

# A guide to the Modern and Contemporary Wing of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Prepared by Students in Villanova University's Augustine and Culture Seminar, in the Spring of 2012. The web version is available at:

<https://www.taskstream.com/ts/immerwahr/ModernArt.html>

## Mary Cassatt - Woman with Pearl Necklace (G 162)

An independent and determined American female artist, Mary Cassatt was constantly faced with the oppression of societal restrictions on females as she pursued her dream career as a painter. But Mary's strong and steady spirit kept her dreams in sight as she successfully used her experiences and views as a woman in the 19th Century American and European societies to convey a true and believable reality through her paintings.

Born to sophisticated members of the Philadelphia upper class in 1844, Mary Cassatt's childhood was privileged as she spent time in Europe and was exposed early to the vibrant and artistic European cultures. These



experiences fueled her fascination and passion for the arts. When her family returned home to the United States, Mary finished grade school in 1860. At the age of 16, she convinced her parents to enroll her in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Where she received "a solid, if uninspiring, education in artistic fundamentals" (Witkoski). Unsatisfied by her American education, she proposed to study in Europe, a much more artistically-versed society. Her parents disapproved of her entering a man's world of competition and professional aspirations and travelling and living on her own in a foreign country without family or a husband (Bullard, 11). Nevertheless, Mary challenged these restrictions and moved to Paris (though still under the strict supervision of her family) and began her studies. As Mary developed her personal style, she traveled to

multiple European art shows to observe other artists' techniques. The exhibits featured new artists who portrayed nude and contemporary images rather than classical art, which featured images such as Greek gods or Renaissance Kings (Bullard, 13). One of these artists, Manet, became an inspiration for

Cassatt to portray modern and realistic images of her own society and experiences in her paintings.

Mary's career finally took off when her first painting was accepted at the Paris Salon in 1872, despite her gender and despite the disapproval of her kin (Bullard, 13). Throughout her own development as an artist, she had also been observing and supporting the artwork of other rising and impressionistic artists. These artists focused on common, ordinary, daily-life subjects and portrayed them with relatively undefined brush strokes and lines and significant light contrasts. In 1877, one of these artists, Edgar Degas, asked Mary to exhibit her paintings in their independent, impressionist exhibitions rather than submitting them to famous art shows like those of the Paris Salon. Mary exclaimed "I accepted with joy. Now I could work with absolute independence without considering the opinion of a jury" (Bullard, 14). A speculated lover, Degas was Mary's most influential inspiration and critic. As 1882 approached, Mary was forced to briefly put her work aside and attend to family matters. Mary found little time to pick up a brush and paint while caring for her family, but when she did, her subjects were often family members, such as her sister Lydia, going about their daily activities (Matthews).

Overall, Mary Cassatt's magnificent painting of a *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* gives us many clues into Cassatt's interests and views on a female's role in society. In this painting, we can closely interpret the messages of feminine power and sophistication in daily life, particularly in Paris, that she intends to convey through many of her paintings. Cassatt was a pioneer in her day as she challenged the norms of female roles in society to not only represent and portray the truth about women through art, but also inspire others to use their creativity and innovation to convey reality.

Cassatt's art is typical of Impressionist pieces. Impressionism was a movement that took place mainly in France during the late 19th century. The subjects that these artists would focus on were primarily members of the bourgeois as they engaged in leisurely activities, which explains Mary Cassatt's focus on women and children in their social circles. Other notable pioneers in the style included Monet, Cezanne, Degas, and Renoir. In fact, many of the paintings surrounding Cassatt's work in the Philadelphia Museum of Art were by Monet, Renoir, and Cezanne such as Cezanne's *Large Bathers* and Monet's *The Japanese Bridge*. Impressionist art focused on the sensation produced by the painting as well as the perception of the image itself. The colors used are distinct and used to incorporate light. The brushstroke technique creates spaces rather than forms and it is this combination with the colors and lighting that evokes the image and emotion for the viewer (Seiberling, 1).

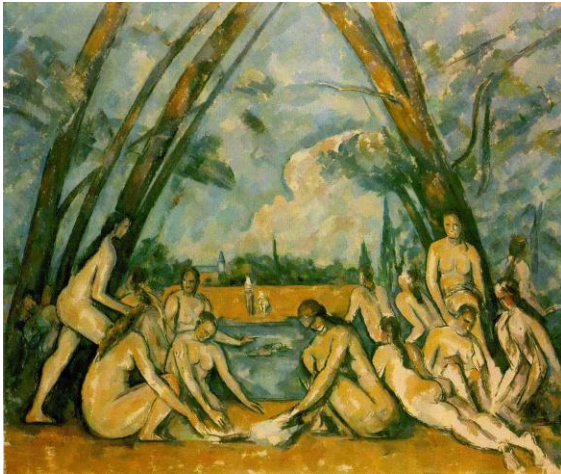
*Woman With a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* is very typical of Impressionist work and evokes a sense of romanticism with lighting and warm colors. The image portrayed is of that of a young woman of the bourgeoisies, rumored to be Lydia, Cassatt's sister. The pearl necklace she wears, along with her eloquent dress, white gloves, and fan represent her social status as she sits in her private box at the theater. Women were very rarely portrayed as the subject of art pieces, especially in a place such as the theater. The theater was traditionally seen as promiscuous and a place where women were flaunting

their sexuality (Pollock, 144). Thus, having women appear as the subject of a piece was very groundbreaking for the time. Cassatt was portraying women as intellectually capable and independent, representing a great culture shift (Haney, 9). Cassatt was a feminist and this influence was clear in her art as her subjects were female and usually the main focus of her paintings.

