Wolf, however, seems locked in a more intimate embrace, as the wolf nuzzles affectionately into the nude woman's arms.

**CONTEXT:**

Many of Smith's works from this period feature a female protagonist who is based on Little Red Riding Hood as well as Sainte Geneviève, the Patron Saint of Paris. Geneviève is herself often associated with Saint Francis of Assisi because of her close relationships with animals and her ability, in particular, to domesticate wolves.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Smith is most interested in narratives that speak to collectively shared mythologies; Smith imbues a story that is normally quite violent with a kind of tenderness that is characteristic of her overall aesthetic. Kiki Smith is drawn to the natural world, her work is multi media and constantly changing. She makes jewelry, bronze sculpture, drawings, paintings and wall hangings and tapestries in 2D and 3D. She has been influenced by the Apocalypse tapestries in Chateau de Angers. She has made commemorative sculptures for witches that have died on pires, drawings of vampires, figures that represent her "insides", figures of Genevieve with wolves, an entire inventory of images. Her father is the sculptor, Tony Smith.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The artist continuously re-imagines tropes she has used in past works, with the result that her practice does not seem to progress through discrete artistic stages. Rather, she works in cycles and layers; she has described her career as an act of meandering, or "walking around in a garden." The notion of "home" has been central to her practice, and she likens it to the human body, a theme that is pervasive across her oeuvre. Domesticity, fragility, and the humble materials of craft and folk arts feature strongly in her work. Similar to other postmodern artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jeff Koons, and Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith appropriates various sources to feed her creative spirit. Smith has found a treasure trove of material in narratives that refer to shared mythologies such as folk tales, biblical stories, and Victorian literature. She often borrows from these familiar stories, as she does here, subtly referencing Little Red Riding Hood but fragmenting it to create new possibilities of meaning and connection.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Featuring an act of bonding between human and animal, the piece speaks not only to Smith's fascination with and reverence for the natural world, but also her noted interests in religious narratives and mythology, the history of figuration in western art, and contemporary notions of feminine domesticity, spiritual yearning, and sexual identity. Smith's reinterpretations of Red Riding Hood and Sainte Geneviève represent a feminist approach to popular folktales. Because patriarchal societies typically grant more power to men, while requiring women to be submissive or dependent, we can think of this "overturning" in Smith's art as a political statement against such inequalities. The artistic narratives portrayed in her work are ones in which binaries are flipped and opposing qualities are merged; in so doing, Smith asserts a critical feminist position that favors the articulation of multiple meanings. This drawing provokes questions about human nature, intimacy, and the relationship between the female and the wild.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**



**TITLE:** Darkytown Rebellion      **LOCATION:** California born, NY based artist      **DATE:** 2001 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Kara Walker      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Postmodernism      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Cut paper and projection on wall

**FORM:**

Here, a brilliant pattern of colors washes over a wall full of silhouettes enacting a dramatic rebellion. Darkytown Rebellion occupies a 37 foot wide corner of a gallery. Her figures are two-dimensional--often black figures pasted onto white gallery walls--and their flatness seems to echo the stereotyping that prevents people of one background from seeing people of other backgrounds in their full vitality and individualism. Light projections cause shadows of the viewers to cast into the work.

**FUNCTION:**

Kara Walker's work is narrative. The stories that she wishes to tell are grounded in history and imagination. Her installations include imagery of racism, psychological perversion and horror. She attempts to blur the line between fiction and reality, not just an examination of race relations today.

**CONTENT:**

This ensemble, made up of over a dozen characters, plays out a nightmarish scene on a single plane: one figure stands upright over his severed limb, despite his bleeding leg stump, with bones protruding from his hips; another figure, also exhibiting a severed limb, rolls on his back; a woman with a bonnet and voluminous hoop skirt may be attacking a smaller figure on its back, perhaps a crying baby, with a long, plunger-like instrument. An overhead projector in the gallery space casts shadows of the viewers into the works. Making the audience complicit in the scene.

