



Mary Cassatt, *The Letter*, 1890–91. Drypoint and aquatint on cream laid paper, 34.4 x 21.1 cm. S.P. Avery Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

< AESTHETICISM AND JAPAN: THE CULT OF THE ORIENT >

In 1853 Matthew Perry, an American naval officer, was sent on a mission to Japan, a country that had been closed to outsiders since the 17th century. With the intimidating threat of a powerful fleet, the Japanese signed a treaty on March 31, 1854 that permitted U.S. ships to buy coal in Japan, and opened Japanese ports to U.S. commerce. Perry's mission ended Japan's isolation and began a flood of foreign imports into Western markets in the U.S. and Europe.

America was rising as a Pacific power, invested in expanding trade and influence with China and Japan. Many Western artists turned to the philosophies and artistic practices of “the Orient” as an alternative to European sources of cultural identity and creative inspiration and developed an appreciation of Asian art and teachings. Woodblock prints with images of everyday life by masters of the ukiyo-e school appealed to many artists of the day and proved to be enormously influential. In the 1870s the term *japonisme* was coined to refer to this influence of Asian and especially Japanese culture on Western art.

Although best known for her perceptive painted depictions of women and children, Mary Cassatt (1844–1926) was also an accomplished printmaker. After seeing the 1890 exhibition of Japanese woodcuts in Paris, Cassatt decided to create a series of prints. She adapted the ukiyo-e (the floating world) theme of women's everyday lives to scenes showing a modern French woman, as she went about caring for a child, trying on a dress, and in this work, sealing an envelope.

In *The Letter*, the influence of Japanese prints can be seen in the bold patterns in the wallpaper and dress, strong color blocks, and a sense of flattened, compressed space. Cassatt translates these formal elements into a scene of personal significance. For Cassatt, who was an American expatriate living in Paris, letter writing would have been the way she kept in touch with family and friends. The drop-leaf desk that is included in this composition still belongs to the artist's family, and it is thought that Cassatt may have used it to write letters.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Mary Cassatt, *The Letter*, 1890–91

- ▶ Describe *The Letter* as carefully as you can. Consider the subject, composition, point of view, colors, and patterns.
- ▶ Some of the qualities that Cassatt admired in Japanese woodblock prints included the unusual angles and shapes, strong linear outlines, an emphasis on flat planes, asymmetrical compositions, aerial perspective, and decorative motifs. How many of these attributes can you find in her image? Explain.
- ▶ Mary Cassatt owned Japanese prints by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) and displayed them in her home alongside her own work. Like Cassatt, Utamaro was inspired by everyday events. Compare and contrast these two prints. In what ways are they similar? How are they different from each other?



Kitagawa Utamaro, *Midnight: Mother and Sleepy Child*, from the series *Customs of Women in the Twelve Hours (Fuzoku Bijin Tokei)*, Edo period, 1790. Polychrome woodblock print, 36.5 x 24.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

- ▶ Some of the daily activities depicted in Cassatt's suite of 10 prints include bathing a child, being fitted for a dress, washing, hugging a child, and socializing at an afternoon tea party. To view all the prints in this series, visit <http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/cassatt/cassatt-46723.html>. If you were to select 10 activities in the life of a typical 21st century woman, what would they be?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- As a late 19th century woman from a wealthy family, Cassatt would have been expected to marry, have a family, and attend to running a household. Instead Cassatt defied the expectations of her time, announcing to her family that she wanted to pursue her own independent career as an artist. Research the role of women in the late 19th century and how it has changed over the past century. What changes and challenges do you think lie ahead for women in the 21st century? Explain your response.
- Imagine a meeting between the women in the Cassatt and Utamaro prints. How might they interact? With a partner, create a dialogue between these two women. You may want to base this conversation on research, or solely on the clues that these two works present.
- In the 1890s correspondence would have consumed a large part of a woman's day. She would not only write to friends and acquaintances, but was also expected to answer invitations and inquiries. What do you think this letter might be about? Write the letter that might be contained in this envelope. Share your letter with your classmates. Did they have similar or different ideas about the subject of this correspondence?
- Because it requires the use of sharp chisels and gouges, woodblock printing is appropriate only for older students. However, younger students can create their own relief prints with less resistant materials including linoleum, rubber stamps, potato prints, Styrofoam prints, and other commercially available materials designed for safe use in the classroom.

The student cuts or carves the surface so that some areas remain untouched while others are removed and recessed. Then an even coating of ink is distributed across the surface, usually with a roller called a brayer. A piece of paper is placed over the inked surface and pressure is applied with a mechanical press, or manually with the back of a wooden spoon. When the paper is peeled away from the surface, the ink has been transferred from the printing surface to the paper, which is called a print. The print is a reverse image of the printing block or plate.

