

## Romantic Art Highlights

Paintings in the Louvre's Romantic art room

- Delacroix and Géricault, Paris
- Chopin's grave, Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris
- Tate Britain (Blake and Turner), London
- Neo-Gothic Halls of Parliament, London
- Neuschwanstein and Linderhof castles, Bavaria, Germany
- The Rhine and the Loreley poem, Germany
- The Alps, Switzerland
- Poetry by Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Blake
- Music by Liszt, Chopin, Beethoven, Wagner, and Schumann



Delacroix, Frédéric Chopin, 1838 (Louvre, Paris). One romantic artist's tribute to another.

## Blake

William Blake of England was another master at putting inner visions on canvas. A mystic, nonconformist poet, he refused to paint poses for his supper. He made a living only through the charity of fellow artists who recognized his genius. Blake's watercolors (in London's Tate Britain), with their bizarre, unearthly subjects and composition, reveal how unschooled he was in classical technique. But his art grabs the viewer by the emotional lapel. That's what Romanticism is all about.

Blake, *Elohim Creating Adam*, 1795 (Tate Britain, London). Blake, who hobnobbed with the heavenly hosts, painted God creating Man.



for the Traveler (2000).  
 \* Steve & OpenShaw, *Europe 101: History and Art*  
 for the Traveler (2000).  
 The Industrial Revolution

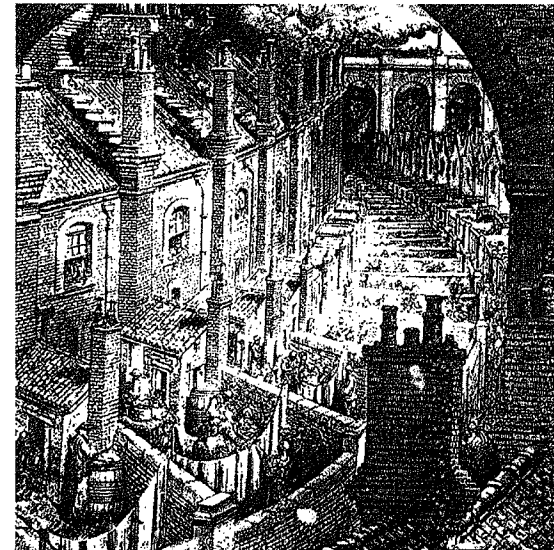
The Industrial Revolution, along with the rise of nationalism and democratic governments, powered Europe into the modern world. While the scientific achievements of the Enlightenment broadened human knowledge, practical inventions and applications (such as the steam engine and telegraph) didn't crank into motion until the 1800s.

This century of exciting technological advancement shifted nations from dependence on agriculture to dependence on industry. Britain's textile industry led the way as new, steam-powered factories lured people from the countryside to the cities.

The invention of the train shifted the revolution into high gear. As more products could be shipped more quickly to more people, huge new trade markets opened up. Rails laced European nations together. A person could travel across a country in a day's journey or less. From 1830 through 1860, one-sixth of all the world's track was laid (and then came the Eurailpass).

Europe's business boom stoked its colonial appetite. The world was Europe's buffet line, and it was "all you can eat." Europe divided up the underdeveloped world, harvested its raw materials, processed them, and sold the resulting products at great profits. Although every European nation grabbed a slice of the world's economic quiche, Britain's empire included nearly a quarter of the world's land and people. England boasted, "The sun never sets on the British Empire." (While others added, "Because God can't trust the English in the dark.")

The riches of England's Industrial Revolution came with its problems. This 19th-century engraving shows poor, dirty, overcrowded slums housing masses of industrial workers under roaring smokestacks.



Technological progress gave Europe a false optimism. Seeing how quickly technology changed nature and lifestyles, people figured it was the answer to the world's problems. Unfortunately, it led to many new difficulties: slums, polluted and overcrowded cities, child labor, unemployment, overwork, and the alienation of workers from the fruits of their labor. As we step out of this Industrial Age and into the Information Age, these problems persist. While we have become ace producers/consumers, quality of life is a different story.

### Socialism and Communism

The Socialist movement tried to solve the social ills brought on by the Industrial Age. Socialists challenged government's lack of intervention in business affairs. Socialists and trade unions worked to restrict the power of factory owners and distribute wealth more fairly.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), both from Germany, cowrote the influential *Communist Manifesto* (1848), developing the fantasy that workers, not factory owners, should benefit most from industry. They predicted that a worker (proletarian) revolution would overthrow the capitalist (bourgeois) establishment. In the 19th century, communist and socialist organizations gained power throughout Europe. Though there was never a classic “workers’ revolution,” Marx’s and Engels’ ideas spurred reforms to benefit the working class.



Soviet Marxism's Fab Four keep watch over a meeting of the Communist International, 1935. Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin (left to right) were the propaganda poster-boys of communism. Their faces decorated factories throughout Eastern Europe and the USSR until the revolutions of 1989 and 1990.

Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924), a Russian, used Marxist ideas to plan the Bolshevik Revolution and overthrow Russia's monarchy (1917), giving birth to the Soviet Union. He had to adapt industrial Marxism to a country still mired in medieval feudalism. Josef Stalin (1879–1953) succeeded Lenin as ruler of the Soviet Union, instituting the iron rule we associate with Russian totalitarianism.

One way or another, those denied their fair slice of the pie revolt to get it. The French Revolution irrevocably resliced the pie with a guillotine to accommodate the merchant class. Now the urban peasantry clamored for its economic share.

### Social Realism

The USSR (and after World War II, its client states in Eastern Europe) attempted to control everyone and everything. They used whatever they could to achieve that end, including the media and art.

Soviet art was propaganda. Called “social realism,” the style draws repeatedly on a few Socialist or Marxist-Leninist themes. (For example, the noble, muscular worker is depicted bashing the chains of capitalism and overcoming the evils of the bourgeois world.) With flags blowing heroically in the wind, the art portrays family ideals, Socialist morality, and undying respect for the fathers of the ideology (and, of course, the imperial power behind the ideological cloak, Russia). Russia is featured as the liberator from the Turks, from the Nazis, and from the evil Western world.