**CONTEXT:**

Walker is a well-rounded multimedia artist, having begun her career in painting and expanded into film as well as works on paper. The layering she achieves with the color projections and silhouettes in Darkytown Rebellion anticipates her later work with shadow puppet films. Silhouettes began as a courtly art form in sixteenth-century Europe and became a suitable hobby for ladies and an economical alternative to painted miniatures, before devolving into a craft in the twentieth century. Traditionally silhouettes were made of the sitter's bust profile, cut into paper, affixed to a non-black background, and framed. The inspiration for her work comes partly from her youth in the deep south.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Darkytown Rebellion reflects on the historical representation of African Americans in American visual culture. From the infamous Brookes slave ship print (1789), to Birth of a Nation (1915) to the Aunt Jemima logo (c.1890-today), powerful visuals shape African-American stereotypes and inform how popular culture perceives this community. Walker is one of several African-American women who use art to engage with and challenge visualizations of race within popular culture. She is influenced by the melodramatic and "paranoid hysteria".

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

By making use of the 16th-century European technique of cut-paper silhouettes, Walker explores stereotypical "forms" that haunt our collective imagination. Her art asks the viewer to stop, look beyond the bright lights that distract and entertain, and be aware that there's always a deeper story. Her work points to stories of racism and sexism in our culture: narratives that shouldn't be hidden, forgotten, or blacked out.

**INTERPRETATION:**

*"I'm not making work about reality; I'm making work about images. I'm making work about fictions that have been handed down to me, and I'm interested in those fictions because I'm an artist, and any sort of attempt at getting at the truth of a thing, you kind of have to wade through these levels of fictions, and that's where the work is coming from."* --Kara Walker The use of cut-paper silhouettes adds meaning to Walker's work by obscuring meaning. We can't really tell who these characters are, what they're doing, or why they're doing it. We can only guess, based on our own cultural biases and any discernible evidence. Interpretations likely vary from person to person, depending on the biases and assumptions they're accustomed to.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** The Swing (after Fragonard). **LOCATION:** British Nigerian Artist **DATE:** 2001 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Yinka Shonibare **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed-media installation

**FORM:**

The Swing (After Fragonard) is a three-dimensional recreation of the Rococo painting after which it was titled, which itself offers testimony to the opulence and frivolity of pre-Revolutionary France.

**FUNCTION:**

His work explores the interactions between European and African culture and the impact of Imperialism, especially in former British colonies.

**CONTENT:**

The piece is inspired by the Swing by Fragonard. The two men from the original painting are missing. The audience takes the place of the men; erotic voyeurism. Shonibare's art considers social class and aesthetics, and is characterized by recurring visual symbols such as "Dutch wax" fabric since the mid-1990s.

**CONTEXT:**

Painted in 1767, Jean-Honoré Fragonard's The Swing depicts a coquettish young girl swinging in a lush and fertile forest and, of course, playfully kicking up her shoe. A sculpture of a bashful cherub looks on, but he is not alone; the female figure is flanked by two male figures lurking in the shadows, one seems to push her swing from behind, as the other mischievously glances up the layers of her dress to catch a glimpse of what is beneath. The patterns on Dutch Wax fabrics were originally based on motifs found in Indonesian batiks, and were manufactured in England and Holland in the nineteenth-century. Predictably, the European imitations did not prove lucrative when sold in South Asian markets, so Dutch manufacturers then marketed the textiles to their West African colonies, where they have since been appropriated and integrated into local visual culture.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

he was stricken with transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spinal cord. This illness left him paralyzed on one side of his body. However, his disability didn't stop him from becoming an artist. He employs others to realize his artistic ideas for him, thus taking the term "conceptual artist" to new heights. He's been confined to a wheelchair in recent years, but this hasn't stifled his creativity. Throughout his career, Shonibare has explored many different media including painting, sculpture, photography, installation art, film, and performance art. Shonibare is a contemporary artist who's very conscious of globalization. His art often deals with colonialism, race, and class. As his installation The Swing attests, European and non-European traditions can inform each other and merge to create new meanings. He describes himself as a "post-colonial" hybrid, and, as his use of the Dutch "African" fabric indicates, he looks beyond the expected when it comes to cultural identity and definition.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

In imaging this particular moment in European history, Shonibare wishes to forge connections between imperialism, the aristocracy, and the "colonized wealthy class." In The Swing (After Fragonard), which is loaded with references to the French Revolution, the Age of Enlightenment and colonial expansion into Africa, Shonibare asks us to consider how a simple act of leisure can be so controversial. His use of the Dutch Wax fabric, with its spurious origins and its misleading aesthetic identity, serve as a reminder that history and truth are also themselves constructions. The fabric is actually Dutch-made, so it's neither truly African nor truly Dutch. The artist is drawn to this cultureless fabric because it suggests that all culture is a construct, something we should transcend as we become more global in our thinking, art, and relationships with the world.

