



Understanding

ART

Lois Fichner-Rathus

Eleventh Edition

Understanding Art

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Lois Fichner-Rathus

THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY



Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

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Lois Fichner-Rathus

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The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art* is dedicated to Allyn, Jordan, Taylor, and March.



< SARAH SZE, *Second Means of Egress* (1998). Mixed media installation view. Berlin Biennial, Akademie der Künste, Germany.

ABOUT THE COVER

Understanding Art has a track record of visually compelling covers that have encompassed, in a single, dynamic image, my concept for a particular edition, as well as the essence of my perspective as an author. My approach to art appreciation has always emphasized equally the visual elements and the history of art, provided a balance between the historical and the contemporary, and aimed to represent the world of art and culture as it truly is—one of diversity.

The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art* brings to this ongoing methodology a vital new dimension to acquiring information and engaging in critical dialogue about the arts and society. The eleventh edition is about seamless connections made possible with its accompanying MindTap® program—connections, importantly, between the text and the instructor’s own indispensable materials; between the text and Cengage’s exceptional digital resources; between the text and the world of electronic media.

And so it is that the eleventh edition features Sarah Sze’s *Second Means of Egress* on its cover. To encounter a work by Sze is not to observe but rather to engage; to be an active participant rather than a passive spectator; to generate rather than simply to receive. Her emphasis on themes of interconnectivity and sustainability, along with what has been called a “mutable quality—as if anything could happen, or not,” captures, for me, key aspects of successful learning: spontaneity, flexibility, accessibility, communicability.

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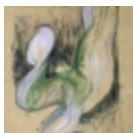
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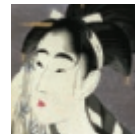
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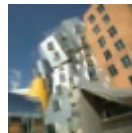
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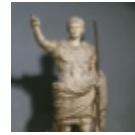
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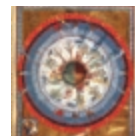
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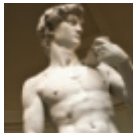
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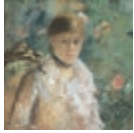
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PREFACE

There are two ways of looking at things. One is simply looking at them, whereas the other involves considering them attentively. Merely to see is nothing else than receiving into the eye the form or likeness of the object that is looked at; but to consider a thing is more like this: it is to seek with special diligence after the means of knowing this object thoroughly.

—NICOLAS POUSSIN

HERE WE ARE, together embarking on the study of art and art history between the covers of a book called *Understanding Art*. A textbook on art is unlike a textbook in other academic disciplines. Yes, there is a special vocabulary of art. Yes, this vocabulary is woven into a language that, once learned, enables us to better verbalize the visual. But the most important aspect of an art book is its images, because a student's journey toward understanding art ought to always begin with looking.

Think of this art appreciation textbook as your “*i*-book”—it begins with looking at images. Having said that, *learning to look* is equally important for art appreciation, and that's where some other “*i*-words” play an important role: information, insight, and interpretation. We gather information about how a work of art is conceived and constructed using the visual elements of art, principles of design, composition, content, style, and symbolism. We explore the motives of artists and the historical, social, political, and personal contexts in which a work of art came into existence. These investigations lend insight into the complex factors contributing to the creation of works of art. In short, we progress beyond *looking* (using the eye passively to recognize the existence of an object) to *seeing* (using the eye actively to perceive, to contextualize, and to understand). And as we gather confidence in our knowledge and insights, we turn more comfortably to the dimension of interpretation—your dimension. It is here where the “I” really counts, for we all bring the weight of our own

Eric Protter, ed., *Painters on Painting* (New York: Dover, 2011), 69; also Peggy Hadden, “The Quotable Artist” (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), 204.

experience to our interpretations, our unique perceptions to our likes or dislikes of a work of art.

The artist Pablo Picasso once said, “People who try to explain pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree.” The words *explain* and *understand*, though, have very different meanings. One can argue that only artists can *explain* their work, can make intelligible something that is not known or not understood. But *understanding* is defined as full awareness or knowledge that is arrived at through an intellectual or emotional process—including the ability to extract meaning or to interpret. The ability to *appreciate*, or to perceive the value or worth of something from a discriminating perspective, then, is the consummate reward of understanding.

THE APPROACH OF UNDERSTANDING ART

The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art*, as earlier editions, is intended to work for both students and professors. *Understanding Art* continues to serve as a tool to help organize and enlighten this demanding, often whirlwind course. My goal has been to write a book that would do it all: edify and inform students and, at the same time, keep them engaged, animated, and inspired—while at the same time meeting instructors’ desire for comprehensive exposition. All in all, *Understanding Art* contains a fully balanced approach to appreciating art. The understanding and appreciation of art are enhanced by familiarity with three areas of art: the language of art (visual elements, principles of design, and style), the nature of the mediums used in art, and the history of art.