RIGHT

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Abstraction*, 1917. Watercolor on paper, 40 x 27.6 cm. Collection of Gerald and Kathleen Peters, Courtesy Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico. © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe



BOTTOM

Arthur Wesley Dow, *August Moon*, ca. 1905. Polychrome woodblock print, 13.5 x 18.5 cm. Collection of Edgar O. Smith, New York. Photo: David Heald/SRGF, New York

< LANDSCAPES OF THE MIND: EARLY MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE >

During the early to mid-twentieth century, American artists championed modern and abstract art while also looking to Asian aesthetics and philosophies that envisioned nature as a site where matter and spirit could be united. From Asian art they distilled an aesthetic of weightlessness, silence, and rhythmic form. On the West coast increasing Asian immigration contributed to the dissemination of Buddhist teachings, inspiring some artists to become students and practitioners of meditation techniques and East Asian calligraphy.

On the East coast Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), an influential Japanese-art specialist and teacher, would influence a generation of artists. As head of the Fine Arts Department at Teachers College, Columbia University, Dow taught that art should express an artist's own feelings and that subject matter could be best realized through the arrangement of line, color, and *nōtan* (the classical Japanese system of light and dark in painting). His revolutionary methods were set out in his



landmark textbook *Composition: A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education* (1899). A young student in his class, Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), would incorporate his teachings into her personal style. Dow's method encouraged students to experiment with nonrepresentational shapes and patterns as they learned the concepts of composition and balance. In 1917, while teaching art in Canyon, Texas, O'Keeffe spent time exploring the wide open spaces and watching the changing sky. She began to invent ways to express her feelings, reducing her pictures to shapes and colors. Most of the time she worked in watercolor because she lacked the uninterrupted hours required for oil. But watercolor, it turned out, was ideal for her subject, the Western sky, since she could let colors flow into one another. Although some of O'Keeffe's acquaintances in Texas commented that these works did not look like the canyon, O'Keeffe responded that she was painting the way she *felt* about the landscape, not the way it looked. Later that year O'Keeffe's first gallery exhibition opened in New York City and included many of these watercolors.

Throughout her long career, the spare simplicity of Asian art, a mix of both abstraction and representation, and a love of open landscape would permeate and inspire her work.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Georgia O'Keeffe, *Abstraction*, 1917, and Arthur Wesley Dow, *August Moon*, ca. 1905

- ▶ What is your initial reaction to each of these works?
- ▶ Compare Dow's approach to landscape with O'Keeffe's. What are the similarities and differences?
- ▶ Describe these paintings in as much detail as possible. What might each artist be attempting to convey?
- ▶ O'Keeffe titled this 1917 watercolor *Abstraction*. What title would you give it? Why?
- ▶ Although O'Keeffe was inspired by the landscape in *Canyon*, she was not attempting to paint the way it looked. Write a paragraph that describes the feeling that this painting conveys to you, and then share your response with another student. How was his or her response similar to or different from yours?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- At the beginning of the 20th century traditional academic training for an artist consisted of copying works by old masters. Student work was judged by how closely it imitated reality. Arthur Wesley Dow's influential textbook *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* (1899) changed the focus of art education by placing the emphasis on the compositional elements of line, color, and *nōtan* (a Japanese word meaning "lightness-darkness") as the basic principles in art. He believed that "art should be approached through composition rather than through imitative drawing." Many of his lessons require in-depth study, but others can be adapted for the elementary school art classroom. Here are two simplified ideas for exercises focusing on *nōtan* adapted from Dow's textbook.
 1. To heighten a student's awareness of *nōtan*, begin with a simple geometric line design and make several copies of it. Experiment with creating variations of the same design by applying different combinations of black and white. Then discuss which are most successful and why.
 2. Choose a landscape with a variety of large and small spaces. Using only black paint on white paper, create an arrangement of dark and light that describes that landscape while also creating a harmonious balance. Discuss which of the students' works are most successful and why.
- O'Keeffe fell in love with the Texas landscape and recalled, "I couldn't believe Texas was real. When I arrived out there, there wasn't a blade of green grass or a leaf to be seen, but I was absolutely crazy about it.... For me Texas is the same big wonderful thing that oceans and the highest mountains are." Have you ever encountered a landscape that you found inspirational? Where was it? What about it appealed to you? Recall that place, and like O'Keeffe create a watercolor painting that emphasizes how that place *felt*, rather than attempting to replicate how it looked.

< EZRA POUND, MODERN POETRY, AND DANCE THEATER >

Ernest Fenollosa, Ezra Pound, Itō Michio, and Isamu Noguchi would each play important roles in introducing Eastern culture to American audiences.

Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), a Boston philosopher and art historian was seminal in introducing Asian art and culture to the U.S. His missionary zeal regarding Japanese aesthetics came from his years of living and teaching in Japan, where he was named an imperial commissioner of fine arts.

Several years after his death, Fenollosa's widow sent his unpublished papers including translations of literature and No, traditional Japanese theater, to Ezra Pound. Pound (1885–1972) was one of the most ambitious and influential poets of his time and drew upon Japanese and Chinese techniques to produce his innovative free-verse poetry. Pound's approach, inspired by Fenollosa's literary concept revolutionized American poetry. According to Pound, "The vision and the plan are Fenollosa's. In the prose I have had but the part of literary executor; in the plays my work has been that of translator who has found all the heavy work done for him and who has had but the pleasure of arranging beauty into the words."

The artistic careers of both Itō Michio (1893–1961) and Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) would draw from a combination of Eastern and Western influences. Itō was raised in Japan

and sent to Paris at the age of 17 to study. After much success as a dancer in Europe, Itō left for the U.S., where his career flourished. Itō's goal was to fuse East and West into a style of his own.

The life of the Japanese-American sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi also took place between two cultures. Born in California to a Japanese father and an American mother, Noguchi was raised in Japan, but studied in the U.S. While still a young man he returned to the East on a Guggenheim fellowship, visiting India, China, and Japan. His developing awareness of his Asian roots was reflected more and more in his work as an artist.

When Noguchi met Itō in 1925, Itō was already well known for introducing Japanese No drama to the West. Noguchi created a bronze mask for one of the dramas Itō staged, from a Fenollosa translation that Pound "finished." Worn by Itō, a dancer whom Noguchi admired, the mask successfully melded the dancer's face with the traditional No costume. The clever handhold resembled a long thin rod of hair. At the time, Noguchi was just beginning his explorations of modernist sculpture, but the portrait contains the promise of his future accomplishments.



Isamu Noguchi. *Michio Itō*, 1925–26. Bronze, 45.8 x 14.6 x 10.2 cm.
The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, New York.
Photo courtesy The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum,
New York © 2009 The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum,
New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Isamu Noguchi, *Michio Itō*, 1925–26

- ▶ Look carefully at this work. What is your impression of this face? What type of persona is projected here? What personality traits would you attribute to these features?
- ▶ Research online or in books the characteristics of traditional No masks. Compare this sculpture to a traditional No mask. In what ways is it similar? How is it different?
- ▶ Dancer Itō Michio used this mask created by Isamu Noguchi on stage. Imagine yourself wearing this mask. Demonstrate the kinds of movements and postures wearing it might suggest.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Ezra Pound adapted the traditional Japanese poetry form of haiku. A haiku usually has 17 syllables in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables. The poet tries to capture a simple scene from nature and to convey a strong feeling about it. The haiku should contain a seasonal word or suggest a season. Here is a classic Japanese haiku:

*An old silent pond...
A frog jumps into the pond,
Splash! Silence again.*
Bashtō (1644–1694)

As the form has evolved, many of these rules—including the 5/7/5 practice—have routinely been broken. However, the philosophy of haiku has been preserved. The influence of haiku on Ezra Pound is most evident in his poem “In a Station of the Metro” (1913). The poem was inspired by his experience of emerging from the Paris metro and walking through the city streets, noticing one beautiful face after another. It began as a thirty-line poem, but was eventually pared down to two:

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.*

Refer to the guidelines above and write your own haiku. A way to share your work is to organize a poetry slam. This form is a continuation and rebirth of the oral tradition in which poetry is performed out loud and engages an audience’s attention.

- Research online or in books the characteristics of traditional No masks. Like Noguchi, create a mask that melds your own features with this traditional form. One way to begin is to mold a sheet of heavy-duty aluminum foil by taking an impression of your face. Using this as an armature, layer paper mâché or plaster gauze over the form. When dry, the mask can be painted.
- This bronze mask was completed 1926 when Noguchi was still in his early 20s. He would later become one of the most accomplished and innovative sculptors of the 20th century. To learn more about the development of his work visit the Noguchi Museum online: <http://www.noguchi.org/>

Franz Kline, *Painting No. 7*, 1952. Oil on canvas, 146 x 207.6 cm.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 54.1403.
© 2009 The Franz Kline Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



< ABSTRACT ART, CALLIGRAPHY, AND METAPHYSICS >

Following World War II New York City became the center of the avant-garde art world. Artists were working in new ways, and some were exploring the energy of the gesture with loose brushwork that reflected the impact of the artist's bold movements. The calligraphic brushstroke was an approach to abstract painting that focused on the spontaneous gesture of the artist's hand and was informed by the East Asian art of calligraphy and popular writings on Zen and its principles of direct action.