**INTERPRETATION:**

the beautiful young protagonist of Fragonard's painting has somehow become headless. This is likely a reference to the use of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in the 1790s, when members of the French aristocracy were publicly beheaded. Shonibare invites us to also consider the increasing disparity between economic classes today, especially alongside the growing culture of paranoia, terror and xenophobia in global politics since 9/11. Dutch Wax fabrics as we know them today are the product of the complex economic and cultural entanglements that resulted from European imperialism. Their symbolism is steeped in histories of cultural appropriation, imperialism and power.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"My depiction of it is a way of engaging in that power. It is actually an expression of something much more profoundly serious insofar as the accumulation of wealth and power that is personified in leisure was no doubt a product of exploiting people." --Shonibare  
Shonibare was awarded a Member of Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2005, an award that he accepted with some irony, given the critical focus of his work for over a decade.

**TITLE:** Old Man's Cloth **LOCATION:** Ghana, Africa **DATE:** 2003 C.E.

**ARTIST:** El Anatsui **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Aluminum and copper wire

**FORM:**

1000 drink tops joined by wire to form a cloth-like hanging. The bottle caps originated in a distillery in Nigeria.

**FUNCTION:**

Old Man's Cloth turns something associated with Europe (and its unjust treatment of African people through the slave trade and colonial rule) into something beautiful. His creation doesn't erase the injury, but it does transform the suffering into something else: Art.

**CONTENT:**

He combines aesthetic traditions of his home country of Ghana, his adopted country of Nigeria, and the global art movement of abstract art. Names such as Chairman, Dark Sailor, and King Salomon are printed on the labels—words that evoke and relate to the history of liquor imports by Europeans from the West Indies to Africa. The bottles recall the colonial trade in slaves and commodities.

**CONTEXT:**

Anatsui's Old Man's Cloth is inspired in part by kente cloth, the royal and ceremonial strip-woven cloth made by the Asante and Ewe people of Ghana and Togo. This kind of cloth is woven in small, rectangular strips pieced together in geometric patterns. The cloth is made into clothing for important individuals for royal and ceremonial occasions. However, El Anatsui's cloth has a different purpose: It's not made to be worn, it's made to be pondered. By combining a trade good, caps from imported bottles of liquor, and the tradition of manufacturing kente cloth, El Anatsui sheds light on the influence of outsiders on African culture. Anatsui's eye is also on the consumerist drive of globalization and economic imbalances that leave Africa in crushing poverty and its people seeking solace in drink.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

El Anatsui is world renowned for his transformation artwork. The artist uses power tools like chain saws and welding torches. He converts found materials into a new type of media that lies someplace between painting and sculpture. El Anatsui merges traditional art with contemporary practice, local events with global economies, and historical narratives with the present moment. In unexpected ways, he transforms the detritus of contemporary life into compelling works of beauty and multiple meanings.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

El Anatsui acknowledges that others from the village have helped in a collaborative approach to completing his work. Textiles are traditionally a communal project in Ghana. He uses gold in his work to add a sense of royal reverence and authority. The material is recycled foils from liquor bottles to connect the meaning to the practice of offering libations to the ancestors.

**INTERPRETATION:**

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Sunsum: an aura or an energy, an electricity, a sort of vitality that gets transferred in to objects that people handle most often.

**TITLE:** Stadia II      **LOCATION:** Ethiopian in New York      **DATE:** 2004 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Julie Mehretu      **PERIOD/STYLE:** Postmodernism      **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Ink and acrylic on canvas

**FORM:**

In her monumental paintings, murals, and works on paper, Julie Mehretu overlays architectural plans, diagrams, and maps of the urban environment with abstract forms and personal notations. The resulting compositions convey the energy and chaos of today's globalized world. *Stadia II* is on a very large canvas, 9 feet tall by 12 feet wide. It's filled with swirling black lines and geometric shapes like diamonds, parallelograms, and ovals in an array of bright colors. A white background hosts all this wild geometric activity. The swirl creates a kind of vortex, as though the viewer has stepped into the middle of a tornado of forms.