WHAT’S NEW IN THIS EDITION

In the spirit of the conviction that “understanding art ought always to begin with looking,” the eleventh edition features hundreds of new artworks that have been chosen to touch the landmarks of Western art and the art of the wider world, and also to better illustrate the elements, mediums, and historic developments of art.

The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art*, as previous editions, discusses the visual elements of art, the mediums of art, and the history of art. However, the balance among the three areas has been enhanced in the eleventh edition.

Reorganization of Chapter Structure

The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art* expands the discussion of the visual elements of art from two chapters to five chapters:

- Ch. 2: “Line and Shape”
- Ch. 3: “Light and Color”
- Ch. 4: “Texture and Pattern”
- Ch. 5: “Space, Time, and Motion”
- Ch. 6: “Principles of Design”

Chapter-by-Chapter Changes — A Sampling

- Ch. 1, “Understanding Art,” has new Putting It All Together features on the visual elements of art and on principles of design.
- Ch. 3, “Light and Color,” has expanded coverage of the physical and perceptual properties of color and of the uses of color.
- Ch. 5, “Space, Time, and Motion,” has new Theory and Practice features titled “Creating the Illusion of Space in Sculpture” and “Chasing the Fourth Dimension: Loïe Fuller.”
- Ch. 6, “Principles of Design,” has a new Theory and Practice feature titled “Focal Point and Emphasis,” which explores the compositional features of Jacques-Louis David’s *Oath of the Horatii*.
- Ch. 9, “Printmaking and Graphic Design,” has a new section on graphic design.
- Ch. 10, “Imaging,” now features sections on photography, film, video, and digital arts, including web design.
- Ch. 11 now includes sculpture, installation, site-specific art, and 3D design.
- Ch. 13 on architecture now includes urban design.
- Ch. 18, “The Baroque Era,” has a Compare + Contrast feature “Two Views of Judith’s Biblical Encounter with Holofernes,” comparing the paintings of Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi.
- Ch. 21, “The Twentieth Century: Postwar to Postmodern,” has a major new section titled “Art, Identity, and Social Consciousness,” which includes discussions of feminist art, sexual identity, and race and ethnic identity.

Integration of Art Outside the European Tradition into the Main Body of the Text

Understanding Art has always been the market leader in terms of numbers of works by women and artists of color and differing ethnicities. The eleventh edition goes farther. Art outside the European tradition is not sectioned off in separate chapters but is now integrated into the main body of the text. At the end of each chapter, “The Wider World” offers extensive coverage of historical and

artistic developments across the globe that are contemporaneous with those occurring in Europe and the United States. For example:

- Ch. 14, “Art of the Ancient World,” now includes Neolithic rock painting from Africa.
- Ch. 15, “Greece, Rome, and the Early Judeo-Christian World,” now includes sections on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Pre-Columbian art.
- Ch. 16, “The Age of Faith,” now includes discussion of the arts of the Tang and Song Dynasties in China, and the Buddhist and Shinto religions in Japan.
- Ch. 17, “The Renaissance,” now includes discussion of the Mughal Empire in India, the Ming Dynasty in China, the Muromachi and Momoyama periods in Japan, and the Aztec civilization in the Americas.
- Ch. 18, “The Baroque Era,” now discusses the British incursion into India, the Qing Dynasty in China, and the development of woodblock printing in Edo period Japan.
- Ch. 20, “The Twentieth Century: The Early Years,” includes a section on the development of the militaristic Meiji period in Japan, a Connections feature that draws visual parallels between Japanese propaganda art concerning the Russo-Japanese War and Goya’s Third of May, Communist Chinese propaganda art, and the post-revolution mural painters of Mexico.
- Ch. 22, “Art Now: A Global Perspective,” contains more than a dozen new works from India and Pakistan, China, Japan, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas, as well as a new Compare + Contrast feature: “Out of Africa: The Enduring Legacy of the Ceremonial Mask.”

Visual Glossary

A new, unique reference focuses on the themes and purposes of art, placing essential, concise information at students’ fingertips and applying it to specific images found throughout in the text. Additional visual glossaries on style and mediums are available on MindTap.

We are all aware that slides in the classroom are poor substitutes for real-life encounters with paintings and sculpture, or for the perception of form and space that comes with physically standing in a building.