Franz Kline (1910–1962) grew up amidst the industrial buildings associated with coal mining. Initially trained as a realist painter, Kline moved to New York City, and became closely associated with important artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement. Like many of his colleagues, Kline was fascinated by East Asian calligraphy and its balance of control and energy, order and dynamism. In Chinese and Japanese calligraphy the brush becomes an extension of the writer's arm, indeed, his or her entire body. The artist's stroke not only suggests the movement of the body, but also inner qualities. Abstract as it appears, calligraphy also conveys something about the essence of the individual artist. It is therefore not surprising that 20th-century American

Abstract Expressionists who sought to convey emotion through paint were drawn to it.

Kline developed many small compositional studies in ink typically sketched on the pages of telephone books. A much-repeated story recounts a 1948 visit that Kline made to his friend and fellow artist Willem de Kooning. Using an opaque projector de Kooning enlarged some of Kline's drawings. Once Kline saw his work projected on the wall, and observed the strength and dramatic effect of the abstract shapes, his work became almost exclusively abstract.

Kline's success came in the early 1950s with large canvases onto which he applied black and white commercial paint with housepainter's brushes. He became known as an Action Painter because his work expressed movement and energy, emphasizing dynamic line. The characteristic black slashes of *Painting No. 7* suggest the full-body movement of the artist as he spontaneously applied the paint, incorporating chance splatters and smearing. Like Kline's process, the calligrapher must learn traditional forms and movements; but once the rules have been observed, they can be broken to express a personal vitality.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Franz Kline, *Painting No. 7*, 1952.

- ▶ Before showing this painting to the class, divide students into pairs. Ask one student to face away from the screen while the other looks at the work and describes it in as much detail as possible. The student who is listening should draw the image using only the information from the partner's verbal description. After 10 minutes display the results, and discuss the experience.
- ▶ Notice the size of this painting and map out its dimensions on a classroom wall. How does the size of this work affect its impact? How might that change if this work were much smaller or larger? Explain.
- ▶ To better determine whether you see a relationship between Kline's painting and Asian calligraphy, research books and/or Web sites that feature Chinese or Japanese calligraphy. Two excellent books are listed in the *Resources* section of this guide. You can also view a short video that features the Chinese calligraphy of Shun Kai Tse at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4ghtJolXC8>. In what ways does Kline's work seem related to Asian calligraphy? In what ways does it differ?
- ▶ How do you think this painting was made? Describe the various steps the artist might have taken to create this work.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Art historians have documented aspects of Kline's process. His abstract paintings were sometimes based on quick ink studies he did on the pages of telephone books. To get a feel for the process that Kline used, begin with a stack of pages torn from a discarded telephone book. With a large brush and watered-down black tempera paint or ink create a series of quick studies that use your whole arm (rather than just your hand) to create abstract designs. Kline made hundreds of these studies, but for this exercise, begin with 15–20. Select the study that most appeals to you. If you have access to an overhead projector, photocopy your drawing onto a sheet of transparency film and project the image onto a large sheet of white paper. You can also scan your work and project it digitally. Experiment with how you will position the projection on the paper. Do you want to include the entire study or, as Kline sometimes did, enlarge only a section to fill the space? Once you decide, use a wide brush, black tempera paint, lots of energy, and your entire body to create your painting.

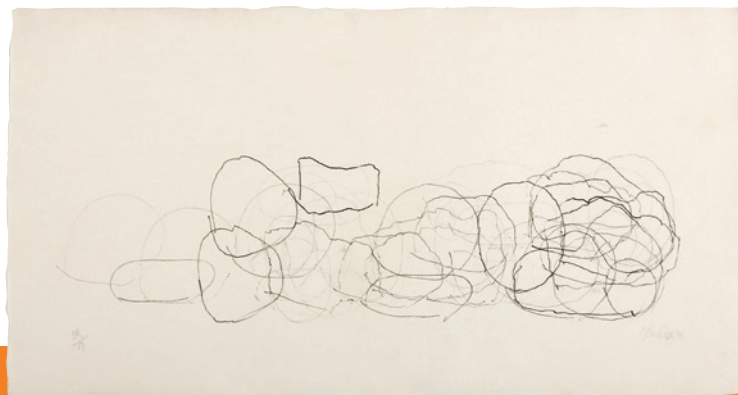
Younger children can emulate the expansive gestures of Kline's work by painting on a chalkboard with sponge brushes dipped in water to achieve bold expressive strokes.

