

## MODULE ONE

# Tradition and Innovation in Modern Painting

The selected works are among the most iconic in MoMA's collection. They share a common medium—painting—and represent various steps in the development of new artistic languages at the turn of the twentieth century. They illustrate developments in modern art and demonstrate how celebrated artists have built on and broken with artistic tradition to forge new ground in representation and artistic practice. Given the focus on innovation, the works are arranged chronologically. This sequence allows the conversation to progress historically and shows how each work builds on tradition to bring about innovation.

# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. 1889

- What do you notice first when you look at this painting?
- How would you describe the colors?
- How do you feel when you look at this painting? What in the painting makes you feel that way?

*The Starry Night*, by Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), is among the most recognizable images in the history of art, and certainly one of the most reproduced. It is a landscape Van Gogh painted in Saint-Rémy, in the south of France. The painting is a quintessential example of the artist's short and textured brushstroke. Furthermore, Van Gogh does not adhere to traditional uses of color but instead favors an imaginative, expressive palette, as in the rolling blue mountains in the background and the bright-yellow stars in the sky. His style influenced generations of artists who appreciated his sense of drama and unconventional use of color.



André Derain. *London Bridge*. 1906

- What time of day do you think is depicted in this painting? How can you tell?
- Why do you think Derain uses the colors that he does? What is the emotional effect of his color choices on the viewer?
- The title of this work is *London Bridge*. Can you imagine London looking the way it is represented here? Why or why not?

André Derain (1880–1954) was a member of the French group of artists who came to be known as the *Fauves*, or “wild beasts.” Their use of color, often not corresponding to reality, earned them this title. In the early twentieth century, Derain left Paris to travel to London, where he painted numerous cityscapes, frequently set along the River Thames, including this rendition of London Bridge. In his new surroundings, Derain continued his exploration of perception and color in his innovative style.



Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*. 1935

- What is the first word that comes to your mind when looking at this painting?
- How is the representation of these figures different from that in traditional paintings? Consider the shape of the figures and their facial expressions, proportions, and colors.
- This painting is eight feet tall and over seven feet wide. What are the emotional effects of the scale of this work? Why do you think Picasso created such a large painting?

This work by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) is considered to be among the most important paintings of the twentieth century. Picasso innovated at multiple levels, exploring the formal possibilities of painting and radically shifting the experience of the viewer. Geometric shapes are used to delineate the women, as if they are seen from multiple perspectives. Picasso incorporated the traditional motif of female nudes as well as African art, as seen in the masklike faces of the two women on the right.

**TURN AND TALK:** In preliminary sketches Picasso included two male figures in this composition — a sailor and a doctor — but ultimately chose not to include them. How would these figures have altered the composition and your interpretation of the scene? How would you change the scene?



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. *Street, Dresden*. 1908

- What type of place is represented in this painting?
- Does anything in the painting give you a sense of the time period depicted?
- What words would you use to describe the overall mood of this work?

During the nineteenth century, the population in Dresden and other German cities skyrocketed, yet Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) wrote, “The more I mixed with people the more I felt my loneliness.” As a member of *Die Brücke* (The Bridge), a German Expressionist art movement, Kirchner investigated the expressive potential of color, form, and composition in depictions of everyday German life. In *Street, Dresden* he highlights the relationship between individuals and their urban environment, including the other people present. Through formal elements he conveys a sense of the highly congested street and at the same time the separateness and emotional isolation between the figures.

**TURN AND TALK:** Share a personal story of a trip to a big city. Did this experience take place during your childhood or more recently? Do you prefer cities, small towns, or suburbs? How do you feel when you are in a city?



Umberto Boccioni. *The City Rises*. 1910

- Are there figures or objects that you can recognize in this painting? If so, what and where are they? What could they symbolize?
- The title of this work is *The City Rises*. How does knowing this title affect the way you view the painting?
- What is the significance of brushstroke in this work? How does it contribute to the mood of the painting?

In 1906 Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) moved from the Italian countryside to Paris, where he was inspired by the modern city and by the new technologies available to him. After meeting Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, founder of the Futurist movement, Boccioni, along with other Italian artists, shifted the movement beyond writing into visual art. The goal of these artists was to abandon nostalgia for Italy's past and propel society into the future by embracing technological advancements. Boccioni integrated notions of modernity and technology into his paintings not only through depictions of dynamic cities but also through optical distortion and blurred lines and figures, which capture the movement of the city like a camera would.

## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we looked at different ways artists have altered traditional forms and styles in painting. Ask participants to create a simple landscape image (for example, trees or mountains) using acrylic, tempera, or watercolor paints on paper. They can depict the scene any way that they like. Once the first version of this landscape has been made, ask them to re-create the landscape on a different piece of paper. This time ask them to change either the color palette (for example, use colors that are not representative of what they really see) or the technique for applying paint (for example, use the tip of the brush, large brushstrokes, or a smaller paintbrush). Afterward, hold the works up side-by-side and discuss how the changes made have altered the overall appearance of the landscape. Ask participants about the motivation behind the changes. Repeat the activity with different materials and techniques as many times as participants would like or as the schedule allows.