Although art as propaganda is nothing new, only in the sphere of the Soviet Union was creativity channeled so effectively into one



Soviet propaganda poster. “Social realism” art was intended to rouse nationalist and class feelings against the threat of the capitalist West. Here the workers are shown victorious through passionate dedication to their state, industry, and military. Soviet art was a broken record of worker triumph propaganda.

purpose. Art was justified only if it promoted the system. Abstract art, which serves no purpose in inspiring the masses, was discouraged. Even artistic mediums as nebulous as music were censored for what they did not promote.

## The Industrial Revolution and Art

The Industrial Revolution put new tools and materials in artists' hands. Concrete, iron, and glass opened new architectural doors. People were proud of their modernity and their ability to build like never before. More buildings were raised in the 19th century than in all previous centuries put together. It was the day after Christmas and Europe was a child with a colossal erector set.

At world's fairs and exhibitions, giant structures of iron ribs and glass walls were proudly assembled and promptly disassembled on rigid time schedules just to prove it could be done. People traveled from all over Europe to marvel at London's short-lived Crystal Palace. Paris, also feeling its industrial oats, built the Eiffel Tower to celebrate the centennial of the French Revolution. The French planned to take down the tower, which many considered ugly, but it became a symbol for Paris and so it stands today. As you travel around Europe, you'll see huge iron-and-glass train stations—more products of Europe's early industrial muscle.

But the Industrial Revolution also threatened art. New building techniques and materials made previous architectural styles obsolete, except as decoration. Like the ancient Romans who used Greek facades on buildings, architects would build modern buildings (such as the neo-Gothic British Houses of Parliament), then adorn them with fake Gothic arches or Renaissance columns.

Painters were threatened by the newly invented camera (developed around 1830), which could



*Eiffel Tower, 1889, Paris. The Industrial Revolution made life one big erector set. This was built to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution.*

### Industrial Revolution Sights

- Blists Hill Victorian Town (open-air museum) at Ironbridge Gorge—the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, near the Cotswolds, Britain
- Covent Garden, London
- National Railway Museum, York, Britain
- Blackpool Tower, Blackpool, Britain
- Eiffel Tower, Paris
- Orsay Museum (originally an iron-and-glass train station), Paris
- Gallerias (grand iron-and-glass shopping arcades) in Milan and Naples, Italy
- Galleria, Brussels, Belgium



*Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, 1877, Milan. In the age of iron and glass, fancy gallerias decorated European cities.*



*When England learned to make iron efficiently, the Industrial Age was born. It happened at Ironbridge Gorge. This is the first iron bridge ever built (1779).*

make portraits faster, cheaper, and sometimes better than they could. The challenge and incentive to portray nature was gone. With the camera, the artist's traditional role as the preserver of a particular moment, person, or scene became obsolete.

Technology widened the gulf between the artist and the public. Modern people could get homes, arts, crafts, and furnishings from

engineers and technicians, thanks to the affordable efficiency of mass production. Artists grew to disdain those who put a price on art the same way they priced pork, kerosene, or a day's work in the factory.

Struggling to come to terms with the modern industrial world, art left technology behind, focusing the artistic lens of the Western world on hazy frontiers of the future.

## Art Nouveau

The Art Nouveau (new-VOH) style was a reaction to the mechanization and mass production of the Industrial Revolution. Longing for the beauty of the pre-industrial age, artists rebelled against mass-produced goods and T-square art. Emphasizing uniqueness, their art included the artists' personal touch.

Whereas industrial art and architecture were geometrical, with rigid squares and rectangles, Art Nouveau ("new art") used delicate, flowing lines, like the curvy stems of plants. Iron grillwork became a new art form.

Art Nouveau influenced architecture, painting, ironwork, furniture, graphic design, and even women's fashions. In America, Louis Tiffany's natural-looking "flower-petal" lamps were the rage.

Antonio Gaudí, born near Barcelona, employed the Art Nouveau style (called "*Modernista*" in Spain) in his distinctive architecture. Many architecture students make pilgrimages to Barcelona to see his famous "melted ice cream" works. He's considered a pioneer, a prophet, and a dreamer who was lucky enough to see his dreams become concrete.

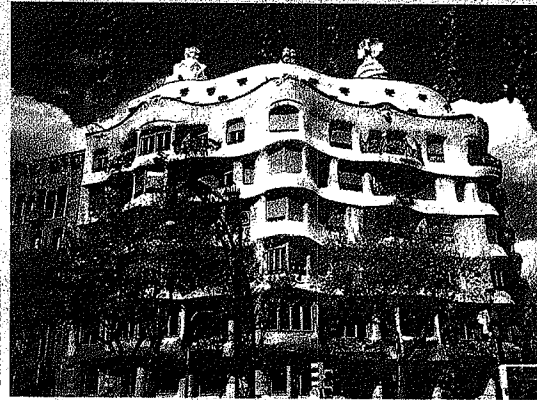
Art Nouveau's intentional curviness eventually gave way to



**Gustav Klimt (1862-1917)**, took the decorative element of Art Nouveau to extremes. In many of his paintings, only the face and bits of body show through gilded ornamental friezes.

## Art Nouveau Sights

- Green iron grillwork at old Métro stops, Paris
- Orsay Museum (exhibits on mezzanine level), Paris
- *Jugendstil* facades throughout Vienna
- Gaudí architecture (especially Sagrada Família cathedral), Barcelona, Spain



**Gaudí, Casa Mila apartment house, 1905, Barcelona, Spain.** This ice-cream castle of a building does everything possible to disrupt the rigid angles of the industrial world.

the straight lines and rigidity we see in modern "International Style" skyscrapers, but its influence has been seen throughout modern times.