**FUNCTION:**

*Stadia II* is part of a triptych of works created in 2004, and explores themes such as nationalism and revolution as they occur in the worlds of art, sports, and contemporary politics.

**CONTENT:**

She's known for her large-scale paintings that feature various architectural elements such as columns, facades, and porticoes that are overlaid with maps, floor plans, architectural renderings, and other geographical schemes. She invents structures that seem to be "blown apart," in order, perhaps, for us to learn how to put the world back together. Her art is abstract, yet it expresses place; a place that doesn't exist except in the mind of the artist. Stylized renderings of stadium architecture. Multi layered lines create animation in the work. Sweeping lines create depth, focus of attention around a central core from which colors, icons, flags, and symbols resonate.

**CONTEXT:**

Julie Mehretu's work is about layers: the physical layering of images, marks, and mediums, and the figurative layering of time, space, place, and history. Working in a large scale, Mehretu draws on the 21st-century city for inspiration, transferring its energy into her gestural sweeps of paint and built-up marks in ink and pencil—often transposed from projections—and condensing seemingly infinite urban narratives, architectural views, and street plans into single unified compositions. "The narratives come together to create this overall picture that you see from the distance," she says. "As you come close to it [...] the big picture completely shatters and there are these numerous small narratives happening." Mehretu layers a range of influences and art historical references as well, from the dynamism espoused by the Futurists, to the scale and physicality of Abstract Expressionism, to the divergent markmaking of Albrecht Dürer, Eastern calligraphy, and graffiti.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Take a look at the orange diamonds at the side edges, the black quadrilaterals interspersed above, or the dynamic red "X" found at the top edge. These lines and shapes are unmistakable references to the Russian constructivist and Bauhaus movements of the early twentieth century, and to artists such as Alexandr Rodchenko, Kasimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Wassily Kandinsky. These artists conceived of pure abstraction as a way to wipe clean the slate of history and to promote universalism and collectivity in art, politics and culture. Mehretu has long explored the use of abstraction in service of revolution and utopian politics throughout the history of Modernist art, "I am (...) interested in what Kandinsky referred to in 'The Great Utopia' when he talked about the inevitable implosion and/or explosion of our constructed spaces out of the sheer necessity of agency. So, for me, the coliseum, the amphitheater, and the stadium are perfect metaphoric constructed spaces." These can represent both the organized sterility of institutions and the "chaos, violence, and disorder" of revolution and mass gathering.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

We may also find corporate logos and religious symbols interspersed throughout; Mehretu is intentional in drawing analogies between these forms and the propagandistic ways in which they are often used.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The artist describes her final product as containing a "stratified, tectonic geology (...) with the characters themselves buried—as if they were fossils." This distinct sense of temporality serves as a metaphor for history, memory, and the legacies of past cultural epochs that still influence contemporary life. The dynamism of the work makes reference to traffic patterns, wind and water currents, migrations, border crossings and travel.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Preying Mantra **LOCATION:** Kenya born artist in NY **DATE:** 2006 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Wangechi Mutu **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Feminism/Contemporary Postmodernist **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Mixed media on Mylar

**FORM:**

In Mutu's *Preying Mantra*, a female creature appears to recline on a geometrically patterned blanket that is sprawled between trees or perhaps on a tree branch. The blanket resembles a Kuba cloth (traditional fabric created by the Kuba people). Legs tightly crossed in front of her, the figure stares suggestively at the viewer with her right hand positioned behind her head, which is surmounted by a cone-like crown. Her relaxed posture is camouflaged by her skin, which appears dappled by sunlight and which mirrors the colors of the tree's leaves.

**FUNCTION:**

Commentary on the female persona in Art History.

**CONTENT:**

Green snake interlocks with her fingers; bird feathers in the back of the head. Left ear lobe has chicken feet, insect legs, and pinchers.