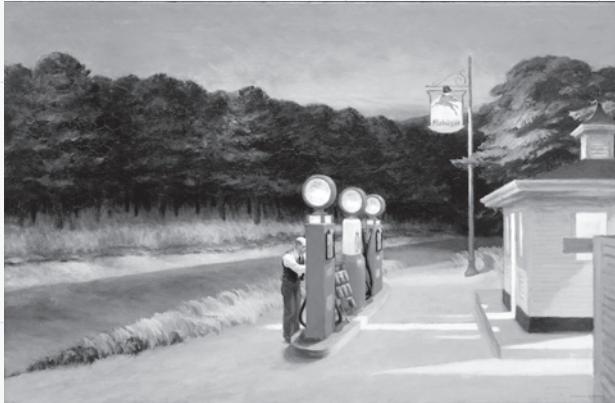
## MODULE TWO

# Images of America

The selected works offer glimpses of life in the United States during the twentieth century. The images include scenes created by artists from different countries and offer a range of interpretations of both urban and rural life. The chronological sequence allows for a discussion of the important changes that were occurring not only in American history but also in the development of art. Throughout the discussion, consider how American culture and identity are defined and represented in visual art.



# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Edward Hopper. *Gas*. 1940

- Is there anything in this painting that strikes you as distinctly “American”? Why or why not?
- What elements of the landscape are familiar to you, if any?
- If this painting were to depict a present-day gas station, how would it differ from the one seen here?

Edward Hopper (1882–1967) studied illustration and painting at the New York Institute of Art and Design, where he and his fellow students were encouraged to create realistic depictions of modern life. Because abstraction reigned supreme then, many critics considered Hopper and his colleagues to be painting in a style that was all but obsolete. Eventually, though, his work came to be considered an important precursor to a generation of Pop artists and Photo-Realist painters. Most of Hopper’s paintings concentrate on the subtle interactions of human beings with each other and/or their surroundings.

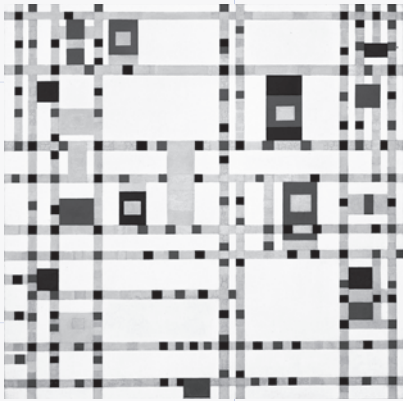


Jacob Lawrence. *In the North the Negro had better educational facilities*. 1940–41

- Who are the figures in this painting? Where do you think they are?
- Consider the title of this work. Do you think this work depicts educational facilities in the North or the South? Why?
- Have you or your family ever moved to another region, and, if so, what were the motivations for the move?

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) is among the best-known twentieth-century American artists. Throughout his lengthy artistic career, Lawrence concentrated on depicting the history and struggles of African Americans, and his work often portrays important periods in African American history. Lawrence was only twenty-three when he completed the sixty-panel series of paintings originally entitled *Migration of the Negro*. This series depicts the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North, of which Lawrence’s parents were a part. The paintings were shown in New York and brought him national recognition after they were featured in a 1941 issue of *Fortune* magazine.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss your own educational experience. What was your early schooling like? How do you think your opportunities and experiences compare to those of children today?



Piet Mondrian. *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. 1942–43

- What shapes and colors do you see in this painting? Why do you suppose the artist exclusively uses straight lines and primary colors?
- If this image represented a place, where might it be? Would it be urban or rural?
- Mondrian titled this work *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. What does “boogie woogie” mean to you? How does knowing the title affect the way you look at the work?

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) made art intimately related to his spiritual and philosophical studies. In his work he sought to transcend specific subject matter to represent the universal. Over the course of the development of his aesthetic doctrine, called Neo-Plasticism, he gradually limited his compositions to what he considered “pure” forms—horizontal and vertical lines—resulting in a strict rectilinearity and a palette of black, white, and primary colors exclusively. In 1940 Mondrian moved to New York City, where he would remain until his death. He took great interest in city life and jazz music, to which he was introduced in New York, and he soon began, as he said, “to put a little boogie-woogie” into his paintings.



Andrew Wyeth. *Christina's World*. 1948

- Why do you think this figure is in the field? What might she be looking at?
- What part of America does this painting depict?
- What is the overall tone of this work?

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009) was an American painter. He often depicted the land and inhabitants around his hometown of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and those near his summer home in Cushing, Maine. As a representational artist, Wyeth's paintings sharply contrasted with abstraction, which gained currency in American art in the mid-twentieth century. Wyeth vividly recorded arid landscapes and rural houses and shacks, painting minute details and nuances of light and shadow. Wyeth's paintings often contain strong emotional currents and symbolic content. There is great mystery in *Christina's World*, and the ambiguities associated with the woman and the scene allow the viewer to form multiple narratives.

**TURN AND TALK:** Create a narrative for this scene. Consider the main figure. Why is she in this field? What is she about to do?



Jeff Wall. *After “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue*. 1999–2000

- What kind of place is represented in this photograph? How would you describe it?
- Is this a real room? Do you think Wall found this place, or constructed it?
- What time period do you think this photograph suggests?