This edition of *Understanding Art* includes more hybrid content than ever. It is the first that is available on MindTap®, a highly customizable multimedia teaching and learning platform. MindTap for *Understanding Art* provides an interactive digital experience for exploration, study, and development of critical-thinking skills. The MindTap ebook reader features a unique visual presentation, which provides an intuitive reading experience—one that honors the design of the printed book by positioning beautifully displayed artworks beside the accompanying

text. This MindTap reader’s two-pane design allows students to view images that appear on the left side while reading about them in the scrolling text discussion on the right side. The MindTap presentation encourages more interaction with images: students can zoom and expand images; access videos, maps, and panoramas related to each image; and view cross-referenced images without having to leave the flow of the main narrative. The image integration extends to the ebook’s navigation, which shows in one place all of the images within a chapter, and which reinforces the development of visual literacy.

New to this edition are interactive Art Tours, also available on MindTap. Each of the familiar Art Tours from previous edition, which highlight public art in specific cities around the world (Jerusalem, Rome, Paris, London, New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Florence, and Los Angeles) has been updated and is now accompanied by an interactive map, which offers students an even more hands-on experience of visiting cities and their art collections in the United States and abroad, underscoring the ubiquity of art and design in their lives. In the interactive Art Tours, students are guided from one site to another and can view related images, videos, and websites.

New architecture videos and 360-degree architectural panoramas of significant monuments and sites create the feeling of “being there” while learning more about interior and exterior details and their present-day surroundings.

FEATURES

The eleventh edition of *Understanding Art* contains unique features—many of which are new to this edition—that stimulate student interest, emphasize key points in art fundamentals and art history, highlight contemporary events in art, and reflect the ways in which professors teach.

CONNECTIONS These new features mainly illustrate how works of art from one period or one global location relate to works from another. Thumbnails are used to make these features visual in nature. Some Connections features, however, show students how they can apply the information in the text to their own lives. For example, a Connections feature in Chapter 1 asks students to list the attributes they would include in a self-portrait.

THEORY AND PRACTICE These features show how artists use principles and theories of art to arrive at their compositions. For example, the Theory and Practice feature in Chapter 1 shows how Neo-Plastic artist Theo van Doesburg “neglected the laws of nature in favor of those

of artistic creation” to develop his *Study for Composition (Cow)*. A Theory and Practice feature in Chapter 5 shows how several artists sought to capture the dynamic spinning and twirling of Folies Bergère dancer Loïe Fuller’s signature “Serpentine Dance” in drawings and in sculpture. The Theory and Practice feature in Chapter 15 explains how the Greek sculptor Polykleitos used his canon of proportions and *contrapposto* (the weight-shift principle) to create “The Body Beautiful,” as exemplified in his statue *Doryphoros*.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER These features visually summarize the ways in which artists use the visual elements of art and principles of design to render their compositions. One Putting It All Together feature in Chapter 1 uses *The Arnolfini Portrait* to show how Jan van Eyck used line, shape, value, color, and other elements of art to bring his portrait of a newly married couple to life. Another Putting It All Together feature shows how contemporary painter Audrey Flack used principles of design such as unity and variety, balance, rhythm, and symbolism to portray the iconic status of 1960s movie star Marilyn Monroe and to suggest her untimely death.

COMPARE + CONTRAST These features show two or more works of art side by side and phrase questions that help students focus on stylistic and technical similarities and differences. They parallel the time-honored pedagogical technique of presenting works in class for comparison and contrast. There are several new Compare + Contrast features in the eleventh edition. For example, Chapter 11 compares and contrasts Duchamp’s *Fountain* with Sherrie Levine’s *Fountains after Duchamp* in a New Compare + Contrast feature titled “(Fountains) Art as Idea as Idea.” A new Compare + Contrast feature in Chapter 22, “The Undying Legacy of the African Mask,” relates a traditional African mask to the fiber arts of Faith Ringgold, the paintings of Pablo Picasso, and an assemblage of women’s high-heeled shoes by contemporary American artist Willie Cole.

TIMELINES The chapters on the history of art, Chapters 14–21, contain timelines for the arts of Europe and the United States, and for artistic developments in the “wider world.” The timelines cover major historic events as well as artistic developments, so that the arts are placed in their historic, cultural, and social contexts.

QUOTATIONS Quotations at the top of pages by artists, critics, and others allow students to “get into the minds” of those people closest to the art world.

GLOSSARY Key terms are boldfaced in the text and defined in a glossary at the end of the textbook. Figure number references provide a visual illustration of each term.