Cassatt uses a particularly unique technique established by Degas to portray the theater setting as large and spacious. She positioned her subject in front of a mirror in order to depict the theater and other patrons behind the woman. Notice, Lydia is watching the show in one direction whereas the other spectators are viewing the performance in the opposite direction. Though it provides an image of a large and full theater behind the woman, it also "refutes the illusion of deep space by reminding us that we are looking at a flat, if reflective, surface just behind the figure" (Pollock, 146).

## Cézanne - Large Bathers (G 164)

Paul Cézanne was born in 1839, and was soon taken with art, and was eager to learn more about it. However, his father, a successful businessman wanted him to study law. While he did this, Cézanne also took art classes on side at *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Aix, France. It was "a period of flux and uncertainty for Cézanne" (Encyclopedia of World



Biography). He lived in constant doubt of his work, this fear mainly stemming from lack of support from his friends and other colleagues. It was only towards the end of his life when he began gaining confidence in his paintings that he publically displayed them and created a positive image for himself.

Cézanne matured during a transformational time period for art, the movement from Impressionism to Post-Impressionism.

Impressionism was the style of art that filled the canvas with bright colors and uneven brushstrokes (see our discussion of Mary Cassatt). However, the main idea of

Impressionism was to create a painting that

looked flat like a painting, rather than trying to replicate reality. Some of the artists that thrived in this period were Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro (and many of their paintings are placed near this work). Cézanne went to study with Pissarro, one of the Impressionists who was most influential on his work. It was during this time that Cézanne discovered the Post-Impressionism. He learned that his art should represent nature and natural things. By reflecting on this idea, Cézanne discovered the founding idea for this new era of art. One of the major styles of Post-Impressionism is to create depth into the work, and to try to make it seem as though the viewer is looking through a window into the art. It is said that "impressionism transformed the Western conception of landscape painting from timeless and nostalgic idealizations of distant places to brightly colored, seemingly accurate representations of existing, often familiar sites seen at specific moments" (Rubin, 1126). As Post-Impressionism became the more dominant style, artists that came after Cézanne began to take the concept of adding shape and depth to art, and began driving art towards Cubism.

At first glance, the most notable aspect of *Large Bathers* is the sheer scale. The painting is about six by seven feet large, leading some to question whether "Large" is in reference to the bathers or the painting as a whole. Also, where displayed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a large octagonal room with a large bath is in the room next to the painting, adding to the setting and almost making the viewer feel like an actual bather. Secondly, the geometric influence in *Large Bathers* is very apparent, in the form of a triangle. The two sets of tree trunks rising from the ground on the left and right side of the painting ascending to the center, along with the horizontal stream at the bottom of the painting form a distinguished triangle. This symbolizes the use of shapes of Cézanne that would lead to cubism. Also, many think that a woman's face can be subliminally found within the triangle, where the trees represent hair, the branches forming to the inside of the triangle form eyes, and bushes in the stream form a mouth. Cézanne also adds depth to the painting in different ways; the first is color. The foreground of the painting has bright tan color on the bathers and the ground. Then in the background the color becomes bluer. This is a way to differentiate what is supposed to be closer to the viewer and further away. Cézanne also created depth by leaving parts of the canvas bare. While some critics complained of the lack of color, but "the way he painted, the canvas, though bare, geometrically plays as important a part as the parts that were covered with pigment" (Rewald, 112). This means that it added extra shape to the painting. The second is focus, where the bathers are more detailed than the people, plants, and building in the background. In these simple expressions of geometry and depth, Cézanne helped transition art from Impressionism to Cubism.

## Picasso - Three Musicians (G-169)

Pablo Picasso, a well-known Spanish painter, created artwork that was heavily influenced by conflict; much of this conflict occurred within his own personal life. Picasso was born in Málaga, Spain in 1881 to a father who was already deeply engrossed in the artistic world. His father "encouraged his aptitude for art" (McQuillan). Picasso's artistic ability grew with his age and in his early twenties he travelled to Paris to further his talents. In Paris, he became part



of a circle of intellectuals who had a lasting impact on his life and art. One member of the circle was Georges Braque who, along with Picasso, became a founder of the art style called "cubism" (Antliff). Another member was Max Jacob who "had been the leading writer in Picasso's circle of friends" (Bassett and Tomlinson) and introduced Picasso to Apollinaire, another poet Picasso befriended. Through this circle, Picasso advanced his artistic expression and developed cubism, an artistic style that became popular during the early 1900's.

In addition to visiting Paris, Picasso also became involved in theatrical life. The spark for his interest in theater came from a director, Jean Cocteau, who asked Picasso to design the sets and costumes

for his upcoming ballet, *Parade*. Picasso then attended many plays and saw performances like the Commedia dell'Arte, a form of comic theater popular in Naples (Bassett, Tomlinson). His art work reflects influence that both theater and his peers had on his life. Picasso transitioned through numerous periods in his artistic career - the blue period, the rose period, etc; however, cubism ultimately was the style that "secured his prominent place in the history of 20th century art" (McQuillan). Picasso, together with George Braque, whose painting is also exhibited in the same room as *Three Musicians*, first introduced cubism to the public. During this time, Picasso employed geometric shapes and neutral colors to create abstract representations of real models. Through Picasso's work, cubism became increasingly popular as "a mode of composition that served to bond together broadly geometric and starkly contoured shapes, and aligned these elements with the rectilinear format of the canvas itself" (Roskill). Using this method of cubism, Picasso also experimented with different types of paper medium, being one of the first to incorporate collages into fine art. This use of mixed media was referred to as synthetic cubism, the *Three Musicians* being a perfect example. (Masters) Through the contrasting shapes and materials, Picasso expressed the clashes between "the intellect and the emotions, between forms of classicism and expressionism and between the conscious and the unconscious" (McQuillan).

