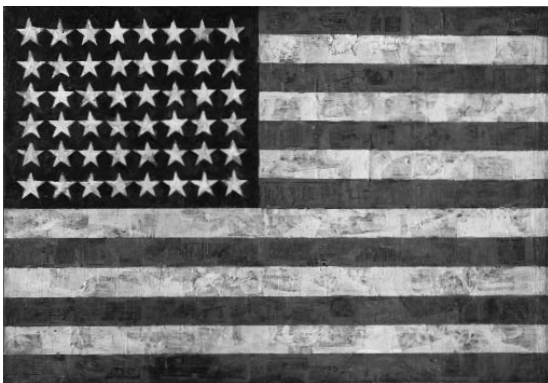


## LESSON FOUR: Art and Politics



**IMAGE ELEVEN:** Jasper Johns. American, born 1930. *Flag*. 1954–55 (dated on reverse 1954). Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric, mounted on plywood, 42 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 60 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (107.3 x 153.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.



**IMAGE TWELVE:** Charles Moore. American, born 1931. *Martin Luther King, Jr. Arrested*. 1958. Gelatin silver print, 8 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (21.3 x 31 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Harriette and Noel Levine



**IMAGE THIRTEEN:** Andy Warhol. American, 1928–1987. *Birmingham Race Riot* from the portfolio *X+X (Ten Works by Ten Painters)*. 1964. Screenprint, composition: 19 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 24" (50.7 x 60.9 cm). Publisher: The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. Printer: Sirocco Screenprinters, North Haven, Connecticut, supervised by Ives-Sillman, New Haven, Connecticut. Edition: 500. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Harry C. Oppenheimer (by exchange)

## INTRODUCTION

The years from the 1950s to the 1970s were turbulent times, which witnessed the Vietnam War, the assassination of President Kennedy, Mao Tse-tung's Cultural Revolution in China, and the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Many artists at this time represented political events in their work. This lesson looks at the work of three artists whose work represents ideas and specific events important to the political and social atmosphere of this time.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will consider the ways that artists respond to political and social events and ideas.
- Students will think about sources—where do artists get their inspiration?
- Students will learn about symbols and think about what they represent.

## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Discuss the political climate of the 1950s and the **Cold War** with students. Who was involved? What effects did the Cold War have on Americans? Tell them about **McCarthyism**. Have them consider how freedom of speech was affected by Senator McCarthy's crusades against alleged Communists.
- Discuss the issues and ideas behind the **Civil Rights Movement** of the 1950s and 1960s. They should consider the following questions: What were African-Americans and others fighting for? Who were the leaders? What did they want to achieve? How did they achieve it? What was the federal government's role?

## IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

### Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954–55 (Image Eleven)

- Ask students to look carefully at this image. Direct them to work in pairs and talk about what an American flag might represent. What does a flag mean to them? What might it mean to others? Ask them to share their ideas.
- Ask them to talk about symbols. What are symbols? What can they mean? This flag is a symbol and its meaning can be different for different people.

Jasper Johns worked at the same time as Robert Rauschenberg. Johns transformed flat, recognizable objects such as flags, targets, numbers, and maps into paintings.

- Ask students to look closely at this work again. What do they notice about how it was made? Share with them the information about the materials Johns used—paint, newspaper, wax, glue, and plywood. This is composed of three canvases that are bound together. One shows white stars on the blue background, another includes the top seven stripes, and the last is the bottom half of the picture.

Johns said, "One night I dreamed that I painted a large American flag, and the next morning I got up and I went out and bought the materials to begin it....I worked on that painting a long time."<sup>27</sup>

27. Jasper Johns, quoted in *Pop Art: Selections from The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 46.

Johns declares that he never intended this picture to be overtly political. However, by looking at an image of a flag, the viewer has to consider the meaning of this symbol. Johns believed that knowledge blinds us to experience. He felt that by showing common things in unexpected ways art could challenge people to rethink their ideas and to become more self-aware. He said, “When something is new to us, we treat it as an experience. We feel that our senses are awake and clear. We are alive.”<sup>28</sup>

- **Ask students if they agree with Johns’s statement. Has looking at a work of art ever changed the way they see things? Did hearing their classmates’ initial reaction to *Flag* cause them see it differently? Ask them to give examples.**
- **This was painted in 1954–55. Ask students to reflect upon what they have learned about the McCarthy era and the Cold War. Ask them to consider what it might have meant to make a painting of an American flag at this time. How does the meaning of this symbol change depending on when we view it? What does it mean to us today?**

### **Charles Moore, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Arrested*, 1958 (Image Twelve)**

- **Ask students to look closely at this image. Ask them to spend a few minutes writing down their observations. They should consider the following questions: What do they see? What is happening at this moment? Who is involved? What kind of place do they think this is? Have students back up their ideas with evidence from the image. Ask students to share their ideas.**

This photograph was taken in 1958 by the photographer Charles Moore. Moore documented many of the events and people involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Tell students that the man in the center of this photograph is Martin Luther King, Jr. The woman to the right of him is his wife, Coretta Scott King.