VISUAL GLOSSARY A visual glossary focuses on themes and purposes of art—a unique reference that puts

essential, concise information at students’ fingertips and which cross-reference images found elsewhere in the text. Additional visual glossaries on style and mediums are available on MindTap.

THE CONTENTS OF THE ELEVENTH EDITION OF UNDERSTANDING ART

The book is organized into the following parts:

I. INTRODUCTION The first chapter of the text, *Understanding Art*, equips students with key content and formal terms to help them build a foundational vocabulary for discussing art—and eventually extracting meaning, understanding, and, with time, appreciation of art.

II. FOUNDATIONS OF ART AND DESIGN Chapters 2–6 provide comprehensive discussion of the visual elements of art, principles of design, and style, form, and content. The language of art is then applied throughout the remainder of the text in discussions of mediums and surveys of art through the ages and throughout the world.

III. MEDIUMS, TECHNIQUES, AND STYLE Chapters 7–10, on drawing, painting, printmaking, and imaging, explain how artists combine the visual elements of art to create two-dimensional compositions. The mediums discussed are as traditional as drawing a pencil across a sheet of paper and as innovative as spray painting color fields and clicking a mouse to access a menu of electronic techniques and design elements. Chapters 11–13 discuss the opportunities and issues provided by three-dimensional art forms, including sculpture, installation, site-specific art, industrial design, craft, and architecture.

IV. ART: A CONCISE GLOBAL HISTORY Chapters 14–18 contain a solid core of art history on the development of art from ancient times to the dawn of the modern era. Chapters 19–22 examine the great changes that have occurred in the world of art since the late eighteenth century. These chapters attempt to answer the question, “Just what is modern about modern art?” Whereas some artists have rejected the flatness of the canvas and moved art into innumerable new directions, others have maintained traditional paths. Controversy and conflict are part of the modern history of art. But movements such as Postmodern art and Deconstructivist architecture also make it possible to speak of the “modern world and beyond.” The phenomenon of globalization has created a new art world in which cultures are no longer distant from one another and people and places are no longer as separate as they once were. As a result, we have trends such as hybridity, appropriation, high art and low culture, and postcolonialism in the

arts. We see how these trends are expressed today within—and without—various cultural traditions around the world. Although nobody can say exactly where art is going, these chapters discuss the movements and works that appear to be vital at the current moment.

V. VISUAL GLOSSARIES The “Visual Glossary: Themes and Purposes of Art” considers the “whys” behind works of art, providing students with a useful reference that presents images found elsewhere in the text (and some that are not) in thematic categories. Additional visual glossaries on style and mediums are available on MindTap.

STUDENT RESOURCES

The MindTap learning platform guides you through the course curriculum via an innovative Learning Path Navigator where you will complete reading assignments, annotate your readings, complete homework, and engage with quizzes and assessments. This new edition features a two-pane e-reader, designed to make your online reading experience easier. Images discussed in the text appear in the left pane, while the accompanying text scrolls on the right. Highly accessible and interactive, this new reader pairs videos, Google Map links, and 360-degree panoramas with the matching figure in the text. Artworks are further brought to life through zoom capability right in the e-reader. Numerous study tools are included, such as image flashcards; downloadable Guides to Studying (a chapter outline and note taking template); the ability to synchronize your eBook notes with your personal EverNote account; Questia research library; Pathbrite e-portfolio.

New Flashcard App

The new and improved Flashcard App in MindTap gives you more flexibility and features than ever before. Study from the preexisting card decks with all the images from the text, or create your own cards with new images from your collection or those shared by your instructor. Create your own custom study deck by combining cards from separate chapters or those you’ve created. Once you’ve compiled your flashcard deck, you can save it for later use or print it for on-the-go studying.

INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

Leverage the tools in MindTap to enhance and personalize your course. Add your own images, videos, web links, readings, projects, and more either in the course Learning Path or right in the chapter reading. Set project due

dates, specify whether assignments are for practice or a grade, and control when your students see these activities in their Learning Path. MindTap can be purchased as a stand-alone product or bundled with the print text. Connect with your Learning Consultant for more details via www.cengage.com/repfinder/.

Access the Instructor Companion Website to find resources to help you teach your course and engage your students. Here you will find the Instructor’s Manual; Cengage Learning Testing, powered by Cognero; and Microsoft PowerPoint slides with lecture outlines and images that can be used as offered or customized by importing personal lecture slides or other material.

Digital Image Library

Display digital images in the classroom with this powerful tool. This one-stop lecture and class presentation resource makes it easy to assemble, edit, and present customized lectures for your course. Available on Flash drive, the Digital Image Library provides high-resolution images for lecture presentations and allows you to easily add your own images to supplement those provided.