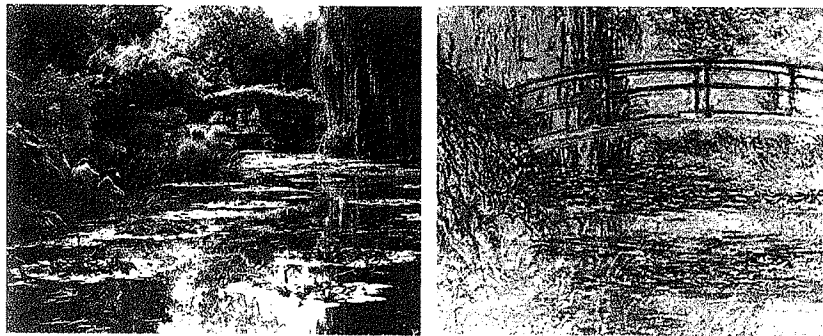
Paris, Vienna, Barcelona, Brussels, Munich, Glasgow, Helsinki, and Alesund in Norway are all famous for their Art Nouveau, or "*Jugendstil*," as the style is called in German.

## Impressionism

Impressionism was the greatest revolution in European art since the Renaissance and the first real "modern" style of art. While the Renaissance found realism, Impressionism threw it out. The artist was interested only in the fleeting "impression" made by the light, shadows, and atmosphere of a scene.

Although its name was originally coined as an insult (like "Gothic"), Impressionism is actually one of the few appropriate art labels. Claude Monet (1840-1926), the movement's father, called the style "instantaneity." The artist, sometimes with only a few quick brush strokes, captures a candid, momentary "impression" of a subject.

The realistic and the Impressionist styles can be illustrated by com-



*Monet's Garden at Giverny (an easy side trip from Paris) inspired much of Monsieur Lily Pad's art. Impressionists cried, "Out of the studio and into nature!"*

paring what Leonardo da Vinci and Monet each see as they drive across the Nevada desert on a hot summer day. Ahead of his Ferrari, realist Leonardo sees heat rising from the asphalt, making the black road look like a bright, shimmering patch of silver. In spite of the way it appears, he knows the road is really black and so he will paint it that way, disregarding the momentary impression of silver.

Monet, an Impressionist, excitedly stops his Peugeot, sets up his easel, and captures the impression of the shimmering heat waves cutting a silver slice through the yellows and browns of the desert.

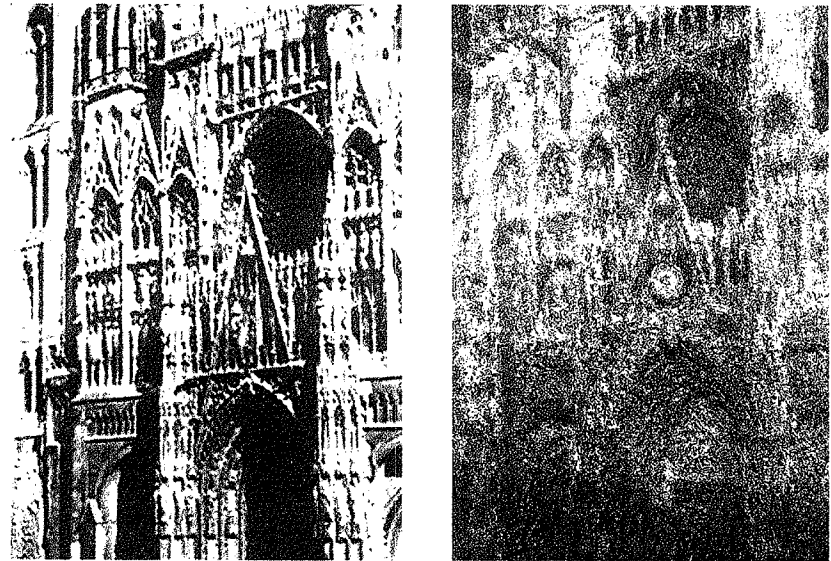
We don't actually see objects or people, but rather the light that bounces off them. The realist paints what his mind knows is there; the Impressionist paints what his eye sees.

### Light and Color

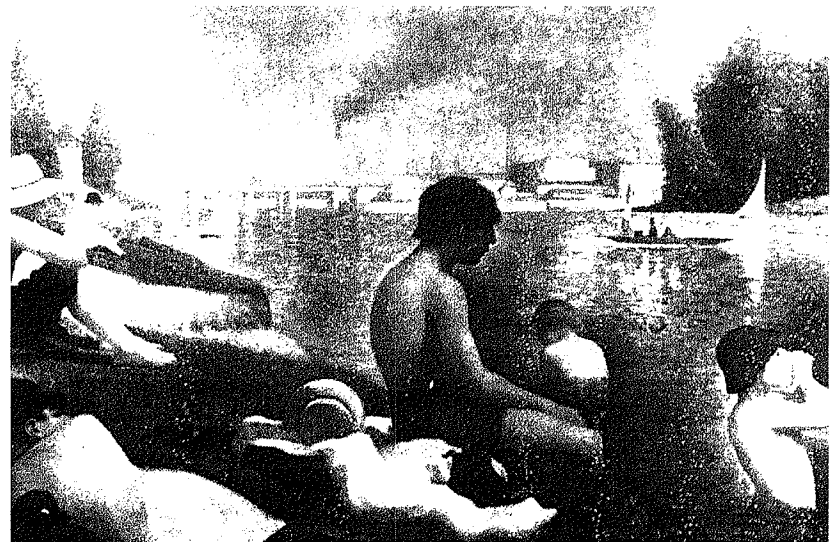
Light plays endless games on the same subject and, to the Impressionist, that same subject is different with each time of day and atmospheric condition. Monet, the most famous Impressionist, often did a series of paintings of a single subject (for example, Rouen Cathedral) at different times of day.

The physical object has become just the rack upon which hangs the real subject: the light and colors. Paint is usually laid on thickly, with heavy, textured brush strokes.

Sometimes the painter, not even bothering to mix the colors on the palette, dabs bits of blue and red side by side to make a purple that shimmers in the viewer's eye. This brush technique was taken to extremes in Georges Seurat's "pointillism," a mosaic of colored dots with no lines at all. (If you look carefully at a newspaper photo, you'll see that it is a mechanical form of pointillism.)