Jeff Wall (born 1946) is a contemporary artist living and working in Canada whose medium of choice is photography. This photograph, *After “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue*, is a reference to the famous American novel that tells the story of one unnamed African American’s struggle to be recognized by white society around the time of World War II. In this visual rendition Wall stays true to the time period in which the novel is set. The scene was imagined and created by the artist with the help of assistants, and incorporates many details from the novel, including 1,369 light bulbs: the exact number cited in Ellison’s prologue.

## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we looked at various representations of American life in the twentieth century. Ask participants to create a collaged image that represents America to them. Suggest that their image can depict the America of today or represent some time in the past. Provide newspapers and magazines in which participants may find the images for their collages. At the end, have participants share their collages with the rest of the group.



## MODULE THREE

# Modern Portraits

The selected works allow for an examination of some of the ways modern painters have depicted others and themselves. In looking at these works, consider how each artist's style and his use of color, scale, and composition affects the figure he depicts. Also take into account the setting of the work and what information it conveys about the person represented or the artist himself.

# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Pablo Picasso. *Les Femmes d'Alger*. 1907

- What is the first thing you notice when you look at this painting?
- How would you describe the faces of these women? How do they vary?
- The women in this painting are staring directly at the viewer. How does that make you feel?

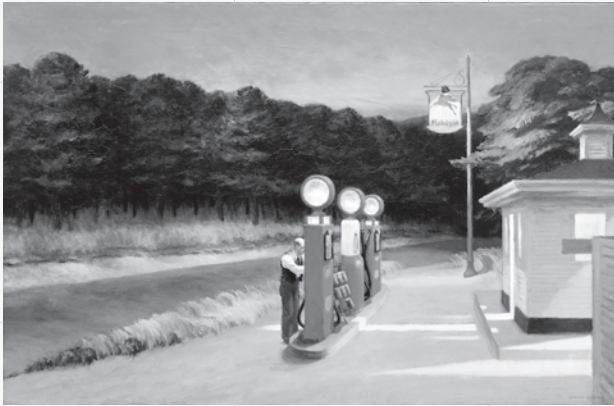
Rather than adhering to established conventions of composition and painting technique, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) broke with traditional methods of representation. In this painting he distorted form, accentuated some details while leaving out others altogether, and presented multiple perspectives within the same work, instead of trying to faithfully re-create likenesses of the figures and the scene. In *Les Femmes d'Alger* Picasso represents five prostitutes posing. Algiers was a street in Barcelona famed for its brothels.



Andrew Wyeth. *Christina's World*. 1948

- What do you think is happening in this painting? Where is this woman and what is she doing?
- How would you describe this woman's posture and body language?
- If you could see this woman's face, what do you think her expression would be? Why?

Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009) was an American painter who spent most of his life living and painting in Maine and Pennsylvania. In Wyeth's style of painting, known as magic realism, commonplace scenes contain a sense of mystery and uncertainty. This painting depicts Christina Olson, the artist's neighbor in Maine, who had a neuromuscular disorder possibly caused by polio. Wyeth described Christina as "limited physically but by no means spiritually." Olson refused to use a wheelchair, preferring to crawl. Wyeth explained, "The challenge to me was to do justice to her extraordinary conquest of a life which most people would consider hopeless."



Edward Hopper. *Gas*. 1940

- During what time period do you think this painting is set?
- What region of the country might this scene depict?
- How do you think this figure is feeling? What is the overall mood of the painting?

Edward Hopper (1882–1967) studied commercial illustration and worked as an illustrator in New York. He spent his summers painting in New England. In most of Hopper's works, he highlights the mundane activities of the everyday in a realistic fashion. In paying attention to these quotidian tasks and often focusing on solitary figures, he imbued his paintings with a sense of loneliness and ambiguity and elevated the importance of each individual's intimate relationship with his or her surroundings.

**TURN AND TALK:** Create a narrative for this scene. What do you think has just happened at this gas station? What could happen next?



Jeff Wall. *After "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue*. 1999–2000

- What is this figure doing? What might his posture reveal about his emotional state?
- How would you describe this environment? What does it convey about this man's life?
- Why do you think he is living in this place?

Jeff Wall (born 1946) is a contemporary photographer from Canada. *After "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, the Prologue* references a literary work: Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*. In the novel's prologue, Ellison introduces the protagonist and narrator, who is never named, in his underground home. In Wall's rendition he presents this man from an angle that denies us a view of his face. Instead, he uses the figure's surroundings to help the viewer establish his identity and his place within American society.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss your favorite story or book. Is there a character you identify with or a particular part you find most poignant? Why is it so meaningful to you?



Vincent van Gogh. *The Starry Night*. 1889

- What is the first word that comes to your mind when you look at this painting?
- How would you describe this place?
- How can we think of this work as a type of self-portrait?

In 1888 Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) went to Provence, where he found the brilliant light and vivid colors of the nighttime intoxicating. He remarked, “It often seems to me that the night is much more alive and richly colored than the day.” Even though this is a night scene, the colors are extremely bright and intense. While this scene was inspired by the view from Van Gogh’s mental institution in Saint-Rémy, the village depicted was partly invented, perhaps based on memories of his native Holland. Thus the painting is derived from actual observation but also from Van Gogh’s imagination and memories. Van Gogh championed individual expression over absolute realism. In *Starry Night* he offers a glimpse into his personal history as well as insight into his thoughts and imagination.

## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we considered how different artists have represented themselves and others. Ask participants to work in pairs to make collage portraits of one another. Use colored poster board as a background and decorative papers of various colors, patterns, and textures for the collage. Ask participants to look at the overall shape or outline of their partner’s head. Suggest they sketch a light pencil line of that shape on their poster board to guide them. They can then start cutting, tearing, and gluing paper to fill in the outline of the portrait. You can also provide pre-cut pieces of paper. Next, instruct them to move on to the details. These can include hair, ears, neck, glasses, jewelry, or clothing. Tell them they can use different textures and colors of materials to describe the various surfaces they see and that the portrait need not be realistic.

## MODULE FOUR

# The City in Modern Art

The selected images are depictions of urban landscapes throughout the development of modern art. Each work illustrates the unique perspective of the artist as well as his relationship to his urban surroundings. The works progress in chronological order, ending with the highly abstract *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Throughout, consider topics such as the development and growth of cities and the benefits and challenges of city life.



# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



André Derain. *London Bridge*. 1906

- What part of the city does this painting represent?
- What city do you think this might be, and why?
- Where is the viewer in relation to the bridge?

André Derain (1880–1954) was a member of the French movement that came to be known as *Fauvism*. The *Fauves*, or “wild beasts,” were known for their unbribled use of color. Their disregard for the natural coloring of objects shocked their contemporaries. In this painting, Derain applies wild color in his depiction of the heavily trafficked London Bridge, with multiple boats and barges in the River Thames below. Derain was encouraged to visit London in the early 1900s by the dealer Ambroise Vollard. While there he painted many different views of the city, focusing mainly on the various monuments and bridges along the Thames.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. *Street, Dresden*. 1908

- What are the people in this painting doing?
- What is peculiar about Kirchner’s use of color in this scene?
- What is the overall mood of this work?

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880–1938) was a member of the German Expressionist group *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). The artists of *Die Brücke* explored the emotional effects of color and composition in the depiction of contemporary life. Through the use of bright, unrealistic colors, Kirchner energized this scene of Königstrasse street in Dresden.

**TURN AND TALK:** Imagine a busy street in your town or city and think of how you would depict it. Which street would you pick? Why? What medium would you use? What colors and techniques?



Umberto Boccioni. *The City Rises*. 1910

- What seems to be happening in this painting? What are the figures doing?
- What are some clues that reveal that this painting depicts a city?
- What is the emotional impact of the way Boccioni has decided to depict the city? Consider his choice of brushstroke, color, and composition.

Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916) was a key figure of the Italian Futurist movement. This group of writers, musicians, and visual artists sought to abandon the air of nostalgia they felt was restricting Italian society. They encouraged their compatriots to embrace the infinite potential of the future, powered by technological advancements and humans' will for change. Boccioni uses “lines of force” to communicate this idea of progression in his dynamic composition of a city being built.



Jacob Lawrence. *In the North the Negro had better educational facilities*. 1940–41

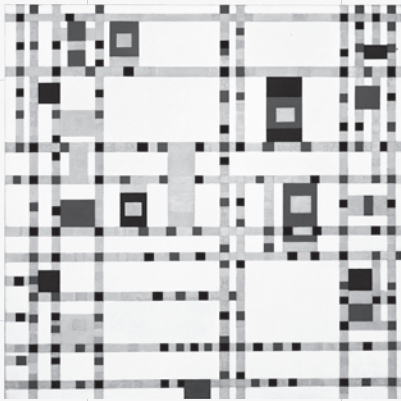
- How is this work related to our theme of the city?
- Do the people in this work look like they come from a particular background?
- What is the impact of the formal choices the artist has made on our viewing experience?

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) and his family were some of the thousands of African Americans to migrate to the North around the time of World War I. They eventually relocated to New York City's Harlem neighborhood, where Lawrence began taking art classes. In 1940 he began *The Migration Series*, a multipanel series of images that narrates this great migration in American history. The panels were worked simultaneously, resulting in a uniformity of palette and similarity in overall composition among the sixty panels.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss the transformations you have witnessed in American society in the past decades, thinking in particular about shifts in public policy and initiatives in social reform.

## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we discussed how artists have represented urban settings. Ask participants to make a representation of a city they have lived in, visited, or imagined. Encourage them to think about what elements of city life they will include and what materials they will use to represent the landscape. Provide various materials, such as paper, pencils, watercolors, and acrylic. Help them to think about how the formal decisions they make will affect the overall impact of their works. Make sure that participants are aware that their depiction does not need to be realistic but can be a rendition of a personal vision.



Piet Mondrian. *Broadway Boogie Woogie*.  
1942–43

- How many shapes and colors are used in this painting?
- What does this painting make you imagine or think of? Does it represent any particular place or thing?
- The title of this painting is *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. Knowing this, how does your understanding of the painting change?

Through the course of his career, Piet Mondrian (1872–1944) abandoned representation to focus on the depiction of “pure” forms. For Mondrian this meant the exclusive use of primary colors and geometric shapes. In 1940 he moved from London to New York City. There he joined a vibrant society, constantly in flux. He was influenced not only by the rhythm of city life but also by the syncopated beat of jazz music.