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Each edition of *Understanding Art* has been undertaken to move the field of art appreciation forward—to stay current with the most recent critical inquiry, to respond thoughtfully to the needs and wants of the current generation of students, and to provide useful pedagogical materials to support instructors who dedicate themselves to imparting their knowledge about art and to creating generations of lifelong museumgoers. A book like this succeeds only to the extent that it meets the goals of instructors who use it. Thus, I wish to thank those peer reviewers whose insightful feedback informed the development of the eleventh edition: Jeanne Brody, Villanova University; Mark Damato, Averett University; Barbara England, Freed-Hardeman University; Cindy Grant, University of Mississippi; Deborah Gustlin, Gavilan College; Sherry Howard, Northwest State Community

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art, ärt, n. practical skill, or its application, guided by principles : human skill and agency (opp. to *nature*) : application of skill to production of beauty (esp. visible beauty) and works of creative imagination (as the *fine arts*) : a branch of learning, esp. one of the *liberal arts* (see **trivium, quadrivium**), as in *faculty of arts, master of arts* : skill or knowledge in a particular department : a skilled profession or trade, craft, or branch of activity : magic or occult knowledge or influence : a method of doing a thing : a knack : contrivance : address : cunning : artifice : crafty conduct : a wile.—*adj.* **art'ful** (*arch.*), dexterous, clever : cunning : produced by art.—*adv.* **art'fully**.—*n.* **art'fulness**.—*adj.* **art'less**, simple : (*rare*) inartistic : guileless, unaffected.—

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inning : artifice :
art'ful (arch.),
duced by art.—
—adj. art'less,
s, unaffected.—

UNDERSTANDING ART

Everyone wants to understand art. Why not try to understand the songs of a bird? Why does one love the night, flowers, everything around one, without trying to understand them? But in the case of a painting people have to understand. If only they would realize above all that an artist works of necessity, that he himself is only a trifling bit of the world, and that no more importance should be attached to him than to plenty of other things which please us in the world, though we can't explain them. People who try to explain pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree.

— PABLO PICASSO

PABLO PICASSO lived to the age of ninety-two and was one of the most prolific artists in history. He was also an eloquent and forceful commentator on his own work, the work of others, and the ideas and philosophies of his generation of modernists. We find ourselves turning again and again to his sometimes brash but always confident insights, as in this oft-quoted passage on understanding art.

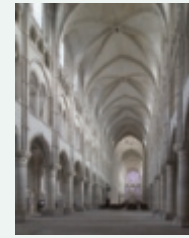
Why did Picasso find attempts to understand art so worrisome? Perhaps he was afraid we'd miss the larger point. In our attempt to comprehend the ingredients of art—the subject, the form, the symbolism—we run the risk of getting it all wrong in the end. One can argue that only artists can *explain* their work, can make intelligible something that is not known or not understood. But *understanding* is defined as full awareness or knowledge that is arrived at through an intellectual or emotional process—including the ability to extract meaning or to interpret. The ability to *appreciate*, or to perceive the value or worth of something from a discriminating perspective, then, is the consummate reward of understanding.

SUBJECT

The **subject** is the *what* of a work of art—people, places, things, themes, processes, events, ideas. For most of the history of art, the subject is recognizable or at least reflects some sort of visual experience. Categories of subjects with which artists work are often called **genres**. The word comes from French meaning “kind” or “type.” Genres include religious or mythological subjects, historical subjects, portraiture, still life, landscape, nonobjective art, and so on. They also include something called *genre* subjects—images and themes from ordinary life. The modernist era, however, challenged the traditional definition of *subject*, which grew to include anything from the elements of art in their purest form, as in a painting by Wassily Kandinsky (Fig. 1.1), to the physical processes of art making, to a concept for a work of art without a tangible object fabricated by the artist.

The imagery in **abstract art** may be difficult to decipher because it no longer fully resembles the original things or scenes from which it was derived. But we cannot say that these works are without a subject. **Nonobjective art** may make no reference whatsoever to the natural world, no pretext to representing it, but even nonobjective works are not without a *subject*—at least from one

CONNECTIONS Standing in the interior of a Gothic cathedral, there is much to discuss about the floor plan, the structural elements, the design of the vaults and stained glass, the engineering, the style of the sculpture. But it is the content of the work as a whole—its role in society, the religious beliefs that gave rise to it, the symbolism of its design and its iconographic program—that leads us to better understand and appreciate the historical and sociological relevance of the work.