**CONTEXT:**

Colonialism in Africa, which began in earnest in the nineteenth century, violently wrested power from Africans for the benefit of European nations through the enforcement of strict military and administrative controls. As colonialism waned during the mid-twentieth century, other social and political issues emerged. Mutu's work was shaped by this complex history and by issues such as the rights of women that came to the fore at the end of the century. Much of Mutu's work concerns hybridity, which looks at how the cultures of the colonized and the colonizer mix to create a new cultural identity. European colonial rule began in Africa in the 19th century, then waned in the mid-20th when other social and political forces took over. Mutu's work evolved out of this complex post-colonial history and investigates how it still impacts African women all over the globe. The title *Preying Mantra*, recalls the praying mantis—an insect that resembles the protagonist in Mutu's collage, with her prominently bent legs. As a carnivorous insect, praying mantises camouflage themselves to match their environment, snaring their prey with their enormous legs. During mating, the female can become a sexual cannibal—eating her submissive mate.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Sources for Mutu's collages include fragments from fashion magazines, pornography, medical literature or even popular magazines such as *National Geographic*. Inspiration for her collages can be traced to the early photomontages of the German Dada artist Hannah Hoch and the American artist Romare Bearden. Mutu appreciates Bearden's use of collage—how it emphasizes community and the African American traditions found in jazz, while the spliced images in Hoch's photomontages reflect Mutu's interest in disrupting societal convention in art.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Wangechi Mutu's artistic practice includes video, installation, sculpture, and mixed-media collage. One of her recurrent themes concerns the violence of colonial domination in Africa (particularly in her native Kenya). Her images incorporate the female body, specifically an imagined "African" body, subjected to sexism and racism on a global scale. She invites us to explore stereotypes about the African female body as explicitly sexual, dangerous, and aesthetically deformed in relation to Western standards. She's well-known for merging organic, human, and machine forms together in collages.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Her art is global in nature and she clearly relishes complicating both Western and non-Western cultural norms; questioning how we see gender, sexuality, and even cultural identity. Mutu creates a space for exploring an informed consciousness about being "African" and female that incorporate these artists' techniques yet develops a new visual vocabulary. *Preying Mantra* centers on female subjectivity, exoticism and the notion of hybridity—both in concept and imagery. Like the female body, the tree is emblematic of the creation myths found in many cultures, including Mutu's *Kikuyu* ancestors in Kenya. In her left hand, the figure holds a green serpent that rests on the blanket which fills much of the scene. The serpent, linked with the role of Eve in the biblical creation narrative, provides yet another cultural source for Mutu's protagonist. The tree envelops the female figure reinforcing links between history and fiction, African and Non-African cultural myths as well as natural versus unnatural phenomena.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Hybridity is a concept often used in postcolonial studies. It describes how the mixing the cultures of colonized and the colonizer—can produce a third space for newer and often disruptive understanding of cultural identity.

<https://wangechimutu.com/>



**TITLE:** Shibboleth **LOCATION:** Columbian born artist, this piece was at the Tate Modern in London **DATE:** 2007-2008 C.E.  
**ARTIST:** Doris Salcedo **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:**

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Installation

**FORM:**

The rupture measures 548 feet in length but its width and depth vary (changing from a slight opening to one several inches wide and up to two feet in depth). The viewer's perception into the crevice alters, as he or she walks and shifts to better glimpse inside the cracks and appreciate the interior space, notably the wire mesh embedded along the sides. The crack begins as a hairline, and extends to 2 feet in depth.

**FUNCTION:**

For Salcedo, the crack represents a history of racism, running parallel to the history of modernity; a stand off between rich and poor, northern and southern hemispheres. She invites us to look down into it, and to confront discomfiting truths about our world. Salcedo is addressing a long legacy of racism and colonialism that underlies the modern world.

**CONTENT:**

The floor of the museum was opened up and a casting of Columbian rocks was inserted. The Times of London reported that 15 people suffered minor injuries in the first eight weeks after "Shibboleth" opened in October in the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern's vast signature space.

**CONTEXT:**

Shibboleth is meant to exclude certain people from a group. It is a word of custom that a person not familiar with a language may mispronounce; it is used to identify foreigners or people of another class. The word 'shibboleth' refers back to an incident in the Bible, which describes how the Ephraimites, attempting to flee across the river Jordan, were stopped by their enemies, the Gileadites. As their dialect did not include a 'sh' sound, those who could not say the word 'shibboleth' were captured and executed. A shibboleth is therefore a token of power: the power to judge, reject and kill. "Shibboleth is a piece that refers to dangers at crossing borders or to being rejected in the moment of crossing borders. So I am making a piece about people who have been exposed to extreme experience of racial hatred and subjected to inhuman conditions in the first world."