## MODULE FIVE

# Family Pictures

The selected works offer several perspectives on the idea of “family” as represented in modern art. The initial works exhibit more traditional interpretations, while the subsequent works are more abstract both in style and in relation to the theme. Throughout, consider such topics as the representation of the figures and their relationships to each other, to the artist, and to their surroundings.

# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Édouard Vuillard. *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist*. 1893

- Who might these women be, and what is their relationship to each other? Do you think they have any relationship with the artist?
- What might Vuillard be telling us about their personalities by painting them in this way?
- Do you relate to either of these figures? What is your role in your family, either now or when you were growing up?

The majority of paintings by Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940) depict domestic interiors and public scenes. They are often rendered with an overall blurred quality, with different textures and patterns blending into each other. Vuillard’s mother earned a living for her family as a dressmaker. The influence of her profession can be seen in Vuillard’s inclusion of intricate decorative patterns. In *Interior, Mother and Sister of the Artist*, he incorporates these patterns throughout the domestic space, seen not only on the clothing of his sister (the figure on the left) but also on the wallpaper. The mother anchors the composition, with the walls and floor all angling in toward her seated figure.



Dorothea Lange. *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*. 1936

- When and where do you think this photograph was taken?
- Describe the face of the woman in the center. How do you think she is feeling? What might she be thinking?
- What is the role of this woman in her family?

Dorothea Lange (1895–1965) began her career as a photographer in her native New York City before moving to San Francisco. Together Lange and her husband documented the poverty and exploitation of migrant workers during and after the Great Depression. *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* is perhaps her most famous work and became the iconic image of the Great Depression. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Lange spoke about her experience taking the photograph: “I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me.” Lange captures the desperation of this mother as well as the strong ties which existed in this family nucleus.





Max Beckmann. *Family Picture*. 1920

- Who is represented in this painting? What are the figures doing?
- How would you describe the relationship between the figures?
- The title of this work is *Family Picture*. How is this painting similar to or different from your own family pictures?

After serving as a medic in World War I, Max Beckmann (1884–1950) transformed his artistic style to incorporate altered perspective and proportion. In contrast to popular trends, he rejected abstract painting and embraced traditional subject matter such as portraits, still lifes, and genre scenes. In *Family Picture*, Beckmann paints a typical genre scene of the various stages of life, ranging from infancy to old age, within one family. The relationships of the figures, however, remain ambiguous.



Marc Chagall. *I and the Village*. 1911

- How does this work relate to our theme of family?
- What are some other ways to think about the idea of a family? Could it include friends? Animals? A community or village?
- Are there specific places that you associate with your family?

Marc Chagall (1887–1985) was born to a large Jewish family in a village in Belarus, at that time part of the Russian empire. In the early twentieth century he moved to Paris. His work often includes imagery from his childhood, including details of Hasidic culture. In *I and the Village*, Chagall includes figures in rural dress, vernacular buildings, and domesticated animals. The large man and goat in the center dominate the composition and seem to have a strong bond, as illustrated by a faint sight line that connects the two figures' eyes.

**TURN AND TALK:** Which city or village do you consider your “hometown”? Is it where you live now or where you grew up? How would you paint this place? Which specific places or people would you include?

## Art-Making Activity

In this module we discussed how different artists have represented families, both their own and others'. Ask participants to create a work that depicts their family, using colored pencils and pastels. You might even ask participants to bring in actual family portraits or copies of photographs and other memorabilia. They can collage these family photographs into their work. Finally, have participants share a story that relates to their family or the work.



Fernando Botero. *The Presidential Family*. 1967

- Who is depicted in this portrait? Do you think these figures are related? Why?
- What do you think is their social status? Consider how they are dressed and how they are posed.
- Is this a positive or a negative rendition? Can you surmise any opinion of the presidential family on Botero's behalf?

Colombian artist Fernando Botero (born 1932) traveled to Europe at a young age with the goal of studying the work of the Old Masters. Characterized by bloated figures, his work often depicts contemporary life in his native Colombia as well as portraits of militarists and people in power. In his work Botero explores both the nature of politics and power as well as the formal possibilities of painting.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss past or current depictions of political families in the United States or abroad. How are they represented? Are they posed or candid? Are they positive or negative depictions?

## MODULE SIX

# Music and Art

The selected works touch on various ways artists have explored music in art. The images offer a range of opportunities to discuss various styles, forms, and ideas related to movement, rhythm, and other elements related to music. The relationship between music, composition, and art is explored through subject matter, materials, and the overall interaction of the elements within the work.

# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Henri Rousseau. *The Sleeping Gypsy*. 1897

- How would you describe this scene?
- What time of day do you think is depicted in this painting?
- Why is this figure carrying a musical instrument? What is her role in society? Where do you think she is coming from? Where might she be going?
- What do you think the relationship is between the person and the lion?

Henri Rousseau (1844–1910) was a self-taught artist who went against the grain of academic style and subject matter by flattening figures and objects. His style was refreshing to some of the leading avant-garde artists of the time, including Pablo Picasso. In *The Sleeping Gypsy*, Rousseau exercises his acute sensibility for color and line in his depiction of a gypsy and lion in the middle of a desert-like setting. With minimal modeling, he reduces all forms to flattened shapes. There is an overall stillness in the setting, giving a dreamlike quality to the work.