▲ Interior, Laon Cathedral (Fig. 16.15)

perspective. Picasso insisted, for example, that there is always a subject: “even if the painting is [nothing but] green, well then! The ‘subject’ is the green.” Jackson Pollock also challenged the notion that a nonobjective work is necessarily a work without a subject: “There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing. We assert that the subject is critical.” Even though we are accustomed to defining the subject of a work as a recognizable representation of a tangible thing, *subject* is a much more inclusive word.



1ft.

< 1.1 WASSILY KANDINSKY, *Composition VI*, (1913). Oil on canvas, 76¾" × 118⅛". Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.



▲ 1.2 United States Supreme Court Building, Washington, D.C. (1935).



▲ 1.3 ICTINOS AND CALLICRATES, Parthenon, Athens, Greece (447–438 BCE).

CONTENT

A distinction is often made between subject and **content**. Whereas *subject* refers to the aspects of a work that can be described, *content* refers to a work’s array of intangible aspects: the emotional, intellectual, psychological, symbolic elements. Content implies subject matter, but is a much bigger concept. Content comes close to being the *why* of a work of art in that it includes what we might consider the reasons behind its appearance: the idea, the cultural and artistic contexts, and the meaning behind the symbolism.

Symbolism is often a key component of a work’s content, even if is unapparent or indecipherable to a viewer. The study of symbols is called *iconography*, literally the “writing of images.” Symbols convey ideas, beliefs, messages, or the ideology underlying works of arts; investigating their significance enriches our understanding of the meaning and purpose of the work.

It may be obvious to us that paintings can be rich in content, but architecture, at first glance, may not seem the most obvious place to find content. Yet architecture informs us not only of the materials and technical means commonly used during certain periods in history; it can also embody the ideas, beliefs, and aspirations of an era. Architecture can have strong symbolic significance. It is easy to spot the influence of Greek and Roman architecture on buildings in the U.S. capital, Washington, D.C.—pristine white marble, columns, pediments, rotundas. But there is a reason why the architects responsible for designs for the United States Capitol Building and the United States Supreme Court building and others chose to emulate the architecture

of ancient Greece and Rome in the capital of the New Republic (Figs. 1.2 and 1.3). It was to symbolize a connection to history’s greatest contributions to civilization: democracy, the rule of law, duty to country and fellow citizen.

Contemporary architect Daniel Libeskind has said that, in the design of his buildings, he wants to

communicate the vastness and also the legacy of things that are not completely visible. Contrary to public opinion the flesh of architecture is not cladding, insulation and structure, but the substance of the individual in society and history; a figuration of the inorganic, the body and the soul.