*Compare the photo of the Rouen Cathedral with the Impressionist painting by Monet (1893, Orsay Museum, Paris). We can see the artist's fascination with the play of light on the building. Detail fades away and we are left with a blurry, yet recognizable, impression of the cathedral.*



*Seurat, Bathers at Asnieres, 1883 (Tate Gallery, London). Here Seurat uses a technique called "pointillism," a mosaic consisting entirely of colored dots.*



### From Ridicule to Acceptance

Impressionism was born in the “Salon of the Rejected,” the “off-off Broadway” of struggling Parisian artists. Initially, people were outraged by this rough, messy style. A newspaper reported that after seeing an early Monet painting, one visitor went mad, rushed out into the street, and started biting innocent passersby. (Although it's much safer today, caution is still advised near Parisian modern-art galleries.)

Although many Impressionist artists (Manet, Degas, Renoir, and Rodin) had first-class classical backgrounds, the stuffy board of the Louvre Museum refused to display the new art—even after the public accepted it. The nearby Jeu de Paume, a former indoor tennis court, was used to store the masterpieces of the movement. Today, Impressionism, far from radical, hangs



Rodin, *The Kiss*, 1901 (Tate Modern, London)



Renoir, *Moulin de la Galette*, 1876 (Orsay Museum, Paris)

in living rooms and corporate boardrooms and fills some of Europe's most popular galleries. The Jeu de Paume collection is now the major attraction in Paris' wildly popular Orsay Gallery.

Auguste Rodin (ro-DAN, 1840–1917) blended Impressionist ideas with his classical training to become the greatest sculptor since Michelangelo. He had the uncanny ability to capture the essence of a subject with his powerful yet sensitive technique. The rough “unfinished” surfaces, particularly of his bronze works, reflect light the same way the thick brushwork of an Impressionist painting does. Check out the Rodin Museum in Paris, filled with the work of this great artist.

### Post-Impressionism

After Impressionism, the modern art world splintered, never again to be contained by any one style. Within 20 years, Impressionism had branched into two Postimpressionist movements. One stressed form and order (led by Cézanne, a forerunner of the Cubists) and the other demonstrated emotion and sensuousness (Gauguin and van Gogh, who inspired the Expressionists and Fauves).

Paul Cézanne (say-ZAWN, 1839–1906), a man of independent means, ignored Paris, the critics, and the buying public. Cézanne worked to capture the best of both artistic worlds: the instantaneity of Impressionism and the realistic depth and solidity of earlier styles.

Paul Gauguin (go-GAN, 1848–1903) was a stockbroker who chucked it all to become a painter. Like Cézanne, he left the artsy folk of proud Paris for inspiration in simple surroundings. He spent time with van Gogh in southern France, but, after Vincent attacked him in a fit of artistic rage, Paul sailed for Tahiti.

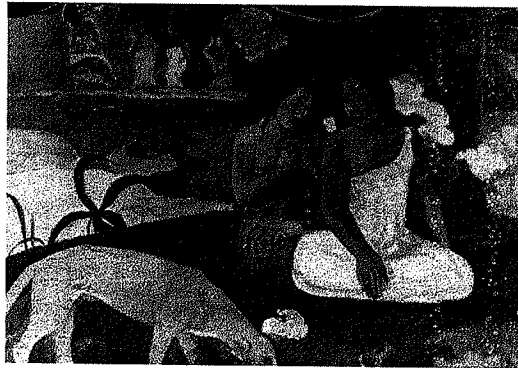
Gauguin's bright, bold paintings of native scenes hit Europe like a ripe

*Cézanne, Still Life. Cézanne painted numerous still lifes in his experiments with form and composition. He once remarked that nature reveals itself in the geometric forms of spheres, cylinders, and cones.*



*Gauguin, Arearea, or Pleasantries (Orsay Museum, Paris)*

mango. He used “primitive” techniques—simple outlines, sharply contrasting colors, and a flat, two-dimensional look—to create a naive and naturally expressive style that inspired many 20th-century artists.



### Van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh (pronounced “van-GO,” or “van-GOCK” by the Dutch and the snooty, 1853–1890) used Impressionist techniques powered with passion. Painting what he felt as well as what he saw, his art truly reflects his life.

Vincent’s early life was religious, not artistic. Disillusioned with the shallow values of the modern world, he served as a lay preacher for poor coal miners. In his late twenties, he channeled that religious vision and spiritual intensity into his art.

After learning from the Impressionists in Paris, he moved to southern France to cloister himself in nature and his art. He did most of his great paintings there in the space of three years. They show the extreme loneliness, the emotional ecstasy, and the spiritual struggles he went through. Several times his work was interrupted by mental illness. Finally, believing that insanity was destroying his creative abilities, he killed himself.

Van Gogh’s art is an oil-on-canvas translation of his soul, his genius, and his emotions. The subjects were simple—



*Van Gogh, Self-Portrait, 1890, hangs in the Orsay Museum, Paris. With swirling brush-strokes, Vincent charged Impressionism with emotion. His canvases take you through the rapids of his life.*

### Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Sights

- Orsay Museum, Paris
- Rodin Museum, Paris
- Marmottan Museum (Monet), Paris
- Orangerie Museum (more Monet), Paris
- Monet’s garden, Giverny, near Paris
- Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, Albi, France
- Arles, St. Remy, and Auvers (all in southern France, although without Vincent sights as such; these are towns that inspired van Gogh)
- Tate Modern, London
- National Gallery, London
- Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
- Kröller-Müller Museum (van Gogh’s *Nachtvlinder*), Netherlands

*Van Gogh, Sunflowers, 1888 (National Gallery, London). Other versions of the sunflowers, two years after painting these sunflowers, the artist killed himself. Vincent van Gogh.*



common people and landscapes. His style was untrained and crude. By distorting and exaggerating certain colors and details, he gave his work spirit and emotions.

Van Gogh’s love of common people shines through in his painting. His subjects seem to glow with, as he put it, “that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize.”

Perhaps the best examples of van Gogh’s art are his self-portraits. Haunted and haunting, these show the man as well as his talent. We see in his burning eyes the passionate love of all things and the desire to paint them on canvas.

In his landscape *Crows in a Wheatfield*, we see a simple, peaceful scene “van Gogh-ed” into a stormy sea of turbulence and emotion. He uses the strong, thick brush strokes and bright colors of the



Van Gogh, *Crows in a Wheatfield*

Impressionists not to capture the light of the scene but to churn it up with emotion. The waves of wheat vibrate with an inner force that van Gogh believed inhabits all things.