In 1921, Pablo Picasso painted his famous work, *Three Musicians* ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). This painting consists of three abstractly drawn figures, each holding some sort of musical item and each person representing someone known by Picasso. All the way to the left, "Picasso depicts himself with a violin under his chin, wearing a Harlequin (clown) costume covered with bright red and yellow triangles, the colors of the Spanish flag" ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). In the center is Guillaume Apollinaire "as Pierrot (pee-air-oh), a mime, playing a clarinet" ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). The third character, "the poet Max Jacob, is dressed in the traditional brown robe of a monk, holding an accordion in one hand and a glass in the other" ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). These three men were all great friends until circumstances forced them apart (monkhood, death), giving Picasso the necessary emotions to create this artwork. At the time, Picasso was designing sets for theater as another medium for his creativity ("Cubism Comes Full Circle"). The setting for this painting seems to be in a "stagelike (sic) space" ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). The contrast of colors in the painting is "like memories, some shapes are filled with dark, dull colors or are partially hidden, while others are bright and bold, perhaps expressing the artist's longing for the happy, fun-filled days that he, Apollinaire, and Jacob had spent together" ("Philadelphia Museum of Art"). It is considered a masterpiece with its "richness of feeling and balance of formal elements" ("Pablo Picasso"). *Three Musicians* is exhibited in a room with various other paintings from the cubist movement, including works by Braque and Juan Gris, another prominent cubist painter.

## Matisse - Portrait of Yvonne Landsberg (G167)

Henri Matisse was born in France in 1869, and before he wanted to be an artist he wanted to study law. He had no interest in art until after he got his degree in 1889. Upon returning home, he took drawing classes before going



to work. That winter, Matisse grew ill and during his recovery, took up painting. After persuading his father that he wanted to abandon law, he finally got the support from his parents to study painting in Paris (Watkins).

His first glimpse of moderate success came in 1896, when his painting, *The Reader*, was selected to be displayed in the *Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*. Following this success, Matisse began to experiment with other forms of art in an attempt to "establish himself as a modern artist" (Watkins). He would spend his summers in Bell-Ile, off the coast of Brittany, where he took a great interest in Van Gogh, and adopted an "Impressionist plein-air technique: pale grounds, broken brushwork, bright colour, and informality of composition" (Watkins).

His return to Paris after that summer marked a turning point in his personal life. He left his mistress of three years, Caroline Joblaud (who he a daughter with and also posed in *The Reader* and *Dinner Table*) and married Amelie Parayre. Like Cezanne, Matisse also studied under Impressionist Camille



Pissarro. Matisse spent time in London and Corsica and moved beyond Impressionism, exploring "different approaches to landscape painting, from conservative, well-constructed compositions to exuberant small-scale experiments in the expressive manipulation of colour" (Watkins). Although he had little money, we he bought several works from Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and studied how they designed the human figure (Watkins).

The major breakthrough in Matisse's career occurred during the "Fauvism" movement, which was based on wild, solid colors that are inconsistent with the subject's natural colors. His work generated much criticism, "for Matisse and his colleagues were generally young compared to the established critics and the random style was new and seemingly

showed no outward proof of skill or professionalism" (Galenson). Matisse believed his art was not to be primarily concerned with observation, but with feeling and emotion.

From 1910-17, Matisse took part in the Cubism movement, in which his primary concern was "to convey the dreamlike atmosphere of brilliant light and colour enveloping both figures and objects" (Watkins). Through cubism, Matisse was able to explore different styles of art such as oil paintings and charcoal drawings. The famous *Portrait of Yvonne Landsberg* was a full-scale charcoal portrait of a young woman. During Mlle. Landsberg's sittings, her husband commented that Matisse's painting began as a "strikingly recognizable portrait" of Yvonne, but as the painting developed, the evidence of her physical qualities lessened and her spiritual qualities began to dominate the space (Klein 168). Matisse had exaggerated the shape of her figure, emphasizing her curves and giving her a stronger presence in the scene (Trapp 57). The method in which Matisse added the arcs around Landsberg was considered by some writers to be a spontaneous gesture, yet the careful precision and repetition with which he drew the lines suggests the exact

opposite. In two separate interviews, Matisse was known to give two different interpretations of the painting; one claim that the lines around the figure were supposed to emphasize her curvy figure, and another claim comparing it to a musical harmony, where the figure is the single note and the lines are the overtones (Klein 168). Matisse's intentions were not to give a single interpretation of the portrait, but rather leave it up to the individual to critique. The ambiguity and apparent spontaneity of the painting adds intrigue and mystery, further solidifying its identity as a product of Cubism.

## Brancusi - Bird in Space (Yellow Bird) (G188)



Constantin Brancusi was born in Romania in February 19, 1876. Since he was a child Brancusi expressed an artistic ability by carving farming tools out of wood. Through his hard work in school he was able to move to Paris and attend the *Ecole Beaux-Arts* in 1904. Brancusi then became an apprentice under the famous sculptor, Auguste Rodin but soon after left because in Brancusi's words, "nothing grows in the shadow of great trees" (Ayers 1). Coincidentally, the Rodin Museum featuring many of the Rodin sculptures that influenced Brancusi, is also located a few blocks from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Brancusi eventually separated himself from Rodin, by exploring new genres of art such as abstraction and used this interest to create one of his most famous works, a series of sculptures known as Bird in Space. (Ayers 1).

Brancusi became fixated with the representation of birds in their simplest of forms. He created them as uncomplicated geometric figures stripped of wings and feathers. This allowed the viewer to concentrate on the bird's movements rather than physical attributes. Brancusi's birds were a depiction of a golden bird character in many popular, old folktales. The 'solar bird' is related to the sun and its cycle around the globe each

day protecting Earth from the sun's powerful rays. As the myth explains, the solar bird is "consumed in fire to be reborn from his ashes – a symbol of the diurnal circle of the sun" (Spear 6). This bird was believed to be reincarnated every morning, continuing the sequence. Brancusi's birds are meant to be a representation of this bird trapped in the underworld with its neck pointed upward with an open mouth yearning for morning when it can escape the underworld and once again take flight.