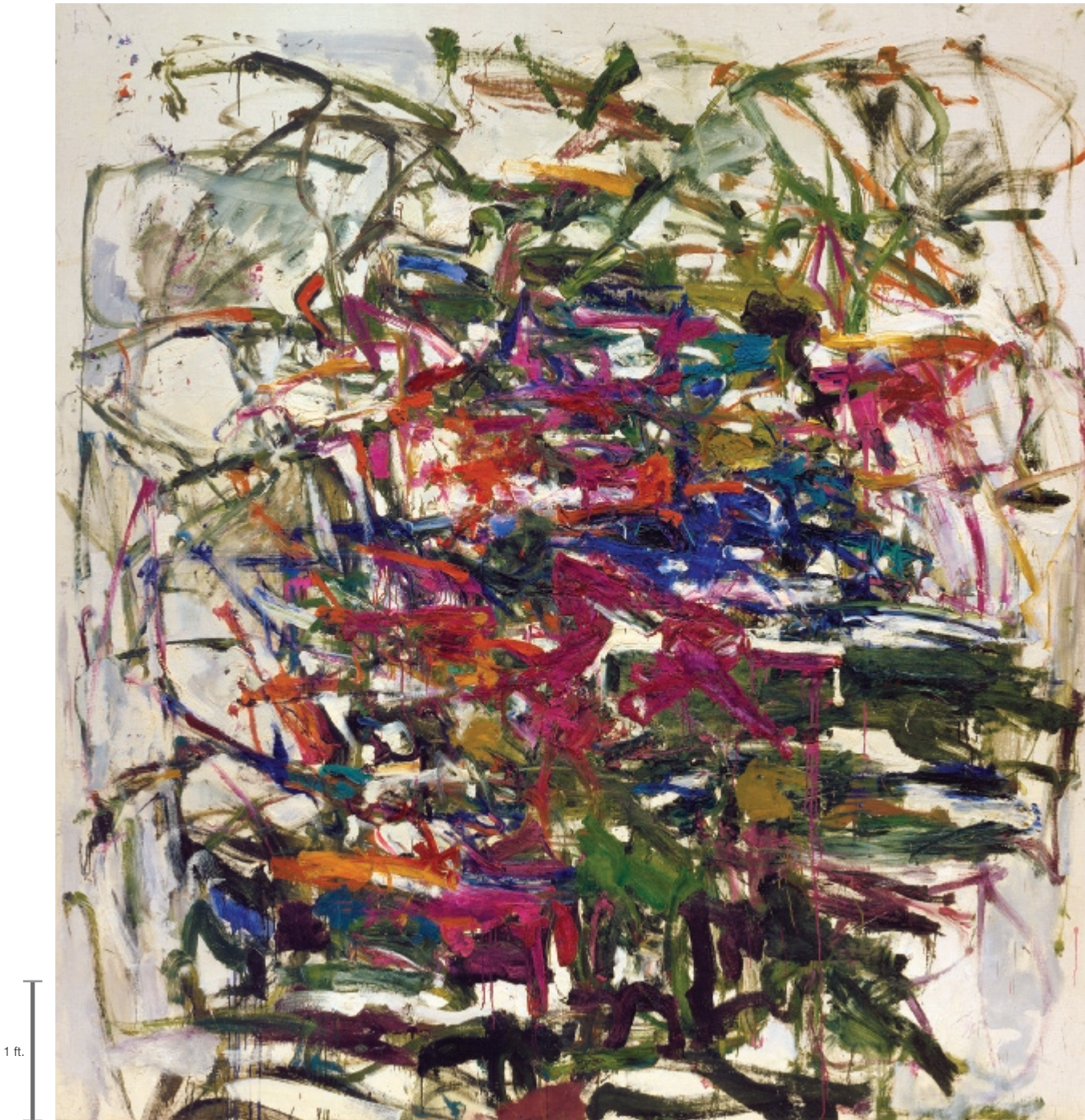
In other words, according to Libeskind, the “flesh of architecture” is not the form; it is the content. His extension of the Berlin Museum, dedicated to Jewish art and life and the memory of the Holocaust, is designed around the concept of a void (Fig. 1.4). A zigzag building—reminiscent in shape of a lightning bolt—was



▲ 1.4 DANIEL LIBESKIND, Extension of the Berlin Museum, Berlin, Germany (1989–1996).

derived mathematically by plotting the home addresses of Jewish writers, artists, and composers who had lived in Berlin neighborhoods before World War II but were killed during the Nazi Holocaust. The building's jagged shape reads as a "bolt out of the blue"—a catastrophic event that could not have been anticipated. It also reads as a painful rift in the continuity of the neighborhood in which it stands; it is punctuated by voids that symbolize

the absence of Jewish people and culture in Berlin. The visitor to the museum is immediately struck by the overwhelming evidence that everything at which one is looking—every structural, design, and symbolic element—has been informed by the historic circumstances that necessitated Libeskind's building. To learn more about the *whys* behind works of art, see the **Visual Glossary: Themes & Purposes of Art**.



▲ 1.5 JOAN MITCHELL, *Cercando un Ago* (1957). Oil on canvas, 95" × 88 1/8". Collection of the Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York.

FORM

In the context of art and design, the word **form** has more than one meaning. Form refers to the totality of a composition or design—the arrangement or organization of all of its visual elements. Form gives substance to a subject or an idea; think of it as the all-encompassing framework of artistic expression. It signifies the totality of technical means and materials employed by the artist, as well as all of the visual strategies and pictorial devices used to express and communicate. It is, simply, the work of art as a whole. The word *form* is also used to discuss three-dimensional shapes (spheres, cylinders, cubes, pyramids, for example) or works of art (such as sculpture or architecture). It also is used to describe areas of void space in sculptural works that serve as compositional counterpoints to solid shapes.

If the subject of a work of art is the *what*, the form is the sum total of *how* the *what* is presented. The appearance of a work of art derives from the artist's manipulation of the elements of art, principles of design, and the medium. When we consider the form of a work, we are asking ourselves how it all fits together—how color and shape are related, how the position of objects or figures reinforces the compositional structure, how brushwork is used to render meticulous detail, or perhaps how brushwork seems to exist for its own sake—free from the task of description, as in many modern and contemporary paintings.

Let's return to the beginning of this section: If subject matter is the *what* of a work of art, form is the *how*. Now let's return to Jackson Pollock. For him, as for many artists—including Joan Mitchell—producing nonobjective work, the *how* IS the *what*. That is, the materials and process may be described as the subject of the work (Fig. 1.5).