Europe's van Gogh treasure chest is the great Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam (next to the Rijksmuseum). His art is well displayed, in chronological order, with each of his artistic stages related to events in his personal life. It's one of Europe's most enjoyable museums.

## Europe in the 20th Century

Twentieth-century Europe was just as exciting as historic Europe and shouldn't take a back seat to Old Regime palaces and ancient ruins. While most of the sights tourists chase in Europe date back a few centuries or more, an understanding of our tumultuous age is important in understanding Europe's number-one tourist attraction—its people.

The 20th century began with the sort of easy happiness and nonchalance of a summer barbecue. The average European in 1910 felt lucky to be living during those prosperous and peaceful times.

Behind the scenes, however, tension was growing. Germany's late entry onto the European economic game board caused competitive rivalries. Tension mounted as Germany grabbed for its "place in the sun." Germany understood that capitalist economies need colonial sources of raw materials and marketplaces for finished products. By the time Germany arrived, most of the underdeveloped world was already controlled by other European powers.

A united Germany was the biggest, strongest, scariest kid on the

block. There was a scramble for alliances across Europe. No one wanted to be left without an ally, so most countries dove headlong into an international game of "Let's Make a Deal." Alliances were secret, often conflicting, and no one knew for sure exactly where anyone else stood.

The modern nationalities of Europe were awakening, and, particularly in the vast Hapsburg Empire, national groups were working aggressively for independence.

## World War I

Beneath its placid exterior, Europe was ready to explode. The spark that set things off was the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand. The heir to the Hapsburg throne was shot by a Serbian nationalist in 1914. The Hapsburg government, which ruled Austria, jumped at the opportunity to crush the troublesome Serbs.

One by one, Europe's nations were drawn by alliance into this regional dispute. Each had a self-serving interest. Russia, slavic Serbia's big brother, aided Serbia. Germany gave Austria a curious "blank check" of support. Germany knew that Russia was about to complete a new railroad mobilization plan that would give Russia first-strike capabilities. Many speculate that Germany thought a war sooner, while Russia was still slow to mobilize, was preferable to a war later, when Russia would be better prepared.

So, when Austria attacked Serbia, the Russians mobilized, and Germany invaded... France! France was allied to Russia, and Germany hoped to wipe out France by surprise, rather than risk getting embroiled in a two-front war.

Well, it didn't work out quite the way Germany planned. Flank, flank, flank, from the Alps to the Atlantic, the Franco-German stalemate that became the Western Front dug in. Soldiers dug trenches to duck machine-gun bullets. France and Germany settled into a battle of attrition, in which the political and military leaders of opposing nations decided to bash their troops against each other, each knowing it would suffer horrific losses but calculating that the other would bleed white and drop first.

For four years, generals waved their swords and wave after wave of troops climbed out of their trenches and fell back into their graves. On many occasions, France lost 70,000 people in one day. That's more than the U.S. lost in the entire Vietnam War. By 1918, half of all the men in France between the ages of 15 and 30 were casualties.

Too often, military leaders are the heroes of previous wars who



vival. France, for instance, has the Basques, the Corsicans, and the Celtic people of Brittany, many of whom see themselves as un-French parts of a French empire ruled from Paris. The George Washingtons and Nathan Hales of these small, neglected nationalities are making news in Europe. Terrorism filled headlines throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and there's no reason to think that patriots will stop regretting that they have only one life to give for their countries.

A silent victim of modern times, the environment, gained attention in the 1980s. The Green party, whose platform was primarily environmental, raised issues many chose not to see in spite of the diseased forests, dead rivers, and radioactive reindeer in their midst. Nuclear accidents, acid rain, ozone problems, and chemical spills are awakening a continent notorious for treating its Mediterranean Sea like its own private cesspool. Even politicians suckling the teats of big business are beginning to realize that you can't exploit the poor on an uninhabitable planet.

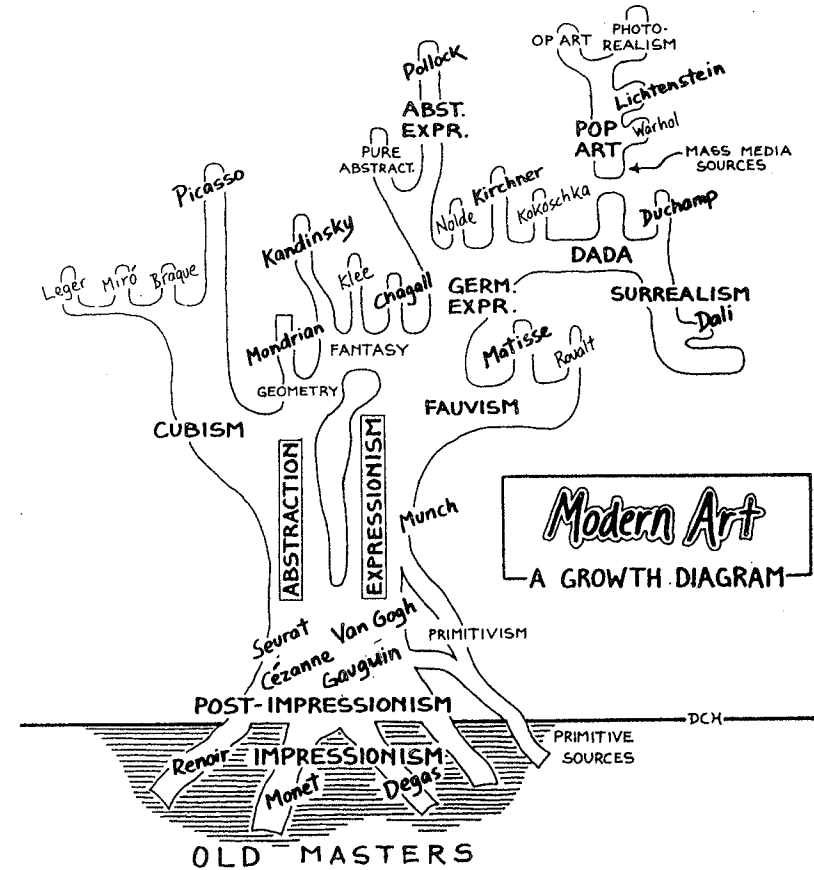
## Modern Art: Reflecting a World in Turmoil

Why is modern art so bizarre? Better to ask: Why is the modern world so bizarre? The world changed by leaps, bounds, and somersaults during the last century. Strange as some art might seem, it's often an honest representation of our strange world.