- Various critics have suggested that Kline's painting may have been inspired by:
 - ◆ the industrial buildings of his coal-mining hometown of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
 - ◆ his experience living in New York City
 - ◆ his study of Asian calligraphy
 - ◆ James McNeill Whistler's painting *Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1* (1871, frequently referred to as *Whistler's Mother*), which can be viewed at <http://www.lib.fit.edu/pubs/librarydisplays/arts/mother.jpg>

Research each of these possibilities and decide which theory seems the most reasonable to you. Then present the evidence to your classmates.

- Franz Kline is not the only American artist who explored the calligraphic line. Artists Brice Marden (b. 1938), Mark Tobey (1890–1976), David Smith (1906–1965), and Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) all worked in gestural modes. Research works by each of these artists and notice how they developed their own personalized approach to calligraphy. Then experiment with developing your own methods by using various mediums, including paints and inks, and applying them to different surfaces.

John Cage, *Where R = Ryoanji (3R/17)*, 1992.
Pencils on handmade Japanese paper, 25.4 x 48.3 cm.
The John Cage Trust, Red Hook, New York.
Photo: David Heald/SRGF, New York
© The John Cage Trust at Bard College



< BUDDHISM AND THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE >

John Cage's (1912–1992) Buddhist-influenced approach to creating art would have an enormous impact on the development of American art in the mid-20th century. He created musical compositions that “allowed sounds to be themselves,” intentionally abandoning the ego-self to emphasize that art and daily life were one and the same.

Cage staunchly refused to create art in keeping with expectations, and all his creative endeavors, including dance, music, and visual art, were revolutionary. His *Lecture on Nothing* began with his statement, “I am here and there is nothing to say.” His concerts were even more challenging. In 1952, he premiered his most notorious composition, *4' 33"*. In a concert hall filled to capacity, Cage presented a piece of four minutes and 33 seconds of total silence on the part of the performer, into which the random sounds of the world entered. When first performed it created a scandal. At the premiere some listeners were unaware that they had heard anything at all. Cage said, “People began whispering to one another, and some people began to walk out. They didn't laugh—they were just irritated when they realized nothing was going to happen, and they haven't forgotten it 30 years later: they're still angry.”

Cage's point is that *4' 33"* isn't silent at all. You are supposed to hear the noise of the person beside you, a cough in the audience, a musician moving in a seat, or a string stretching on an instrument. The goal is to hear everything you normally wouldn't notice. Cage believed that the purpose of art is to open our hearts and minds to the flow of reality.

Although Cage was best known for his musical endeavors, he also created works of visual art. A series of graphite drawings were inspired by the garden of the Rinzai Zen Buddhist temple Ryōanji in Kyoto, Japan. The garden is an austere arrangement of 15 rocks resting on a bed of white gravel. Cage used 15 stones in composing the series. He placed each stone on the paper, its location determined by chance, and traced around it a certain number of times, also determined by chance, until the paper carried the images of all fifteen stones. Cage turned to the ancient Chinese book of wisdom—the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*—to govern these aesthetic decisions. He stated, “I use chance operations instead of operating according to my likes and dislikes.” This approach allowed Cage to escape his own preferences and open himself up to new possibilities.

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: John Cage, *Where R = Ryoanji*
(3R/17), 1992

- ▶ Since Cage's approach to art encourages us to dispense with our egos, describe Cage's drawing as objectively as possible, not focusing on your personal likes or dislikes, but on describing only what you see.
- ▶ Cage used elements of chance to determine the placement of his forms and lines on the page. Can you identify any aspects of this drawing that allude to how it was created?
- ▶ John Cage based this series of drawings on a place that he found inspirational, the Rinzaï Zen Buddhist temple Ryōanji in Kyoto, Japan. You can view photos of the temple at <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/japan/kyoto-ryoanji.htm>. Compare photos of the site to Cage's drawing. How does seeing photos of the place Cage was inspired by change the way you respond to his drawing?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- One of Cage's most famous works is *4' 33"*, a performance staged in a concert hall that consists of the pianist going to the piano, and not hitting any keys for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Research more about this work and then discuss why Cage might have created it. Would you have wanted to attend this performance? Why? Why not?
- Cage once stated, "Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating." Close your eyes and take four minutes and thirty-three seconds to listen to the sounds around you. Then write down all that you remember noticing. Was there anything you heard that surprised you? Discuss the experience of focusing your attention on the very sounds we usually try to ignore.
- Create two works of art that focus on the same theme. In the first one consciously plan and premeditate every possibility—leaving as little to chance as possible. For the second find ways to incorporate elements of chance into its creation. For instance:
 - ◆ You may create a second poem using all the words used in the first poem, but this time write the words on separate pieces of paper and turn them all face down. Your new poem might be created by randomly turning over words.
 - ◆ Even if you don't own a copy of the I Ching, you can use dice to choreograph a dance by assigning a type of dance movement to correlate with each side of the die.
 - ◆ Try drawing in a way where it is more difficult to control the result: with your eyes closed, or with your non-dominant hand.Compare the two experiences. Many artists like to balance these two approaches—being intentional about their work, but also valuing the "happy accidents" that occur during the process of creating. Determining how chance will affect your work is a creative decision as well.
- John Cage was inspired by a place that had special meaning for him. Think of a place that has meaning for you and create a work of art that conveys the essence of that place. Then share your work, your inspiration, and your process with your classmates.