Brancusi's famous Yellow Bird was just one of his attempts to perfect his image of this bird. Brancusi's Bird Series consists of "over twenty-five marble or bronze sculptures formed during the course of four decades" (Temkin 320). Each bird can be split up into one of three categories. The first category of Brancusi's oldest sculpted birds is called *Maiastrea*. As you can see to your right when you enter his exhibit in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, these birds consist of a fattened belly, a long neck, an open beak, eyes, and legs. The second type, the Golden Bird, is a simplified and sleeker version of the *Maiastrea*. The Golden Bird has neither eyes nor legs. Its back is completely straight, its beak became one with its neck, and "the passage between neck to belly disappeared" (Spear 18). With his Golden Bird in place, Constantin was close to perfecting his birdlike form. The Golden Bird then gave rise to the third category of transformation, the Bird in Space. The Yellow Bird, a form of the Bird in Space, is made of yellow marble sitting on

top of a limestone-wood-limestone base. The sculpture itself is very simple. It is an arced piece of marble that goes straight up and down, but has many great sculpting qualities embedded in it. One of these sculpting techniques is its verticality. This up and down position of the sculpture used by Brancusi puts emphasis on “upwards motion” (Shanes 34). The top yellow marble section also goes from narrow, widens, and then gets narrow at the top again. This simulates a flow throughout the sculpture. The sculpture also has a base which is jagged to contribute to the overall upwards emphasis of the sculpture (Shanes 37).

In terms of interpretation, Brancusi intended for this sculpture to be interpreted in terms of flight instead of looking at it as an actual bird. He once said, “all my life I’ve been looking for one thing, the essence of flight...What a marvelous thing flight is” (Shanes 40). He also claimed “my birds are a series of different objects in a central research,” that research being flight (Shanes 40). Shanes writes “Brancusi produced more variants of Bird in Space than of any other theme, for the subject was spiritually, aesthetically, and formally fundamental to him”(Shanes 40). Going deeper into interpretation, one might say that Brancusi was even addressing a flight of one’s soul (Shanes 40). By the end of his life, Brancusi completed and perfected his Bird in Space collection, which he had began in 1923.

## Dali - Soft Construction with Boiled Beans (G 174)

Salvador Dali was an incredibly bright man, who constructed some of the greatest works in the field of Surrealism. He was born on 1904 in Figueras, Catalonia. Despite a childhood filled with anger and cruelty, Dali was still able to produce advanced pieces of art at an early age. He managed to convince his father to allow him to go study in Madrid in 1921 and was heavily influenced by several different styles. In 1928, during a visit to Paris, France, Dali had his first exposure to the Surrealist movement. By 1929, Dali had turned to Surrealism and it was during this time period that he began to really develop as an artist and advance his own style of painting. What Surrealism essentially does for its viewers is that it portrays a picture in which a modern event, thought, or concept is put on paper, fused with the artists subconscious spin on the topic. This creates images unique and revealing far beyond any



literal materialistic beauty the physical world can offer. His paintings would involve objects that were carefully drawn but at the same time, positioned in a strange contrast with other objects which made many of his paintings seem if they were tilted upward (Chilvers). It is important to understand that Dali started as a sort of Modernist Artist, and Surrealism really developed from that particular style, as the artists added a bit of a personal twist to the work. In his own case, Dali utilized Surrealism, specifically in *Soft Construction With Boiled Beans*, as a means of participating in the

Spanish political system, which had otherwise locked him out. This magnificent construction of the physical world’s concepts fused together with



the subconscious mind of an artist with strong views on the subject in front of him is the epitome of Surrealism, and it portrays the importance of this style through Dali's speaking out against Spain's political system using only his artistic talent.

*Soft Construction With Boiled Beans* is most typically regarded as Dali's perception of the coming Spanish Civil War. It fuses politics and real world issues as Dali saw them with ideas from his subconscious mind, making *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans* one of his more eccentric works. It was through this painting and surrealism that Dali contributed to the Spanish political system. The image itself is a body literally tearing itself to pieces, portraying Spain's internal strife. Even details such as the clear background shifting to a discolored sky had a purpose, which was to exemplify the drastic change taking place at the time. The boiled beans in this painting represent that this amount of horror and carnage is something "one could not imagine swallowing ...without the presence of some mealy and melancholy vegetable" (Wach). *Soft Construction With Boiled Beans*, "combines frenzy and ecstasy" specifically in the face of the construction, portraying an image of confusion and mistrust in his country. Dali used Surrealism as a tool to display his feelings on politics, and among these works, *Soft Construction With Boiled Beans* was one of the most complicated yet compelling pieces of his lifetime.

## Paul Klee - Fish Magic (G 168)

Paul Klee was born in Berne, Switzerland in 1879, but spent much of his life in Germany (Gale). Berne is famous for a clock tower, seen in several of Klee's paintings (Verdi 151). Klee was influenced by the arts from a very young age. His father was a musician, his great-uncle a portrait artist, and his



grandmother a painter (Arnold). Klee enjoyed learning from his father and grandmother, the two most accessible sources of the arts to him, but ultimately felt that he must decide between playing the violin and painting, finally choosing the latter. "With his parents' reluctant permission, in 1898 he began studying art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich with Heinrich Knirr and Franz von Stuck" (Arnold). Klee spent summers in Possenhofen fishing, an object prevalent in many of his

paintings (Verdi 151). After his time at the Academy, Klee was married to Lily Stumpf and began teaching at the Bauhaus in 1914, allowing him to spend time on his own works, including *Fish Magic* (Gale).