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Salcedo's act remains transgressive: the act of deliberately breaking one's media (in this case a concrete floor) is an act of rebellion. In this way, Shibboleth joins a tradition of artists experimenting with surface.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

For Salcedo, the ravine in the Tate Modern's floor represents the immigrant experience in Europe, notably the racial segregation that marks people from the third-world as irrevocably "other," a permanent state apart. Yet, the artist offers some hope. After seven months, the show ended and the Tate Modern filled the crack, leaving a scarred floor. This is a remarkable symbol of the possibility of healing through figurative and literal closure; however, the mark is also an obstacle to any attempts to erase the past.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Salcedo has offered few explanations beyond stating how the fissure represents the immigrant experience in Europe. the sinister history of the word "shibboleth" illustrates how friends and enemies are separated by fine, linguistic lines. Any stranger in a foreign land appreciates the vulnerability this entails, especially the fear of being outed as a foreigner and exposed in a hostile environment. Salcedo's reticence to discuss her process and meaning at length is our opportunity to develop infinite interpretations. According to the artist herself, this 548-foot crack in the gallery floor "represents borders, the experience of immigrants, the experience of segregation, the experience of racial hatred. It is the experience of a Third World person coming into the heart of Europe."

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

"We should all see the world from the perspective of the victim, like Jewish people that were killed with their head down in the Middle Ages. So he wonders, what is the perspective of a person that is agonizing in this position?" Theodor Adorno "Shibboleth," a codeword that distinguishes people who belong from those who do not. A shibboleth is a belief, principle, or practice that's commonly adhered to in a certain culture but is thought by some people to be inappropriate or out-of-date.

**TITLE:** MAXXI National Museum of Contemporary Arts **LOCATION:** Rome, Italy (An Iraqi-British architect) **DATE:** 2009 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Zaha Hadid **PERIOD/STYLE:** Contemporary Architecture **PATRON:** Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Glass, steel, and cement

**FORM:**

Internal spaces are covered by a glass roof, natural light is admitted to the interior filtered by louvered blinds. Walls flow and melt into one another, creating new and dynamic interior spaces.

**FUNCTION:**

Two museums, MAXXI Art and MAXXI Architecture, a library, auditorium and cafeteria. With its soaring spaces and curving walkways, it's a space well suited to serve as an exhibition space for 21st-century art. The galleries flow from one to the next and are connected by stairways and hallways that are giant sculptures in their own right. The space is designed to handle any sort of installation or exhibition rule-breaking postmodern artists might try to throw at it. As declared by the architect, the museum is 'not a object-container, but rather a campus for art', where flows and pathways overlap and connect in order to create a dynamic and interactive space.

**CONTENT:**

Contemporary arts of the 21st century are displayed here. The first Italian museum dedicated to the art of today. Of course MAXXI Art and MAXXI Architecture regularly host exhibits, in addition to serving as spaces for artistic experimentation and weekly workshops, conferences, performances, projections and educational labs.

**CONTEXT:**

Hadid began to be known as a "paper architect," meaning her designs were too avant-garde to move beyond the sketch phase and actually be built. This impression of her was heightened when her beautifully rendered designs—often in the form of exquisitely detailed coloured paintings—were exhibited as works of art in major museums. Hadid further explored her interest in creating interconnecting spaces and a dynamic sculptural form of architecture. In 2010 Hadid's boldly imaginative design for the MAXXI museum of contemporary art and architecture in Rome earned her the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stirling Prize for the best building by a British architect completed in the past year.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

This building is reminiscent of the international style, and the work of people like Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe. There are also columns that refer to ancient Greco Roman Tradition and to modernist structures like the Villa Savoye. The use of concrete connects to its origins in Rome. She draws inspiration from modernism, constructivism, Russian painters like Malevich, and early 20th century utopianism. She was also influenced by the Samarra mosque's minaret. Like the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao designed by Frank Gehry, Hadid's MAXXI is another example of a contemporary building that makes architecture an art form.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

"My first idea was about a delta where the mainstreams become the galleries and minor ones become bridges which connect to them." -Hadid

**INTERPRETATION:**

To say she divides opinion is to put it mildly. To some, including several fellow architects that I spoke to, she is a tyrant; her work is "unbelievably arrogant" and "oppressive; I don't believe she cares what it's like actually to be in one of her buildings". To others she's a genius, and a hero, the only ground common to all these views being a remark once made by her mentor, Rem Koolhaas, that she is "a planet in her own inimitable orbit". The truth is that she is all these things, and more.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

In 2004 she became the first woman to be awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize. In 2012 she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE).