Pablo Picasso. *Three Musicians*. 1921

- Which geometric shapes do you see in this image?
- How many musicians are there? How has Picasso depicted these musicians? What material has he used?
- Where might these musicians be performing? What kind of music do you think they are playing?

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Georges Braque were the two pioneers of Cubism, developing it roughly between 1907 and 1914. Their collaboration spawned the collage technique, in which pieces of paper and other materials are adhered to a surface to create an image. *Three Musicians* is characterized by the illusion of this collage technique: the figures are composed of multiple painted shapes that resemble pieces of paper or other materials. Of the three figures, the two characters on the left, a masked Pierrot, or sad clown (far left), and a Harlequin, are associated with the *commedia dell'arte*, a form of improvisational theater that began in Italy in the sixteenth century. While these characters add a certain humor to the scene, the darkened palette lends a somber quality, creating an overall sense of ambiguity in the work.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. *La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge*. 1891–92

- What are the people in this painting doing? Where do you think they are? What are some elements that help you identify the specific time frame and location of this painting?
- How would you describe the central figure? How does she present herself? Can you determine her social status?
- What kind of music do you think is played at this dance hall?

After moving to the Montmartre district of Paris, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) began frequenting dance halls and other social venues. This particular scene illustrates the Moulin Rouge, one of the many cabarets that were a distinguishing feature of Paris nightlife toward the close of the nineteenth century. The painting highlights one particular dancer, Louise Weber, nicknamed “La Goulue,” the reigning belle of this milieu. In his representation of the figures and the dance hall, Toulouse-Lautrec applied artistic techniques learned through his study of Japanese woodblock prints, including a cropped scene, shallow spaces, and outlined figures. These characteristics are also seen in his commercial posters, for which he was well known.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss your favorite music venue. What kind of music is played there? Is there dancing? What kind?



Henri Matisse. *Dance (I)*. 1909

- Where do you think this scene takes place and what are the figures doing?
- What kind of mood do their body positions and movements suggest?
- How do the artist’s decisions regarding color, composition, and lack of detail affect your interpretation of this scene?

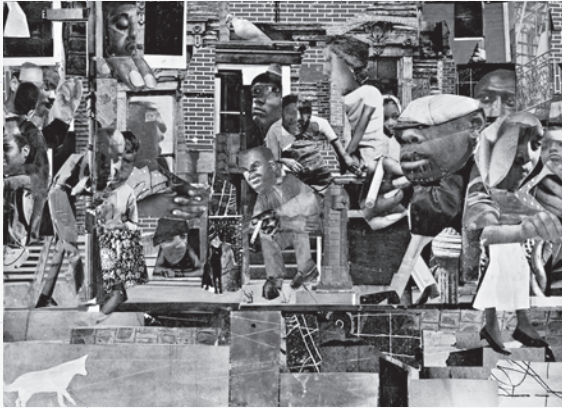
Henri Matisse (1869–1954) was one of the main artists of the avant-garde movement known as *Fauvism*, which explored the expressive potential of color. After returning from travels in North Africa, he started to experiment with innovative treatments of the human figure, inspired by classical decorations, African tribal sculpture, and ongoing developments in the work of his contemporaries. *Dance (I)* combines remnants of the Fauvists’ use of color with Matisse’s desire to treat the female form as a fluid visual balance of opposing rhythms and volumes. In the year just before Matisse painted *Dance (I)* he wrote, “What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity devoid of troubling or depressing subject-matter . . . a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.”

**TURN AND TALK:** If you were to paint a scene with dancers, what kind of dance would they perform and in what setting? What would the dancers be wearing? Would this performance be a large spectacle or a small show?



## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we considered how different artists have incorporated or alluded to music and rhythm in their artistic practice. In this activity, play different styles of music while participants are creating a painting of a figure. Offer some suggestions: a musician, a dancer, a friend, a self-portrait, etc. The best materials for this project are those that can be used more fluidly while the music is being played. Consider using watercolors or acrylic paint. Provide paint brushes of different sizes and large pieces of paper to paint on. Allow participants to work at their own pace.



Romare Bearden. *The Dove*. 1964

- Who and what is represented in this work? Are these elements easy to identify?
- How do you think this work was made? What materials were used?
- In what different ways do movement and rhythm come into play in this work?
- What type of music do you associate with this scene?

Although he studied and worked as an artist for multiple decades before, it was not until 1964 that Romare Bearden (1911–1988) began to make the collages that would become his signature works. In *The Dove*, he uses the collage technique to represent his own Harlem community. This work is part of a series titled *The Prevalence of Ritual*, in which Bearden repeatedly represented the activities that made up everyday existence in his neighborhood. Using imagery found in newspapers and magazines, Bearden created a vibrant and rhythmic street scene.

## MODULE SEVEN

# Modern Visions of Light

The selected works explore different ways that artists have incorporated the theme or image of light into their practice. Included are a photograph and four paintings: two mediums whose relationship with light is essential. When discussing these works take note of where light is seen and how it affects the viewer's perception of the place that is depicted. Also consider the effect of the absence of light in some of the works.

# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



René Magritte. *The Empire of Light, II*. 1950

- What are some words that you would use to describe this scene?
- What time of day would you say is depicted in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Why do you think Magritte has included elements of both night and day here?

As one of the most important Surrealists, René Magritte (1898–1967) often painted scenes filled with ambiguity. This image is one of a series in which Magritte presented the same street scene simultaneously during the day and at nighttime. In his adherence to this illusionist technique, Magritte’s aesthetic was similar to that of his fellow Surrealist Salvador Dalí, who referred to this style as “hand-painted dream photographs.”



Jacob August Riis. *Bandits' Roost*, 59½ Mulberry Street. 1888

- Who are the people in this photograph and where are they?
- Photography literally means “writing with light.” What are the different ways that light is present and absent in this work?
- What are the differences between photography and painting? What possibilities does photography offer for depicting certain scenes?

Jacob August Riis (1849–1914) was an early proponent of the documentary potential of photography. He used his camera to capture the climate and conditions of the slums of New York City in an effort to promote social change. After the advent of the flash, Riis began photographing tenements and other overcrowded urban areas at night, casting a harsh light on the poor living conditions of his subjects. *Bandits' Roost*, 59½ Mulberry Street represents a notorious spot in downtown Manhattan. Riis began photographing this street as a police reporter for *The Tribune* in 1878. From then on, this street and its surroundings would remain an important subject in his work.

**TURN AND TALK:** If you were to photograph certain parts of your hometown, which would you choose and why? How would your depictions differ based on the time of day?



Jacob Lawrence. *Street Shadows*. 1959

- Where does this scene take place? Can you determine the time of day or the season?
- How does Lawrence depict light and shadows?
- What title would you give to this work? Once you learn the actual title, does it change your perception of the work?

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) is one of the most celebrated African American artists to date. While living in New York, he studied at the Art Students League and at Studio 306 in Harlem and worked under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Although abstract paintings were in vogue at the time, Lawrence maintained a dedication to creating representational paintings. In *Street Shadows*, Lawrence depicts a busy urban block. The scene is filled with stylized figures and buildings as well as planes of light and shadow.



Paul Cézanne. *L'Estaque*. 1879–83

- What natural and man-made elements do you see in this painting?
- Where can you see light in this scene?
- What is the emotional impact of the painting?

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) is often called the father of modern art. He used conventional content, such as landscape, still life, and portraiture, to deepen his explorations of form and perception and to question the traditions of painting. In this painting he applied large patches of different hues, laid on with wide brushstrokes that sweep rhythmically across the surface. No drawn contours bound the shapes of the houses, trees, or rocks. Rather, the play of light and shadow creates a sense of three-dimensionality. *L'Estaque* is one of many landscapes Cézanne created in the south of France, where he was able to paint numerous landscapes from a variety of viewpoints and angles, further investigating ideas of our visual relationship to our surroundings.

## Art-Making Activity

In this module, we considered different ways artists have explored the effects of light on certain settings and how we perceive them. In this activity, have participants consider how daylight affects a certain place that they know well. Ask participants to think of a specific place from their past or present. Give them paint, pastels, or paper — any medium that allows for extensive use of color. Ask them to depict this place during the day. When they are done, ask them to consider the exact same place at night — and to illustrate it on a separate piece of paper. Lead a discussion to compare and contrast the two renditions: How do they differ? How has the lighting changed? Has a new tone or mood been created?



Edward Hopper. *New York Movie*. 1939

- What space do you think this painting depicts? How does this theater look different than current movie theaters?
- What is the woman in blue doing? How do you think she is feeling?
- What are the different ways that lighting plays a role in this painting? Where can it be seen? What kind of mood does it create?

Paintings by Edward Hopper (1882–1967) are often realistic, but also often full of ambiguity. Feelings of loneliness and isolation pervade his paintings, particularly his later works, which typically contain one solitary figure or, at times, a few figures that do not interact. Through the use of strong, shadow-casting light, he emphasizes mood and illuminates the scene. Personal and emotive, his works are charged with narrative potential.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss the woman standing to the side. Why is she not watching the film? What might she be thinking about? What will she do once the movie ends?



## MODULE EIGHT

# Art and Politics

The selected images are depictions of political figures and conditions throughout modern history. Included are works from a variety of countries: Germany, Mexico, and the United States. Because of their inherent ties to political history, the works are ordered chronologically. Throughout, consider how politicians present themselves and how they are perceived by others. The works can stimulate discussion about the living conditions created by particular political movements and events as well as their effects in subsequent years.

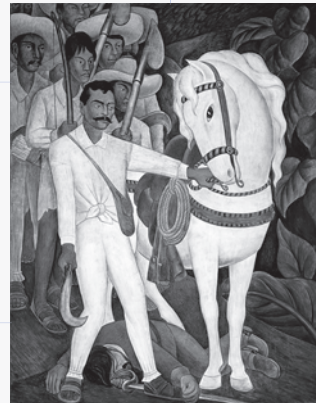
# Discussion Questions and Art-Historical Information



Otto Dix. *Dr. Mayer-Hermann*. 1926

- Who is the man in this painting? What is his profession?
- Do you think this is a positive or negative representation of a doctor?
- How do the elements of the doctor's office reflect Dix's opinion of his subject?