After visiting Tunis in the mid-1920's, his art techniques went from black and white to a genre called divisionism. This art technique was used from this year forward by creating "the opposition between an endlessly divisible continuum, which he called 'dividual', and individual form" (Kudielka 104). This means that he used contrasting forms that showed repeating

shapes that could be endlessly divided and forms that could not be divided. When interpreting one of Klee's paintings, *Fish Magic*, you can look at each individual fish and compare the scales, fins and gills of each fish or look at the painting dividually or as a whole and see a group of fish that make up the artwork. Besides interpreting the individual and dividual form, this genre also included the use of many lines and shades of colors. Not only did he incorporate divisionism into his paintings but also abstract surrealism. This genre of art is expressing the subconscious through images and by creating bizarre dream-like images. After this turning point from black and white to abstract surrealism and divisionism, he created many paintings, including a watercolor painting in 1925 called *Fish Magic*.

*Fish Magic* depicts many seemingly unrelated images that are positioned very specifically to give the large piece meaning. An important quality to notice is that the piece is made up of a small, square piece of canvas in the center of a large, rectangular canvas (Verdi 147). This center square has a mirror effect on several of the fish, the flower vase, and on the head of the being with two different faces (Verdi 148). When first looking at the painting it is evident that the general theme of the piece is an atmosphere where life in the form of fish and plants live freely among people and planets. The seemingly unrelated clown and curtain in the corners of the piece also draw the viewer's attention (Verdi 148). The center figure appears to be a suspended church steeple with a clock in the center of it (Verdi 148). This is significant because it gives the idea that "at its heart beats a clock" (Verdi 148). The rest of the image, besides the clown and curtain, are clearly flowers, fish, and celestial objects.

The various figures of the *Fish Magic* painting can be put together to have several different messages or interpretations depending on who is viewing it. The piece can be interpreted purely as an underwater scene where the clock represents "the time remaining before the fish are caught" (Verdi 151). However, a more likely theme of this work that is seen in a lot of Klee's works is "the difference between cosmic and earthly time-between infinite and finite time...It suggests that all life is controlled by time" (Verdi 151). The life is represented by the flowers, fish, and beings and time is represented by the clock, celestial objects, and the curtain. The being with two faces appears to be looking into both worlds of time versus life which reminds the being of the eventual mortality of all life (Verdi 153).

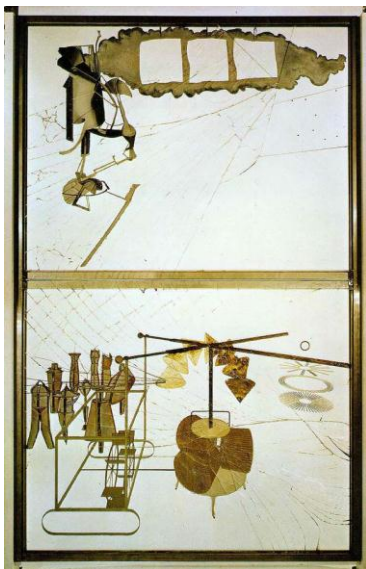
## Duchamp- Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (G 182)

Widely recognized as one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, Marcel Duchamp ushered in a new era of modern art as he challenged traditional artwork and shocked the artistic community. Born into a family of sculptors and painters in 1887, Duchamp was immediately thrown into the world of artists. Duchamp went to an art school in Paris, yet very little of this influenced his artwork. His two oldest brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, were involved in the cubism movement and made many notable contributions which influenced Marcel to pursue cubist art. Duchamp eventually began to develop an analytic cubism style; a approach that finds its roots in intellectually stimulated works that derive their inspiration from the

Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, the theoretical writings of Henri Poincaré, caused Duchamp to tolerate any interpretation of his art, which is why the onlooker is vital in understanding *Large Glass* (Marcel). This means Duchamp did not assign one specific meaning or purpose for his artwork; he wanted the onlooker to form his own individual opinion.

After his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912) was banned from a show and provoked controversy, Duchamp wanted to leave behind what he called 'retinal' art, art only for the eyes. Instead, he decided to use literature and art in conjunction. This momentous event in his life allowed Duchamp to begin to develop his own sense of artistic individuality. The majority of Duchamp's few works are a combination of dada and surrealism; surrealism is further discussed on the Dali page. Duchamp, along with many others artists of the early twentieth century, found Dadaism as a means to express their profound sense of rage and grief over the suffering and human immorality in World War I. Dada was deliberately anti-art and anti-sense; it was

intended to shock and scandalize people, and *Large Glass* did so. According to Chalupesky, Duchamp thought that art should "point beyond the three-dimensional and lead to the four-dimensional (Paz). This theme of motion and indefinite time is consistent in *Large Glass* as well. The transparent qualities of the glass allow him to show that "Painting is a criticism of movement but movement is the criticism of painting" (Paz).



