CHAPTEr 1

The Nature of Art and Creativity
Learning Objectives

1. Describe art as means of visual expression using different media and forms.
2. Show human creativity as an inherent trait that inspires the production of art.
3. Demonstrate the diverse intellectual, cultural, and skills backgrounds of artists.
4. Distinguish form and meaning in visual analysis.
5. Define the terms representational, abstract, nonrepresentational, and iconography used to discuss art.
Introduction

• The ability to create is a special characteristic of humans.
  ▪ Art as common experience
• Janet Echelman, *Her Secret Is Patience*
  ▪ Large, distinctive public artwork in Phoenix, Arizona
  ▪ Inspired by saguaro cactus
  ▪ Artistic creation as a two-way street
Fiber, steel, and lightning. Height 100' with a top diameter of 100'. 
[Fig. 1-1]
What Is Art?

- Generally refers to:
  - Music
  - Theater
  - Literature
  - Visual arts
    - Including drawing, painting, sculpture, film, architecture, and design
- Communicates meaning beyond verbal exchange
What Is Art?

- **Work of art**
  - The visual expression of an idea or experience, formed with skill, through the use of a medium.

- **Medium**
  - A particular material along with its accompanying technique (pl. *media*)
What Is Art?

• **Medium**
  - Chosen by artist to enforce the function of the work
    - Echelman's use of flexible netting that responds to wind
  - Traditional or modern materials
  - **Mixed media**
    - Describes art created with a combination of materials
What Is Creativity?

- The ability to bring forth something new that has value
  - Relevance or new way of thinking
  - Not a novelty
- Potential to influence future thought or action
What Is Creativity?

• Five traits that define creativity
  1. Associating
  2. Questioning
  3. Observing
  4. Networking
  5. Experimenting

• Visual creativity
  ▪ Use of imagery to communicate beyond words
What Is Creativity?

- Robin Rhode
  - *He Got Game*
    - Low-tech chalk drawing of a basketball hoop
    - Artist imitates slow-motion photography and performs an impossible flip
  - *Prevalence of Ritual: Tidings*
    - **Photomontage**
      - Suggests Christian Annunciation
Twelve color photographs.
Lehmann Maupin, New York and Hong Kong © Robin Rhode. [Fig. 1-2]
Romare Bearden. *Prevalence of Ritual: Tidings*. 1967. Photomontage. 36" × 48". © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. [Fig. 1-3]
Forming Art

• Romare Bearden, 1911–88
  ▪ Jazz
    • Musical spacing and structure
    • Relationship between color and melody
  ▪ Memory
    • African-American roots in his work
    • Childhood in North Carolina
    • Fascination with the idea of homecoming
Romare Bearden.
Bernard Brown & Associates. [Fig. 1-4]
Collage on board. 13" × 9-1/4".
© Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. [Fig. 1-5]
What Is Creativity?

• Trained and untrained artists
  ▪ Training
    • In the past, via apprenticeships
    • Today, in art schools and/or colleges and universities
    • Not always necessary
  ▪ **Folk artists**
    • Naïve or **outsider artists** with little or no formal training
What Is Creativity?

- Trained and untrained artists
  - *Nuestro Pueblo (Our Town)*
    - Use of cast-off materials
    - Towers built without power tools, rivets, welds, or bolts
  - Philadelphia Wireman
    - Unknown creator, likely male
    - More than a thousand-sized sculptures of small objects wrapped in wire
Sabatino "Simon" Rodia. *Nuestro Pueblo*, distant view. 1921–1954. Mixed media. Height 100'. Watts, California. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 1-6a]
Sabatino "Simon" Rodia.

*Nuestro Pueblo*, detail of enclosing wall with construction tool impressions. 1921–1954. Mixed media. Height 100'.

Watts, California. Photograph: Duane Preble. [Fig. 1-6b]
Watch face, bottle cap, nail, drawing on paper, and wire. 7" × 3-1/2" × 2-1/4".
Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. [Fig. 1-7]
What Is Creativity?

- Trained and untrained artists
  - Retablo paintings in Mexico and the American Southwest
    - Giving thanks to God
  - Children
    - Intuitive sense of composition
    - Depict world symbolically until about age 6
    - Begin to doubt creativity by age 9/10
Retablo. 1915.
Paint on tin. 9" × 11".
Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole. [Fig. 1-8]
Alana, age 3. *Grandma.*
[Fig. 1-9]
Art and Reality

- **Representational art**
  - Depicts the appearance of things
- **Figurative art**
  - When human form is the primary subject
- **Subjects**
  - Objects depicted in representational art
  - "Real"-looking paintings in the French *trompe l'oeil* style, lit. "fool the eye"
    - *A Smoke Backstage*
Oil on canvas. 7" × 8-1/2".
Honolulu Museum of Art, Gift of John Wyatt Gregg Allerton, 1964. (32111). [Fig. 1-10]
Art and Reality

- **Representational art**
  - Magritte's *La Trahison des Images (Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe)*
    - Viewer may wonder "if it's not a pipe, what is it?"
    - Answer: it is a painting.
  - Beldner's *This is Definitely Not a Pipe*
    - Complicated relationship between art and reality
René Magritte. *La Trahison des Images (Ceci N'est Pas une Pipe)*. 1929.
Oil on canvas. 25-3/8" × 37".
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). Purchased Mr. and Mrs. William Preston Harrison Collection (78.7). Digital Image Museum Associates/Art Resource NY/Scala, Florence © 2013 C. Herscovici, London/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 1-11]
Sewn US currency. 24” × 33”.
Courtesy of the artist. [Fig. 1-12]
Art and Reality

- **Abstract art**
  - Works that have no reference at all to natural objects
  - Works that depict natural objects in simplified, distorted, or exaggerated ways
    - May be obvious to viewer or may need a verbal clue
  - Common in many cultures
Art and Reality

• **Abstract art**
  - Chief's stool from Cameroon
    - People representing the community that supports the chief
  - *Abstraction of a Cow*
    - van Doesburg's exploration of how far he could simplify a cow while still capturing its essence
Chief's stool. Late 19th–early 20th century. Wood plant fibre. Height 16-1/2". Western Grasslands, Cameroon. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Photograph by Don Cole. [Fig. 1-13]
Pencil on paper. 4-5/8" × 6-1/4".
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Purchase 227.1948.1. © 2013 Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 1-14a]

Pencil on paper. 4-5/8" × 6-1/4".