The world wars devastated Europe. No one could have foreseen the extent of the slaughter. People, especially artists, were shocked, disgusted, and disillusioned. As old moral values were challenged by the horror of war and our rapidly changing society, so were artistic ones.

Modern art is such a confusing pile of styles and theories that only one generalization can be made: little of it looks like the real world. But you can't judge art simply by how well it copies reality. Artists distort the real world intentionally. Especially in modern art, some of the messiest and least-organized-looking works ("My four-year-old coulda' done that!") are sophisticated, based on complex theories requiring knowledge of many art styles. If you don't understand it, you can't judge it. Learn about art first, understand the artist's purpose, and then you can appreciate or criticize with gusto.

Modern artists portray the "real" world in two different ways, expressive or abstract. Expressive art is like van Gogh's. It depicts the real world but distorts things to express emotion. Abstract art abandons the visible world altogether, making basic lines and patches of



color that reflect not real objects but a more fundamental beauty. Other modern styles such as Cubism, primitivism, and the combo style of abstract expressionism, are variations on these two basic themes.

## Expressionism

The best example of the "expressive" distortion of reality is called expressionism. This style carries van Gogh's emotionalism to the extreme. In *The Scream*, Norwegian artist Edvard Munch ("MOONK," 1863–1944) bends and twists everything into a landscape of unexplained terror. We "hear" the scream in the lines of the canvas rising up from the twisted body, through the terrified skull, and out to the sky, echoing until it fills the entire nightmare world of the painting.

We can appreciate the power of modern art by comparing *The Scream* to an earlier work, Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* (see page 216). Both are a terror on canvas. But while Gericault's terror arises from a realistic portrayal of a grotesque event, Munch simply distorts the appearance of an everyday scene so we see it in a more powerful way, from a different emotional perspective.

Expressionism flourished in Germany from 1905 through 1935. Artists showed the horror and injustice of the war years they experienced. The garish colors, twisted lines, and mask-like faces stress emotion over realism.

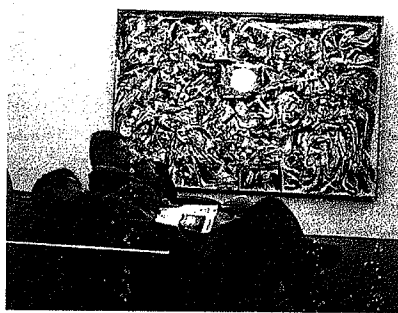
### Abstract Art

The second strain of modern art, "abstraction," is less understood than the "expressive" distortion employed by Munch and van Gogh. Abstraction is simplification.

Since a tree, for instance, can never be painted with all its infinite details, all art is to some extent an abstraction, or simplification, of the real world. For so many generations, artists had denied this fact, trying to make their two-dimensional canvases look as real as the three-dimensional world they painted. But by the 20th century, the camera had been accepted as the captor of reality. Artists began to accept the abstract and artificial nature of paintings. In fact, they emphasized and enjoyed this abstraction to the extent of neglecting the subject itself. They were free



Munch, *The Scream*, 1893 (Edvard Munch Museum, Oslo). Norwegian Munch led the way into the artistic movement aptly called "expressionism." These artists distorted reality to express the horror of the modern world. The Munch Museum in Oslo is excellent.



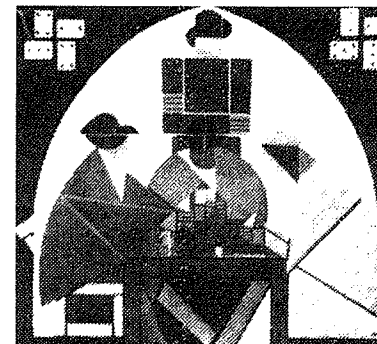
*Abstract pondering*

### From Realism to Abstraction

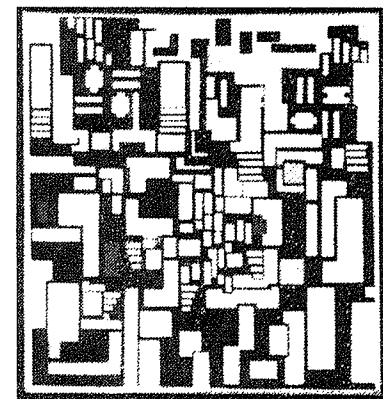
Here is a progression of realism to abstraction based on Cézanne's post-Impressionist painting (top), which is more or less realistic. Below left: The figures are flattened, the canvas reduced to a composition of geometric shapes. The subject matter is still apparent. Below right: Simplified into a jumble of puzzle pieces, the card players are barely recognizable. The blocks of line and color themselves become the subject.



Cézanne, *The Card Players*, 1892



Van Doesburg, *Card Players*, 1916



Van Doesburg, *Card Players*, 1917

to experiment with the building blocks of realistic art: lines, colors, and shapes. Not concerned with representing the real world, this art is called “nonrepresentational.”

Abstract artists are free, like children with a set of brightly colored building blocks. Rather than use the blocks to build a house or some recognizable object, children are fascinated by the blocks themselves. Like children, abstract artists spend hours organizing patterns that are pleasing for their own sake, not because they add up to something else. But unlike children, abstract artists generally have years of training with which to plan the best arrangement of the “blocks.”

To appreciate and judge modern art, the viewer needs to know the rules, especially if the art can't be compared to reality.