When interpreting *The Large Glass*, it is important to note that there is no correct interpretation. Duchamp not only contradicted himself in his writings, but never revealed the truest meanings of the work because he wanted the onlooker to interpret it. However, the overarching subject of this work is the machinery of sexual desire. Duchamp kept notes on his ideas about *The Large Glass* in what was named *The Green Box*. *The Green Box*, located next to *The Large Glass* in the museum, is comprised of various notes and drawings about *The Large Glass*, and many of his notes explain

facets of the piece that one would never see were it not for the notes. Therefore, Duchamp believed that this collection of notes was equally as important as the piece itself. *The Large Glass* looks like a highly complex machine, and it illustrates the desire between a bride and her bachelor's in a mechanical process. The work consists of an upper area, called the Bride's domain, and a lower area, called the Bachelor's domain. The cloud in the Bride's domain is a telegraph system through which the Bride sends her sexual desires to the bachelors, thus setting in motion the machinery of love-making. The bachelors, located at the left side of the Bachelor's domain, are working to turn the water mill to make the chocolate grinder, in the middle of the Bachelor's domain, turn. The chocolate grinder then grinds out an imaginary milky substance: semen. This substance then shoots up towards the Bride's domain through the various rings on the right side. This projection is, however, blocked by the metal bar which separates the upper and lower domain (*The Shock of the New World*). This results in the bride being condemned to always tease the bachelors who are trapped by the metal bar. The bachelor's fate is said to be a state of "endless masturbation" because the bride is desirable but unattainable (*The Shock of the New World*). The bachelors are wholly passive, "[waiting] stupidly for the signal to perform the basic male function that is required of them here" (Tomkins, 6). Overall, *The Large Glass* turned the art world upside-down and still today causes controversy and conflict over potential deeper meanings on a cynical representation of the relationship between men, women, and sexual desire.

*The Large Glass* is located in a room full of Duchamp's other works. One of the most influential paintings, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, is also located in this room. This painting, as aforementioned, was banned from a show and provoked controversy, pushed Duchamp away from cubism and towards the styles exhibited in *The Large Glass*. *The Large Glass* is conveniently located in the center of the room with its back facing a window which gives the work an ever-changing background due to the glass' transparency. With a change in sunlight or weather, the work can be seen in a new light. Years later, Dennis Summers made this [amusing animation](#) of the elements in *Large Glass*.

## Sol LeWitt - On a Blue Ceiling (G 174)

Sol Lewitt was an American sculptor and painter; he was a pioneer in post-war era art, as he helped popularize conceptualism and minimalism in art works (NY Times). For LeWitt, art was a form of expression where he found "delight and regard are in the making of art, and then sharing the results" (Retrospective). His work showcased a combination of creative ingenuity and well-thought out visions. Lewitt's artistic motives and desired messages are essential to interpreting one of his most fascinating masterpieces: *On a Blue Ceiling*.

Sol LeWitt was born on September 9, 1928. LeWitt began his pursuit of an artistic career in his teenage years, when he attended Syracuse University in New York between 1945 and 1949. At Syracuse LeWitt was given the opportunity to "visit oriental shrines, temples and gardens" (Lewison). He furthered his passion for art four years later, when he moved to New York to attend the Cartoonists and Illustrators School. From there LeWitt applied his knowledge in the work force for the first time, earning a position as a graphic designer for architect I. M. Pei (Lewison). During this time with the architect, LeWitt continued working on his personal painting projects, but simultaneously and most importantly, picked up the tools and knowledge that would tremendously influence his later works. LeWitt's experience with



construction during this job caused him to abandon painting, in that that he began working with structures rather than canvases. His new artistic and more object-oriented endeavors led to his most famous works. These "serial and modular works" consisted mainly of " wall and floor structures" initially, and as he progressed LeWitt included "wall drawings and drawings on paper as well as prints" (Lewison).

One thing common amongst all of LeWitt's works was his very methodological approach to creating them: "As a general principle, [LeWitt] used written instructions as the starting point of his art" (Moszynska). This concept is most effectively conveyed in his abstract Wall Drawings, in which "the impersonality of the idea logically entailed the collaboration of assistants for their execution" (Moszynska). Such an innovative concept brought to the forefront of the



artistic world by LeWitt actually had its roots in earlier artists Duchamp (see our page above) (Moszynska). LeWitt can be most strongly associated with the conceptual art movement in twentieth century America. His work was so influential that many critics consider him a "lodestar of American art" (Kimmelman). LeWitt truly was the guiding light for other Conceptual and Minimalist artists seeking to challenge the traditional painting of the 1970s (Moszynska). His series of works "stressed idea over execution" so that a masterpiece could be easily replicated. This concept embodied the entire Conceptualist movement. Artists like LeWitt valued "simplicity, logic, [and] openness" in their works rather than the traditional aesthetic values of art (Garrels). Therefore, LeWitt and his fellow Conceptualists did not focus intensely on the beauty of colors and portraits, but rather the intellectual value of a particular structure. The knowledge and logic that went into producing these works of art was what the Conceptualists wished to share.

*On a Blue Ceiling* is an artistic rendering by Sol Lewitt that was installed in the Philadelphia Art Museum in 1981. However, in true conceptualist fashion, Lewitt never laid hands upon the ceiling, rather he provided instructions for other workers to paint it (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Being that the Conceptual art movement exemplified universal access and intellectual exchange, LeWitt intended for this work to be best adapted to its environment by the artists who used the instructions to complete it. Lewitt welcomed the fact that many different hands would touch "On a Blue Ceiling" and as one critic put it, he "welcomed the variability". (John B. Ravenal) He believed the different workers would each have their own unique spin on the work, adding to its beauty. At the museum, *On a Blue Ceiling* is located along the ceiling of a barrel vault. The arching shape of the structure with light blue fill and distinct, white geometric figures creates a very chapel-like scenery in the Philadelphia museum (Philadelphia Museum of Art). The themes of minimalism can also be seen in Lewitt's description that he provided to the museum, which read simply, "eight geometric figures: circle, trapezoid, parallelogram, rectangle, square, triangle, right triangle, x." The description sounds very bland and boring and doesn't even come close to describing the beauty that shines through when the idea is put into fruition; but alas, adds no filler just as minimalism asks for. Consequently, Sol Lewitt's *On a Blue Ceiling* shows his inspiration from the concepts of minimalism and conceptualism.