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Purchase 227.1948.6. © 2013 Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 1-14b]
Theo van Doesburg (born C. E. M. Küpper). Composition (The Cow) from Abstraction of a Cow. c. 1917.

Theo van Doesburg (born C. E. M. Küpper). *Composition VIII (The Cow)* from *Abstraction of a Cow*. c. 1918.

Oil on canvas. 14-1/4" × 25".

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Purchase 225.1948. © 2013 Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 1-14d]
Art and Reality

• Nonrepresentational art
  - Nonobjective or nonfigurative art
  - Presents visual forms with no specific references to anything outside themselves
    • As in pure sound forms of music
Art and Reality

• **Nonrepresentational art**
  - Two-color pattern in Thomas's *Gray Night Phenomenon*
    - Neither gray nor night-like
    - Depicts a mood
  - Maori women's geometric *tukutuku* panels
    - Rich and varied texture
  - Learning to "read" visual language
Acrylic on canvas. 68-7/8" × 53-1/8".
Photograph Smithsonian American Art Museum/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. [Fig. 1-15]
Maori peoples, New Zealand. *Tukutuku* panels. 1930s. Dyed, plaited flax strips over wood laths. Dimensions variable. Te Whare Runanga, Maori Meeting House, New Zealand. Photograph: David Wall/Alamy. [Fig. 1-16]
Looking and Seeing

• Looking
  ▪ Implies taking in what is before us in a mechanical or goal-oriented way

• Seeing
  ▪ More open, receptive, and focused
  ▪ "Looking" with memories, imaginations, and feelings attached
  ▪ Appreciation of a form beyond function
Looking and Seeing

- Ordinary becomes extraordinary
  - Edward Weston's *Pepper #30*
    - Quality of glowing light from a time exposure of over two hours
    - Seemingly common object elevated to represent the artist's achievements
    - Sense of wonder about the natural world
  - The process of seeing is different for every person.
Photograph.
Photograph by Edward Weston. Collection Center for Creative Photography. © 1981 Arizona Board of Regents. [Fig. 1-17]
Form and Content

- **Form**
  - Total effect of the combined visual qualities within a work
  - Includes materials, color, shape, line, and design

- **Content**
  - The message or meaning of a work of art
  - What the artist expresses to viewer
Form and Content

• Contrasting Rodin's *The Kiss* and Brancusi's *The Kiss*
  - Rodin's work representational of Western ideals
    • Highly-charged moment of lovers embracing
  - Brancusi's manipulation of a solid block of stone to represent lasting love
    • Symbolic concept of two becoming one
Marble. 5' 11-1/4".
Musée Rodin, Paris. RMN-Grand Palais/Agence Bulloz. [Fig. 1-18]
Limestone. 23" × 13" × 10".
Photo The Philadelphia Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. [Fig. 1-19]
Form and Content

• Seeing and responding to form
  ▪ The artist is the sender of the work's message.
  ▪ The viewer must receive and experience the work.
    • Learning to respond to form
  ▪ Subject matter can interfere with perception of form.
Form and Content

• Seeing and responding to form
  - Look at pictures upside down.
    - Unfamiliar becomes fresh
    - Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jack-in-the-Pulpit*
      - Enlarged to 4 feet in height
      - Focusing on only the flower
      - Viewer takes time to observe an object that would normally be too small or be passed over
Oil on canvas. 48" × 30".
Alfred Stieglitz Collection, Bequest of Georgia O'Keeffe, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1987.58.4. Photograph: Malcolm Varon © 2013 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Fig. 1-20]
Form and Content

- **Iconography**
  - Subjects, symbols, and motifs used in an image to convey its meaning
    - Mother and child as Mary and baby Jesus
  - Not all works contain iconography.
Form and Content

• Iconography
  - The Virgin of Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory
    • Christian iconography
      • Winged figures as angels
      • God holding the orb of the world
      • Holy Spirit as a dove
      • Mary wearing crown
      • Cross signifying Christ
      • Scapular garment
Circle of Diego Quispe Tito.
*The Virgin of the Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory*. Late 17th century.
Oil on canvas. 41" × 29".
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York/The Bridgeman Art Library. [Fig. 1-21]
Form and Content

• Iconography
  ▪ Asian traditions
  • Amida Buddha
    • Long earlobes representing life as wealthy prince who wore heavy earrings
    • Simple garment
    • Hands folded in meditation
    • Lotus flower
      - Symbolizes that enlightenment can come in the midst of life
Amida Buddha. 12th century.
Wood with traces of lacquer, pigment, and gilding. Height 52-1/2".
Japan. The Avery Brundage Collection, B60S10+ © Asian Art Museum, San Francisco. Used by permission. [Fig. 1-22]
Form and Content

• Iconography
  ▪ Popular Culture
    • Alexis Smith, *Black 'n' Blue (for Howie Long)*
      • Howie Long, a defensive lineman in the NFL
      • His most famous statement on an artist's palette with a photo of wrestlers and weapons

Photo by Douglas Parker. Courtesy of the artist and Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles. [Fig. 1-23]