### Abstract Art = Visual Music

It's helpful to compare abstract art to pure instrumental music. Some music is designed to imitate a sound heard in nature, such as a storm or a bird's call. Other music is intended to express an emotion, such as the sadness caused by the death of a friend. But most music is the perfect audio equivalent of abstract visual art. It simply plays with the beautiful “shapes and colors” of sound, the harmonious relationship of tones. Our ears don't demand to know what the sounds are supposed to represent. Our ears are better than our eyes at accepting abstract beauty.

Abstract art explores the relationships of lines and colors. The rules of these relationships are visible to the trained eye just as the rules of music are audible to the trained ear. But to the average viewer (or listener), abstract art (or music) is to be enjoyed, not analyzed. Music is enjoyable even if you don't understand the meter and scale on which it's built. The same is true of visual abstract art—it's just plain nice to look at. (Notice the similarity between the titles of abstract artworks and musical compositions: *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue*, “Sonata for Piano and Violin No. 1.”)

Abstract artists have



*Kandinsky, Composition 238: Bright Circle, 1921. Reality is tossed out the window as the artist calls on us to enjoy more basic shapes and colors. We hope this is right side up.*

been criticized for avoiding reality—for playing with their building blocks and making patterns that only they can understand. Artists such as Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky have replied that what they paint is reality, not the fleeting reality of the visible world that changes and passes away, but the eternal and unchanging world of geometrical relationships. The abstract artist simplifies the world into timeless shapes and colors. Are your eyes as open-minded as your ears?

### Primitives and Wild Beasts

“Primitivism” is a return to the simplified (and therefore abstract) style used in prehistoric cave paintings and stylized, early Greek art. Primitivists tried to paint the world through the eyes of primitive people, with a calculated crudeness.



*Rousseau, War, 1894 (Orsay Museum, Paris)*

Paul Gauguin was their inspiration. Gauguin rejected the sterile, modern, industrial world (and its sterile art) for the expressive and magical power of primitive images.

The Fauves (French for “wild beasts,” pronounced “foavs”) shocked the modern-art world with their exuberant use of elements of primitive art: strong outlines; bright, barbaric colors; and two-dimensional flatness. The Fauves distorted the visible world so we could see it through more primitive eyes.



Their leader was Henri Matisse (mah-TEES, 1869–1954), a master of simplicity. Each of his subjects is boiled down to its essential details and portrayed with a few simple lines and colors.

*Matisse simplifies reality so we can see it better through primitive eyes. The two-dimensional flatness shows Gauguin's influence.*

Even though Matisse's work looks crude, his classical training is obvious. The "flat," primitive look is actually carefully planned 3-D. The bright colors that seem so bizarre are purposely placed to balance the composition. And despite the few lines, his figures are accurate and expressive.

### Picasso and Cubism

Pablo Picasso's long, prolific career spans several art styles. Picasso (1881–1973), an innovator, provides us with prime examples of many things characteristic of modern art.

When he was 19, Picasso moved from Barcelona to Paris to be where the artistic action was. (An exciting collection of his early work is displayed in his house in Barcelona.) Picasso's early paintings of beggars and other social outcasts are touching examples of expressionism done with the sympathy and understanding of an artist who felt, perhaps, as much an outcast as his subjects. These early works were from his Blue Period (around 1905), so called because their dominant color matches their melancholy mood.

Picasso was jolted out of his Blue Period by the abstract methods of the Fauves. Fascinated but not satisfied with the Fauvist 2-D treatment of 3-D, Picasso played with the "building blocks" of line and color to find new ways to reconstruct the real world on canvas.



Picasso, *Science and Charity*, 1897 (Picasso Museum, Barcelona). As a teenager, Picasso painted realistically.



Picasso, *The Frugal Meal*, 1904 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). He then explored beyond what the eye sees, evolving through several stages. This stage was melancholy, a style of expressionism called Picasso's "Blue Period."

In about 1910, after an orgy of artistic exploration, Picasso and his friend Georges Braque found a new way to portray their world. This was Cubism, so called because the painting looks as though it was built with blocks. Cubism

is like breaking a vase and arranging the broken pieces on a flat surface. In Picasso's work, chunks of light and shadow seem to stand out in 3-D, like shards of broken glass reflecting light.

Picasso was still tied to the visible world. The anatomy might be jumbled, but it's all there. Picasso shattered the real world, then pieced it back together on canvas in his own way.

In his monumental mural *Guernica*, Picasso blends the abstract and the expressive. In the 1930s, Nazi-backed Spanish Fascists destroyed the Spanish town of Guernica. Picasso captured the horror of the event, not through a realistic portrayal but through expressive images.

The ambiguous, abstract nature of *Guernica* elevates the painting to a statement about all wars. There are some clearly recognizable images of the agony of war: the grieving mother with her dead child (a modern *Pietà*); the dying

Picasso, *Seated Nude*, 1909 (Tate Modern, London). During a frenzied period in Paris with painting buddy Georges Braque, Picasso jumbled realism into a new art style, "Cubism."





Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937 (Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid). This masterpiece combines Cubism, surrealism, and abstractionism in black, grey, and white to show the terror of the Fascist air raid on a defenseless town during the Spanish Civil War. Today it is a virtual national monument of Spain and a comment on the futility and horror of war in general.

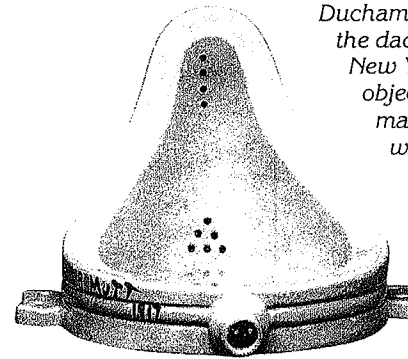
warrior clutching a broken sword; the twisted horse's head. But the real power of the work comes from the disjointed anatomy typical of early Cubist works, as if the bombs had shattered every belief and decimated every moral principle, leaving civilization in a confused heap of rubble.

*Guernica*, Spain's national work of art, spent the Franco years in exile. Today it's the powerful centerpiece of the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, a few blocks from the Prado museum.