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## Warhol - Brillo Boxes

Andy Warhol could definitely be referred to as one of the best known American artists. During a time where the social norm was a clean cut husband who wore a suit every day to work and the wife stayed at home with the kids in their picture perfect suburban home, Warhol broke the mold and played a significant role in the pop culture movement.



Warhol was born on August 6th, 1928 in Pittsburgh to Andrej and Julia Warhola who were recent Slovakian immigrants. He studied art at the Carnegie Intsitute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) which was and still is one of the most highly regarded art schools in the country. Once out of college, he moved to New York City and began doing commissioned work for

various fashion houses particularly a shoe company called I. Miller and Sons which earned him a number of awards from the Art Directors Club. His new renown in the artists' community allowed him to begin focusing on his own art work which is considered the earliest examples of "Pop art" (Marter 150-3).

What made the Pop art movement so popular isn't so much the subjects of the individual pieces, but what the subject represented and how they were produced. Warhol wanted to bring meaning to familiar images of the American way of life "that span from the great and the good to the bad and the ugly" (Dawtrety 132). Warhol once said "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it" (Berg 3). So what makes his art work so meaningful is that he was able to represent our modern society that revolves around mass production and mass consumption and how things that appear to be identical as a whole are actually incredibly unique. This idea represents how although society often times forces people to assimilate and appear similar, people are incredibly unique. What allowed Warhol to do this was his use of silk screening. Although silk screening is a technique that allows for the replication of an image many times, Warhol was able to alter each individual image by using more or less ink each time which made each image darker and lighter respectively (Dawtrety 132). One of the best examples of this is the Brillo Boxes. When the boxes are stacked together they appear to be identical but it becomes apparent that each one is minutely different.

The Brillo Boxes did a lot to express warhol's idea of the individual as well as art was perceived. Prior to the boxes it was more clear cut as to what was considered art and what was not. When the boxes were exhibited in New York, Warhol radically changed the world of art as well as how people perceived art and "brought history to an end by demonstrating that no visual criterion could serve the purpose of defining art" (Danto 459). All of this came from the fact that each box was almost identical to the Brillo box you would find at the grocery store. It is possible that by creating the boxes in this way, Warhol was trying to express that everything is beautiful and interesting in its own way. The Brillo pad itself also begins to have a more important meaning of what it represents. "Brillo is nothing other than steel wool, an industrial product available... in any hardware store, a part of the masculine world of car refinishing, boat repair, and industrial labor yet the product Brillo belongs to

the domestic order, a feminine-gendered space in 1960s America" (Walsh). This being said, a connection could be made to Warhol's home of Pittsburgh and its connection with the steel industry and how "steel... also becomes wool. Brillo, through simple packaging, transforms steel wool into the perfect housewife's friend, a faithful ally in the never-ending pursuit of shining aluminum cookware. With the Brillo Boxes, Warhol captured the power of advertising at its most alchemical, powerful enough to mutate substance and gender at will" (Walsh). Warhol represents the complexities of American society with the use of simple and iconic parts of the American life in a way that is not always clear but influential and meaningful. For this reason the Philadelphia Museum of Art surrounded the boxes with a number of Americana art like an American flag painting and Warhol's own "Jackie" which is four portraits of the American icon, Jacqueline Kennedy.

## Jasper Johns- Painting with Two Balls

Multifaceted American painter, sculptor, and printmaker Jasper Johns was born in Augusta, Georgia in 1930. Johns was raised by his grandparents after his parents split up. He would start his collegiate career at the University of South Carolina, before leaving school to go to New York City. Although Johns attended an art institute in New York City, Johns is known as "a self-taught artist" (Crichton 1). Johns was exposed to many different artists as he built up his career in New York City, including the likes of Robert Rauschenberg and Marcel Duchamp (see Duchamp page). Rauschenberg's influence can be seen in many pieces, as the aspiring artists lived in the same building for a significant part of Johns' early career (Crichton 1).

Similar to Johns' own life, where he worked with many different influences to create himself, Johns' creations, paintings, sculptures, and prints developed into a well rounded, " progressive body of work" (Crichton 1) where Johns expressed his different talents and genres. Johns worked within two genres throughout his lifetime: his early work falls into Abstract Expressionism, but he later transitioned into Pop. Abstract Expressionism was an American movement in art that was popular in the 1940s and 1950s (Anfam 1). Although there was not one unifying characteristic of the works of Abstract Expressionists, they all shared the "common sense of moral purpose and alienation from American society" (Anfam 1). In general, Abstract Expressionism embodies a sort of disequilibrium in paintings, achieved through color, structure, forms and other elements of the piece. Some critics refer to this as a "push-and-pull tension" (Bernstein 48). Pop art, on the other hand, was very much about involvement in American society. Pop art was an international movement that took off in the 1950s, and its goal was to appeal to the public. In this sense, Pop art had very little connection to the artist, but was very easily relatable for the public. Johns was a very prominent figure in the pop art movement,



defining some of the terms that came to shape the genre, such as "irony and anti-art" (Livingstone 2). Several critics say that Pop art is at the "lower end of a popular-art to fine-art continuum" (Livingstone 1). Johns integrated both types of genres into his works. As a matter of fact, he and his friend and fellow-artist, Robert Rauschenburg, are "credited with inspiring the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Pop art" (Crichton 1). *Painting With Two Balls*, as one of Johns' earlier works, falls largely into the Abstract Expressionism genre.

*Painting With Two Balls* has several different interpretations, which is characteristic of Johns' work, since he was focused on "one's visual experience of" the art work, which emphasized individual interpretation (Barnes 28). Made of "three stacked panels [that] are joined together by four metal strips, each of which has four openings for screws," the painting shows the detail that Johns strived for in all of his work (Yau 36). His meticulous handiwork continued, as he "used two strips, one at either end, to abut each section to the one adjoining it...[and] two paint-smear wooden balls are squeezed into the gap between the top and middle panels, seemingly causing them to open like the slit of an eye" (Yau 36).