< ART OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE: PURE ABSTRACTION AND ALTERNATIVE MINIMALISM >

The 1960s were a time of vital spiritual ferment in the United States. For many American artists the influence of Asian ideas was channeled toward creating Zen-inspired art forms that could transform human consciousness. By interpreting Asian art and religious thought they sought to create works that would be objects of concentrated contemplation that could alter public consciousness and hold social, spiritual, or Utopian potential.

The philosopher D.T. Suzuki, who lectured at Columbia University, was influential in disseminating Zen ideas including a love for what is spontaneous and irregular, a passion for simplicity, sensitivity to nature, a preference for intuition and feeling over knowledge, and self-discipline and directness of perception and action. These ideas spread to artists on both the East and West coasts of the U.S.

Suzuki often cited the work of Japanese Zen monk Sengai Gibon (1750–1837), whose painting *Circle, Triangle, and Square* he saw as the embodiment of the universe. Suzuki interpreted Sengai's three fundamental forms as geometries of formlessness and infinity, which underscored his own view of emptiness as the essence of Zen enlightenment. This scroll has fascinated people ever since. Rather than a single level of black or gray, the ink tones keep changing. The forms overlap just

a bit, suggesting interconnections between these fundamental shapes.

Walter De Maria's (b. 1935) *Triangle, Circle, Square* quotes from Sengai's famous 18th-century Buddhist painting. His early work of the 1960s, including music, performance, and writing as well as sculptural and conceptual works, was impacted by his exposure to Zen-informed thinking. De Maria developed an interest in task-oriented, game-like projects that resulted in viewer-interactive sculptures. De Maria started making pieces in metal in 1965 creating small-scale, polished-aluminum floor sculptures in shapes that possess significant iconic impact. In addition to these geometric forms he also produced a cross, six-pointed star, and swastika. The hollow interiors of the sculptures form narrow channels containing metal spheres. Like elegant, elementary game boards, these works each contain a ball the artist added, he said, "to disturb the purity of the symbol."

Although De Maria's works have been labeled Minimalist because of their use of simple geometric and repeating forms, their intention is complex. They seek to provoke close observation and sustained thought. De Maria has said, "Every good work should have at least ten meanings."



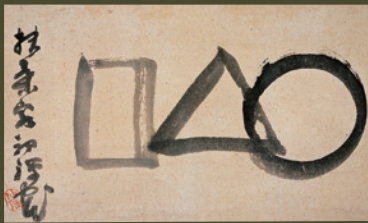
LEFT TO RIGHT

Walter De Maria, *Triangle, Circle, Square*, 1972. Brushed stainless steel; triangle 9.2 x 100.3 x 115.9 cm; circle 9.2 x 100 x 100 cm; square 9.5 x 100 x 100 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston. Photographer: Hickey-Robertson, Houston © 1972 Walter De Maria

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Sengai Gibon, *Circle, Triangle, and Square*, early 19th century

- ▶ In the classroom, project *Circle, Triangle, and Square* by Sengai Gibon for two seconds and then turn the projector off. Ask students to write down everything they noticed about the work. Then turn the projector on again and ask students to look at the work for two minutes, and then create a new list of all that they noticed. Compare the first and second lists. What new things did students notice in the second viewing?



Sengai Gibon. *Circle, Triangle, and Square*, Edo period, early 19th century. Hanging scroll: ink on paper, 28.4 x 48.1 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Arts, Tokyo