## Dada

The Jazz Age of the 1920s, when Europe tried to drown the memory of the war in wine and cynicism, produced Dadaism. The name was intentionally nonsensical and childish to poke fun at the pompous art styles, theories, and -isms of prewar times. The one rule of the Dada theory is that there are no rules. The *Mona Lisa* with a mustache, a snow shovel signed by the artist, a collage of shredded paper dropped on a canvas—these were the Dadaists' contribution to Art, a summation of the rebelliousness and disgust of the Roaring Twenties.

If a snow shovel is art, what is art? With mass production, the lines began to blur. Handmade art became an economic dinosaur as it became possible for rich people to buy beautiful objects and furnishings right off the production line. Artists found themselves on the outside of an industrial society that was interested more in utility and affordability than in aesthetics and uniqueness.



Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917. Marcel Duchamp, the daddy of Dada, placed this urinal in a New York exhibit. By taking a common object, giving it a title, and calling it art, he makes us think about the object in a new way.

Without patrons to please, modern artists had no one to please but themselves and fellow artists. They turned to subjects interesting to the highly educated—studies in color, brushwork, and textures. Originality and innovation became more important than beauty.

Modern artists face the same challenge as Michelangelo's successors: to be original at all costs. If you can't please the public, shock it.

## Surrealism and Beyond

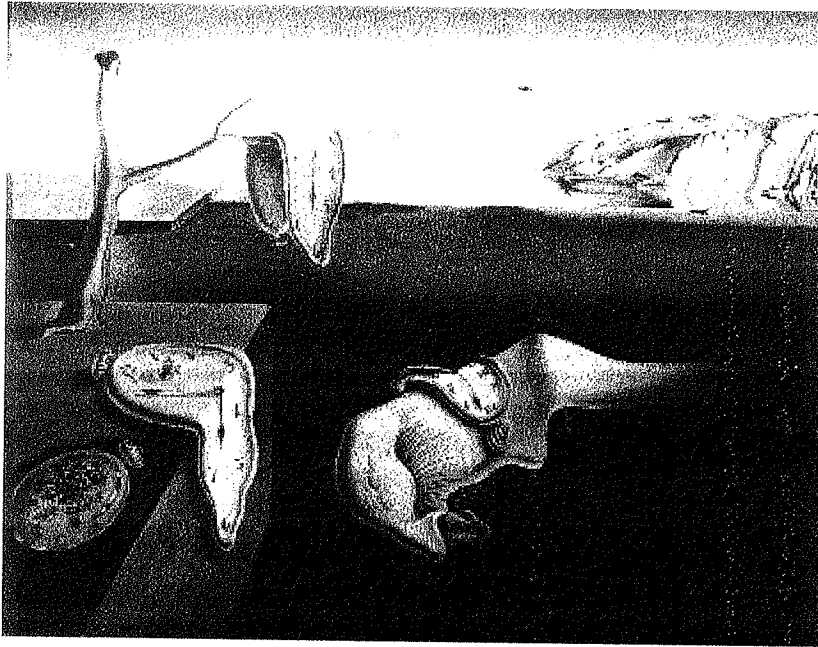
Dada's successor for shock value was surrealism. (The name implies "beyond realism," as if reality isn't weird enough already.) Inspired by the psychiatric theories of Sigmund Freud, surrealism explores the inner world of the subconscious mind. The canvases of Salvador Dali are primal, troubling "dreamscapes." In dreams, objects appear in weird combinations, constantly changing in shape and meaning. A woman becomes a cat, the cat has a train pass, the cat is the train . . .

Marc Chagall (shuh-GAWL, 1887–1985), although not a surrealist, used the same scrambling of images. Raised in Russia, Chagall mixed a rich borscht of Russian folk images, Jewish motifs, and Christian messages. His



Chagall, *Self-Portrait with Seven Fingers*, 1912 (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)





Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931 (Museum of Modern Art, New York). This first-ever look at “flex time” sums up the surrealists’ attempt to shock us by taking familiar objects and placing them in an unfamiliar context.

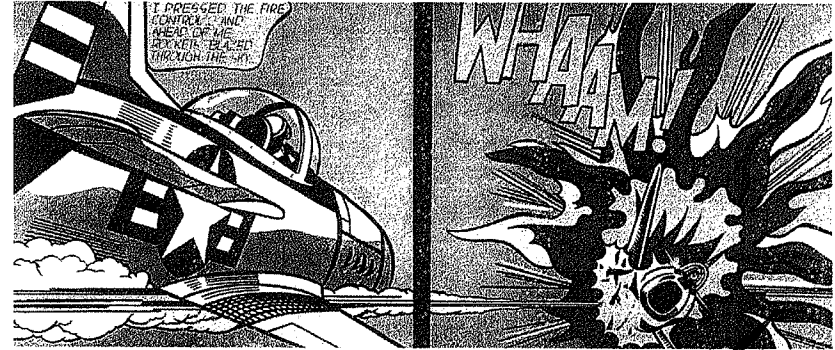
colorful paintings are a stimulating fantasy of mostly weightless images. The Chagall museum in Nice, designed by the artist himself, is a delight.

While surrealists painted recognizable objects (though often in a twisted or unusual setting), other artists produced purely abstract works. As Europe struggled to rebuild and recover after World War II, the focus of art shifted to the United States.

### Pop Art

Pop Art of the 1950s and 1960s, like Dada of the Jazz Age, challenges the old rules of what constitutes art. The everyday toothpastes, soup cans, comic books, and advertisements of commercial society are displayed as art. The viewer sees these objects in a new way, reflecting on the value our society places on them.

Modern artists experiment with modern materials. From initial experimentation with Cubist collages, artists began replacing paint with all kinds of things. The resulting mixed-media creations stimulate



Lichtenstein, *Whaam!*, 1963 (Tate Modern, London). A child’s comic book becomes a 70-square-foot piece of art: Pop Art. What would Raphael think?

all the senses—in some cases, even smell—and fuse the mediums of painting and sculpture.

Painting has been the most dynamic of the visual arts in this century, but sculpture followed some of the same trends. The primitivism of the Fauves influenced Constantin Brancusi, whose sculptures are the equivalent of Matisse’s “minimal” paintings. Brancusi altered the shape of the original stone only slightly.



Author Gene Openshaw “getting into” modern art (Pompidou Center, Paris)