**TITLE:** Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds). **LOCATION:** Chinese artist working in the Tate Modern in London **DATE:** 2010-2011 C.E.

**ARTIST:** Ai Weiwei **PERIOD/STYLE:** Global Contemporary **PATRON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Sculpted and Painted porcelain

**FORM:**

Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds) consists of more than 100 million tiny, handmade porcelain sunflower seeds, originally weighing in at 150 tons. They filled the enormous Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, an industrial building-turned-contemporary art space.

**FUNCTION:**

Ai Weiwei often uses his art to critique political and economic injustice. Each seed to represent an ocean of fathomless depth. Also to represent the people of China as per the dogma of Chairman Mao's that the people were the Sunflowers and he was the Sun.

**CONTENT:**

100 million porcelain sunflower seeds.

**CONTEXT:**

Sunflower seeds evokes a warm personal memory for the artist, who recalls that while he was growing up, even the poorest in China would share sunflower seeds as a treat among friends. Communist propaganda optimistically depicted leader Mao Zedong as the sun and the citizens of the People's Republic of China as sunflowers, turning toward their chairman. Ai Weiwei reasserts the sunflower seed as a symbol of camaraderie during difficult times. More than 1,600 artisans worked to make the individual porcelain seeds by hand in Jingdezhen, the city known as the "Porcelain Capital," where artists have been producing pottery for nearly 2000 years. Porcelain, first produced during the Han dynasty in about 200 B.C.E. and later mastered during the Tang dynasty, is made by heating white clay (kaolin) to a temperature over 1200 degrees Celsius. The fusion of the particles within the clay during firing allowed artists to create vessels with thin but strong walls. Porcelain—a symbol of imperial culture in China—was also made for export via the Silk Road and became important to the creation of the idea of China in the West.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Ai Wei Wei is intentionally provocative. He uses Social media to share, present and question issues of antiquity, traditional values, how we memorialize our past, and what we honor. One of China's leading conceptual artists, Ai is known for his social or performance-based interventions as well as object-based artworks. Citing Marcel Duchamp, he refers to himself as a 'readymade', merging his life and art in order to advocate both the freedoms and responsibilities of individuals. 'From a very young age I started to sense that an individual has to set an example in society', he has said. 'Your own acts and behavior tell the world who you are and at the same time what kind of society you think it should be.'

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

It was important to Ai Wei Wei to use artisans in the village of Jingdezhen because it was the city known for its porcelain production since Imperial China. He also insisted on using traditional methods, and paid each craftsman for their work. As material for his art, he draws upon the society and politics of contemporary China as well as cultural artifacts such as ancient Neolithic vases and traditional Chinese furniture, whose function and perceived value he challenges and subverts. Although Weiwei originally intended for viewers to be able to interact with the piece (yay giant ball pit!), eventually they were restricted to looking out over the roomful of seeds from a few vantage points when the curators realized that the seeds emitted a dust that could be harmful if inhaled for an extended period time.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The individual seed is lost among the millions, a critique of the conformity and censorship inherent in modern China. Sunflower Seeds asks us to examine how our consumption of foreign-made goods affects the lives of others across the globe. This combination of mass production and traditional craftsmanship invites us to look more closely at the 'Made in China' phenomenon and the geopolitics of cultural and economic exchange today.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Ai Weiwei was arrested at the Beijing Capital International Airport on April 3, 2011 during his Tate exhibition.[1] He was detained for 81 days. The artist, along with many in the international community, asserted that his true offense was his political activism for democracy and human rights. Mr. Ai had blogged for four years—investigating cover-ups and corruption in the government's handling of a devastating 2008 earthquake in Sichuan and the country's hosting of the Olympics. Ai Weiwei's blog was shut down in 2009. Since then, he has turned to Twitter and Instagram. During his detention, the international community, including major US art institutions, rallied for his release. Officials eventually released him, charging Ai Weiwei with tax evasion, but his passport was withheld, preventing him from leaving the country for four years. It was returned in 2015.