- ▶ Zen Masters often paint a circle, and from their inscriptions we know that it can mean the universe, the void, the moon, or even a rice cake. *Circle, Triangle, and Square* does not bear an inscription, only Sengai's elaborate signature. Sengai's painting may have symbolic meaning or be just what it is: a circle, a triangle, and a square. What do you think this painting might mean?
- ▶ Compare Sengai's painting to De Maria's metal sculptures. In what ways are they similar? How are they different? What might De Maria be expressing by referring to a work by a Japanese monk that was created more than two centuries ago?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- De Maria has said, "Every good work should have at least ten meanings." Work with a partner to come up with at least ten possible meanings for De Maria's sculptures. Then share your list with your classmates.
- De Maria created other works that reference Zen philosophy. In the early 1960s he began a series he called "invisible drawings." He experimented with creating drawings with the lightest of pencil lines that hovered on the threshold of visibility. He was interested in the *idea* of the drawing and how the viewers' senses would intensify if they weren't sure if the drawing was there or not. He said, "It wasn't necessary to have a big fistful of India ink and brushes and it wasn't necessary to have a thousand colors." Create your own (almost) invisible drawings. Experiment with the point at which your drawing becomes perceptible.
- In 1977 De Maria completed his best-known work, *The Lightning Field*. Located in a remote area of western New Mexico, it comprises 400 polished stainless steel poles, averaging 20 feet and 7 1/2 inches in height, installed in a grid measuring one mile by one kilometer. Visit <http://www.lightningfield.org/#overview> and discuss how De Maria's approach to creating art is manifested in this ambitious work.
- Through the ages and across cultures, geometric forms have been used to convey symbolic meaning. Research some of the possible meanings that circles, squares, and triangles may denote. Then use one or more of these essential forms in your own work to suggest a meaning beyond the shape itself.

< EXPERIENTIAL PERFORMANCE ART: THE AESTHETICS OF TIME >

By the 1970s, Asian traditions and values had become such a part of the intellectual and social fabric of the U.S. that they contributed to the human-potential and environmental movements, new-age spiritualism, and other popular culture developments. Asian traditions grew in popularity in American culture, and gradually the long-entrenched “East-West” divides began to break down. Artists investigated the possibilities of video, installation, and live performance art. Some used extreme endurance techniques to explore meditation, self-awareness, and political resistance. Whether as a form of political protest or an expression of social and spiritual anguish, performance art has caused us to reassess the way we derive meaning from art.

Tehching Hsieh (b. 1950), a pioneer of performance art in Taiwan, began his career as a painter in the late 1960s, and then made a dramatic debut as a performance artist in 1972 when he jumped from the third floor of a building in Taipei. The event was naturally considered shocking and seems to have been the artist’s most influential work in Taiwan.

In 1974 he arrived in the U.S. as an illegal immigrant, and continued to engage in risky body “performances” including living in a state of self-imposed homelessness on the streets of New York for a year. Hsieh’s way of being in the world is to live in the present tense. His work demands enormous physical and mental endurance that places the artist in

harsh and extreme circumstances. His works are unparalleled in their physical difficulty over long periods of time and in their conception of art and life as simultaneous processes.

In *Punching the Time Clock on the Hour, One Year Performance* (1980–81) he punched a time clock every hour on the hour for one year, documenting each register with a photograph and growing his hair to illustrate the passage of time. The resulting documentation presents a year passing in six minutes. On December 31, 1999, Hsieh claimed that he would probably no longer make art. It appears that his art and life have merged so seamlessly that art has disappeared from his life, and his life has disappeared from art.



Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980–1981*, April 11, 1980–April 11, 1981. Installation of documentary photographs and original performance relics, including poster, documents, 366 time cards, 366 24-hour images, 16mm film, time clock, 16mm movie camera, uniform, shoes, and footprints, Dimensions variable. Collection of the artist.
Photo by Michael Shen, © 1981 Tehching Hsieh, New York
© 1980–81 Tehching Hsieh

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Tehching Hsieh, *One Year Performance 1980–1981*, April 11, 1980–April 11, 1981

- ▶ From April 11, 1980 to April 11, 1981 Tehching Hsieh performed a work where he punched a time clock every hour on the hour. Some people see him as a groundbreaking artist and a leader in the field of performance art. Others believe his work is destructive and not art at all. What is your reaction to his work? Explain.
- ▶ Critics have commented that in Hsieh's performances there is no boundary between art and life. Explain how this performance merges art and life.
- ▶ Hsieh has been asked if it was difficult to reenter the world after a year of devoting himself solely to the performance. He responded, "Not really, I just began sleeping through the night." What other adjustments do you think he needed to make? Imagine and discuss how committing yourself to this performance for a year would impact your life.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- YouTube has many videos that show the passage of time, including the progress of a woman's pregnancy and documentations of successful weight-loss regimens, among many other examples. Think about your own life and select an aspect of it that you would like to document over time. You can document your project with photographs, video, sound recording, in a journal or in some other way that you devise. Then share your work with your classmates.
- The 1970s and '80s saw the emergence of video, installation, and live performance as important new ways to create art. In addition to Hsieh, artists creating interesting and challenging works included Linda Montano (who collaborated with Hsieh on another one-year performance), Marina Abramović, Laurie Anderson, Yoko Ono, Adrian Piper, and Bill Viola. Research the work of one of these artists and compare his or her approach to Hsieh's.

RESOURCES

EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Munroe, Alexandra. *The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2009.

Baas, Jacquelynn. *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.