Otto Dix (1891–1969) is best known for the depictions of indigent war veterans and prostitutes that he painted after his service in the German Army during World War I. He also painted portraits of members of the upper echelons of German society. In this portrait of Dr. Mayer-Hermann, Dix's actual physician, he maintains his honest and unforgiving style. The frontal pose of the figure, as well as the various circular forms inside the doctor's office, all emphasize his unhealthy rotundity. This realism was the signature characteristic of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement, of which Dix was a chief member. Through this almost satirical portrait Dix highlights and critiques the life of excess led by the thriving middle class of the Weimar Republic.



Diego Rivera. *Agrarian Leader Zapata*. 1931

- What are some possible narratives suggested by this scene? What has just happened? What will happen next?
- Which social classes do the people in this painting belong to?
- What emotions do you associate with these characters?

Diego Rivera (1886–1957) was one of the Mexican artists that became known for their murals depicting events related to important advancements and figures in Mexican history. Having visited Europe on multiple occasions in the early twentieth century, Rivera was exposed to both the avant-garde trends of Paris and the continent's rich artistic history. He also traveled to Italy, where he studied the Renaissance fresco tradition. In *Agrarian Leader Zapata*, Rivera paints the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, backed by his army of peasants, holding the proud horse of his enemy, who lies dead behind him. This fresco was created for a 1931 solo exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art. It is a replica of a portion of a mural painted the year before in the Palace of Cortés in Cuernavaca.



Garry Winogrand. *Democratic National Convention*. 1960

- Where do you think this photograph was taken?
- How is it different from other photographs of politicians that you have seen?
- Why do you think the photographer chose to shoot from this viewpoint? How does this perspective affect the way you interpret the image?

This photograph is one of a series that depicts various gatherings and social functions, taken by Garry Winogrand (1928–1984) in the 1960s. Winogrand adhered to the documentary tradition of photography and commented on the social and political conditions that created the scenarios he focused on. In *Democratic National Convention*, Winogrand captures the future president John F. Kennedy speaking to his constituents from two different perspectives. In the foreground he shows the typical experience of the public, viewing the event on a television screen. This image is juxtaposed with a behind-the-scenes look. This photograph touches on different aspects of American politics, issues of honesty and transparency, and the role of the media in relaying political events.

**TURN AND TALK:** Discuss a specific political moment that was important to you. Where were you when it happened? Were you there in person, or did you watch it on television? How did that event affect your life and the country?



Jasper Johns. *Map*. 1961

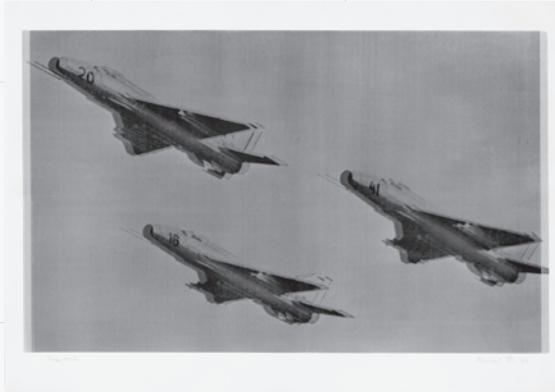
- How has Johns altered the traditional image of a map of the United States?
- How would you describe Johns's use of color and brushstroke in the painting? How does it inform your interpretation of this work?
- What are the political undertones of the transformation of this map?

Jasper Johns (born 1930) began his career in New York City during the height of Abstract Expressionism. Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko, the artists most associated with the movement, were celebrated for their individualistic and emotionally revealing large-scale works. In *Map*, Johns adopts their highly expressive brushstroke and applies it to the representation of a recognizable and rather mundane image: a map of the United States. Through the use of everyday images, such as maps, targets, and flags, Johns is able to focus on the process of creation rather than the subject matter. In addition, *Map* alludes to the representation and meaning of political symbols.

**TURN AND TALK:** Think about how you would create your own version of the map of the United States. Which elements would you change? What emotional effect would you try to create?

## Art-Making Activity

In this module we discussed how artists have responded to and represented political events and ideas. In relation to this theme, ask participants to make a propagandistic poster of a particular political figure, party, or event. They can use a variety of materials and mediums. In addition, ask them to include a slogan to go with the poster. Invite participants to tell a story relating to an event or figure that is or was particularly important to them and influenced their life in some way.



Gerhard Richter. *Flugzeug II*. 1966

- What type of airplanes do you think are depicted in this work? What are they used for?
- Why do you think Richter used a photograph as his starting point for this print?
- Have you seen similar images of aircraft elsewhere?

Gerhard Richter (born 1932) began incorporating photography in his practice in the early 1960s. Richter used images that he found in newspapers and other publications, and investigated the effect of mass media on perception. Richter began making prints in 1965 and has completed more than one hundred. This print of fighter planes reflects the World War II bombing of his native Dresden and the debates around German rearmament prevalent in the national press at the time. The printing strategy creates an effect for the viewer that is similar to that of newspaper illustrations.