"Johns stenciled the title and his name, and wrote '1960', the year he executed the work" (Yau 36) in order to display his ability to put meaning into every area of his art. Like shading an area in and then erasing the desired letters, Johns collaged the outside of the stencil to create "negative shapes" (Yau 36). Johns uses the relationship between positive and negative space to create additional questions (Yau 36). A connection between the two spaces is made, where two things are dependent on each other. The balls are central to the interpretation of the piece. One idea is that the balls lend themselves to Abstract Expressionism by creating tension within the painting, and by proving "to be as legitimate a means of expressing creative presence as Abstract Expressionist nerve, or 'balliness' [sic]" (Welish 51). Another interpretation is that this piece actually is a response to criticism, and one of the few times that Johns' emotions leak through to his work. Critics speculate that perhaps the use of "Balls" in the title is "meant to be an ironic, even sarcastic, pun referring to the 'masculine Mystique' that a good painting had to have 'balls'" (Bernstein 48). Johns could also have been responding to a critic who claimed that Johns' works "had no balls" (Rose 62). If one thing is for sure about *Painting With Two Balls*, there is no definite interpretation, and as Johns wanted, the meaning is left up to the individual viewer to decide..

## Cy Twombly - Fifty Days at Iliam (G185)





Cy Twombly (April 25, 1928 - July 5, 2011) was an American-born artist, who is revered as one of the most productive and versatile minds to have ever influenced contemporary art (Schirmer 42). Throughout his life, his work was ever changing, as he was constantly influenced by the various environments with which he came in contact. Twombly was trained at three different institutions: the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Arts Students League of New

York, and Black Mountain College (Leeman 14). In addition to his extensive art education, he also spent time living in places such as Europe and Africa (Leeman 19). Twombly took a particular interest in ancient, pictorial writing, such as Egyptian hieroglyphics, while in Africa and was drawn to the world of the Greek gods, as the Mediterranean culture fascinated him with the history, literature, and mythology of the western world (Schirmer 46). His form of expression through art was molded by his experiences over the course of twenty years, ultimately resulting in his utilization of "visual language" (Leeman 20), a unique combination of both legible and illegible markings and brush strokes which, according to Schirmer, "transform the drama of humanity into a sensual and poetic vision" (42).

By the time Twombly had reached the height of his artistic career, he focused largely on characters of classical mythology and antique figures (Brigstocke par. 1). He made use of visual language within his works by incorporating inscriptions, which were legible, yet remained a part of other shapes and markings of the artwork (Wijnbeek par. 3). It is through these seemingly random brushstrokes and nearly indecipherable letters and numbers that Twombly created his own tribute to anchors of Western culture (Phila. Museum of Art 340). His work is known for its cryptic fragments of words and pictorial metaphors which requires a great deal of attentive reading for a viewer to recognize and appreciate the image of the classical past.

Twombly's *Fifty Days at Iliam*, currently displayed in its own room at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is a perfect example of his rather untraditional style of art inspired by, "Characters from classical mythology and antique figures and sites" (Brigstocke). A common trend of Twombly's is to indicate a vision, a sort of simplified representation of their sources in his designs (Leeman 95). These ten panels, in particular, "...evoke incidents from Homer's epic poem in Twombly's characteristic synthesis of words and images" (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Through his individual technique, he recreated a vision inspired by Western literature, one that embodies the final fifty days of the Trojan War as composed through Homer's *Iliad* (Brigstocke). Twombly purposefully designed the pieces so that the four located on the left side of the room present an action packed Greek mood, while the final four panels on the right side portray a more relaxed Trojan character (Temkin et.al 133). This sort of sensational progression, which Brigstocke refers to as "synchronic," ultimately creates a historically sequential, "diachronic" representation of the war, beginning with the powerful warrior Achilles (depicted on the first canvas located in a separate room from the remaining nine), and commencing with a mysterious expression of death (Philadelphia Museum of Art 340). One last notable aspect of the placement of the panels is the centrality of the sixth panel which honors Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector, the three fallen heroes of the Trojan War (Temkin et. al 133). The *Fifty Days at Iliam* also demonstrates the numerous mediums and materials that Twombly undertook in his creations. Composed

of oil, oil crayon, as well as graphite on canvas, this piece exhibits a range of artistic textures and tools. Overall, these ten pictures portray, "Twombly's continual reawakening to language with the appearance of some very different kinds of sign: expressive lines, pictographs, words, reminiscences of ancient symbols, as well as...ideograms, which were supposed to translate ideas directly" (Leeman 81). As a result, a deep analysis and observation of the *Fifty Days at Iliam* can accurately represent the incredibly unique and intellectually stimulating character of Twombly's art.

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**Augustine and Culture Seminar: Moderns, section V01, Spring 2012 (Picture Above)**

Matthew Bolton, Sean Currao, Michael Fiorelli, William Haner, Brittanie Hendrix, Christian Hoelzli, Megan Hopkins, Brendan Hughes, Alessandra Lamari, Bryan Lee, Danielle Morro, John Prufeta, David Stillings, Savannah Trifiro, Rickie Zheng

**Augustine and Culture Seminar: Moderns, section V02, Spring 2012 (Picture Below)**

Nicole Breen, Donovan Driscoll, Callan Edwards, Kelly Gabriel, Kristin Hallowell, Chris Herman, Jim Jacobs, Jenny Lee, Brian Lutkewitte, Deanna Manniello, Anna Mariani, Dan Petrocelli, Spencer Snyderman, Noah Thacker, Stephanie Uibel, Joelle Viscardo

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