Greenberg, Jan and Sandra Jordan. *The American Eye: Eleven Artists of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1995.

AESTHETICISM AND JAPAN: THE CULT OF THE ORIENT

Desmet, Anne, and Jim Anderson. *Handmade Prints: An Introduction to Creative Printmaking Without a Press*. Worcester, Mass.: Davis Publications, 2000.

Mathews, Nancy Mowll. *Mary Cassatt: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Wichmann, Siegfried. *Japonisme: The Japanese Influence on Western Art in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. New York: Harmony Books, 1980.

Khanduri, Kamini. *Japanese Art & Culture*. Chicago: Raintree, 2004.

National Gallery of Art
<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/cassatt/cassatt-46723.html>

What is a Print?, Museum of Modern Art
<http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2001/whatisaprint/flash.html>

Includes interactive demonstrations of how to make woodcuts, etchings, screenprints, and lithographs, with a gallery of images for each type of print.

LANDSCAPES OF THE MIND: EARLY MODERN CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE

Bothwell, Dorr, and Marlys Mayfield. *Notan: The Dark-Light Principle of Design*. New York: Dover Publications, 1991.

Dow, Arthur Wesley. *Composition: A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education*. New York: Bowles, 1899.

Green, Nancy E., and Jessie Poesch. *Arthur Wesley Dow and American Arts & Crafts*. New York: American Federation of Arts, 1999.

Lynes, Barbara Buhler. *Georgia O'Keeffe Museum Collections*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2007.

Georgia O'Keeffe Museum
<http://www.okeeffemuseum.org/home.aspx>

EZRA POUND, MODERN POETRY, AND DANCE THEATER

The Noguchi Museum
<http://www.noguchi.org/>

Janeczko, Paul. *How to Write Poetry*. New York: Scholastic, 1999.

ABSTRACT ART, CALLIGRAPHY, AND METAPHYSICS

Qu Lei Lei. *The Simple Art of Chinese Calligraphy*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2002.

Boudonnat, Louise, and Harumi Kushizaki. *Traces of the Brush: The Art of Japanese Calligraphy*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003.

So Kam Ng. *Brushstrokes: Styles and Techniques of Chinese Painting*. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1992.

ART OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE: PURE ABSTRACTION AND ALTERNATIVE MINIMALISM

Walter De Maria, *Lightning Field*
<http://www.lightningfield.org/#overview>

EXPERIENTIAL PERFORMANCE ART: THE AESTHETICS OF TIME

Teaching Hsieh, *Punching the Time Clock on the Hour, One Year Performance*
<http://www.one-year-performance.com>

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM An art movement of the mid-20th-century that was primarily concerned with the spontaneous assertion of the individual through the act of painting. Generally, abstract expressionist art is without recognizable images. The abstract expressionist movement centered in New York City and is also called the New York School.

CALLIGRAPHY The art of producing written ideograms, the basic component of East Asian written languages, traditionally with a soft, fine-tipped brush.

I CHING An ancient Chinese book of divination, one of the five classics of Confucianism. Also called *Book of Changes*.

JAPONISME The influence of Asian and especially Japanese culture on western art of the 19th century.

NO (or NOH) The classical drama of Japan, with music, dance, and poetic chant performed in a highly stylized and abstract manner by elaborately dressed and masked performers on an almost bare stage.

NŌTAN A Japanese word meaning “dark, light,” refers to the harmonious distribution and combination of dark and light spaces in a work of art.

PERFORMANCE ART An international movement of the 1960s and early 1970s that may employ a combination of movement, theater, cinema, music, and other forms of public expression, so as to act out concepts before an audience in a choreographed fashion.

RYŌANJI (Peaceful Dragon Temple) A Zen temple and World Heritage Site in northwest Kyoto, Japan, best known for its Zen garden, a simple arrangement of rocks and raked gravel that inspires peace and contemplation.

UKIYO-E (“images of the floating-world”) A stylistic school of Japanese painting and colored woodblock prints so named because they portrayed the ephemeral and fleeting world of urban life in Edo-period Japan during the 18th and 19th centuries. The unusual angles and shapes, strong linear outlines, and emphasis on flat planes had a profound impact on several European and American artists.

KITAGAWA UTAMARO (1753–1806) A master of the Japanese woodblock print who dominated the popular ukiyo-e school during the 1790s. His subtly colored prints featured women of Edo (Tokyo) and exerted a strong influence on later Japanese printmakers.

WOODBLOCK PRINT (woodcut) A print made by cutting a design into the surface of a block of wood. For multiple color prints a different block is used for each color.

ZEN A school of Buddhism that asserts that enlightenment can be attained through meditation, self-contemplation, and intuition rather than through faith and devotion and that is practiced mainly in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Also called *Zen Buddhism*.