- **Ask students to summarize what they know about the Civil Rights Movement. What do they know about Martin Luther King, Jr.? What was his role in the Civil Rights Movement?**

Inform students that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a pivotal leader in the American Civil Rights Movement. A Baptist priest and social activist, he advocated for nonviolence and equal treatment for African-Americans. For more information, including King’s writings and speeches, see [www.stanford.edu/group/King](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King).

Moore took this photograph in a police station in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1958. He was the only photographer present to witness King’s argument with local police that led to his arrest. King insisted on remaining in jail for the full fourteen days of his sentence, even though the Police Commissioner paid the \$10 fine himself to try to diffuse the publicity surrounding this event.

Moore continued to document the Civil Rights Movement in the South. He represented images of desegregation, voter registration, marches, protests, and police abuse. His photographs were distributed nationwide in *Life* magazine, which at that time was read by over half of the adults in the United States. These works helped people to learn about the events of the day. According to former U.S. Senator Jacob Javits, Moore’s pictures “helped to spur the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.<sup>29</sup>

28. Jasper Johns, quoted in *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996), p. 17.

29. See <http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/moore/aboutCharlesMoore.shtml>.

- Ask students if they have seen an image in a magazine or newspaper that made them think differently about the world around them. What was the image? What was it about the image that made them stop and think?

### Andy Warhol, *Birmingham Race Riots, 1964* (Image Thirteen)

- Show students this image. Ask them to look carefully and to describe what they see. Ask them to back up their ideas with evidence from the image. What does this image tell us about the time?
- Inform students of the title. Tell them that this work derives from a photograph by Charles Moore that was published in 1963 in *Life* magazine. It was taken in Birmingham, Alabama, when police unleashed attack dogs and fire hoses on a group of nonviolent African-American children and protesters led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the early 1960s, Warhol began to use images from newspapers and magazines that chronicled catastrophes, conflict, and death. These became known as the Disaster Series. In 1962, Warhol began to **screenprint** on canvas, matching mass-produced images with a commercial and easily repeatable medium. This allowed him to work directly from the photographs that inspired him.

- Ask students to compare Warhol's print with Moore's photograph *Martin Luther King, Jr. Arrested*. Ask students to consider what it means to look at a photograph in a newspaper versus one that is included in a print. How does the meaning of this appropriated image change? What remains the same?
- Ask students to discuss what kind of political statement this work makes. Are Warhol's ideas about using art to make a political statement similar or different to Johns's? How?

## ACTIVITIES

### 1. Injustice Today

Warhol called the Birmingham Race Riots episode a “blot on the American conscience.”<sup>30</sup> Ask students to write an essay about an instance of prejudice or injustice they have encountered or observed. Did it concern them or someone else? How did they deal with it? What steps can they take to try to rectify this situation or attitude?

### 2. Civil Rights

In order to learn more about the civil rights struggle, students can research one of the following figures, laws, or events: Jim Crow Laws, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Lyndon Johnson, George Wallace, Brown vs. Board of Education, Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma to Birmingham March, the 1963 March on Washington, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

### 3. Make a Political Commentary

Ask students to select a photograph from the newspaper that has to do with a social injustice. Have them create their own political commentary. Advise them to think about the following questions: Why did they select this image? What relevance does it have to our society? What can they do to help fix this problem?

30. Weitman, *Pop Impressions Europe/USA*, p. 90.

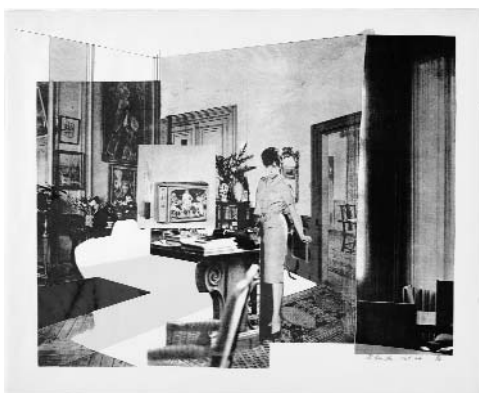
## LESSON FIVE: Artist's Choice: People



**IMAGE FOURTEEN:** Willem de Kooning. American, born the Netherlands. 1904–1997. *Woman, I*. 1950–52. Oil on canvas, 6' 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 58" (192.7 x 147.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2007 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



**IMAGE FIFTEEN:** Roy Lichtenstein. American, 1923–1997. *Drowning Girl*. 1963. Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 67 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (171.6 x 169.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund (by exchange) and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright



**IMAGE SIXTEEN:** Richard Hamilton. British, born 1922. *Interior*. 1964 (published 1965). Screenprint, composition: 19 $\frac{3}{16}$ " x 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (49.1 x 63.8 cm). Publisher: Editions Alecto, London. Printer: Kelpra Studio, London. Edition: 4 (final state, edition: 50). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Dorothy Braude Edinburg Fund. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London