ICONOGRAPHY

Iconography, as noted, is the study of themes and symbols—figures and images that, when

deciphered, reveal the underlying meaning of a work of art. Bronzino's sixteenth-century masterpiece, *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (Fig. 1.6) in the collection of the National Gallery in London, is a fascinating example of a work in which there must be much more than meets the eye, but whose iconographic puzzle is yet to be solved. When Bronzino conceived the painting for King Francis I of France, he clearly intended to weave an intricate allegory with many actors and many symbols.

Venus, fondled by her son, Cupid, is exposed by the gray-bearded Father Time, whose muscular arm draws back a purple drape to reveal the couple's incestuous behavior. We recognize them by their symbolic attributes, or things that they hold or have around them. Venus cups a golden apple in one hand and an arrow from the winged Cupid's quiver in the other; Time has



▲ 1.6 BRONZINO, *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time* (c. 1546). Oil on wood, 61" × 56¾". National Gallery, London, England.

THEORY & PRACTICE

Giving Form to Experience: A Visual Meditation on Cows

DRAWN TO THE PURITY and precision of geometric shapes and committed to the synthesis of art, architecture, and design, Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931) played a principal role in the dissemination of the style and theories of the Dutch group known as De Stijl. De Stijl, meaning “the style,” is also commonly referred to as

Neo-Plasticism after van Doesburg’s 1919 treatise on the De Stijl movement titled “Principles of Neo-Plastic Art.”

Van Doesburg observed that even in works of art with subjects that seem to mimic the visible world, an artist may “neglect the laws of nature in favor of those of artistic creation” and use “natural

Drawing A is naturalistic; it represents the actual appearance of a cow.



1.7A Study for Composition VIII (*The Cow*) (1917). Pencil on paper, 4 5/8" × 6 1/4".

Drawing C is characterized by the dominant contrast of black and white shapes.

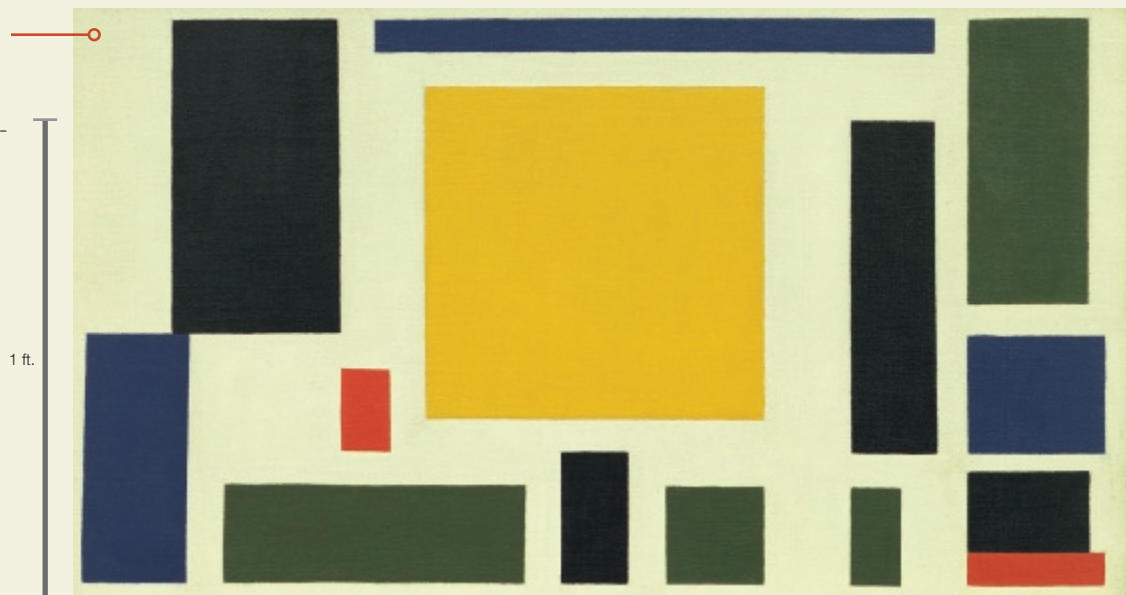


1.7B Study for Composition VIII (*The Cow*) (1917). Pencil on paper, 4 5/8" × 6 1/4".



1.7C Study for Composition VIII (*The Cow*) (c. 1917). Tempera, oil, and charcoal on paper, 15 5/8" × 22 3/4".

Drawing D depicts color and form in their purest state, creating a harmonious whole.



1.7D THEO VAN DOESBURG, *Composition VIII (The Cow)* (1917). Oil on canvas, 14 3/4" × 25". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York.