

# **LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART**

*A Guide for Educators*

The Teacher Information Center at The Museum of Modern Art

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	A NOTE TO EDUCATORS
2.	USING THE EDUCATORS GUIDE
3.	ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS
42.	THEMATIC APPROACHES TO THE ARTWORKS
48.	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES
52.	MoMA SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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## A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

We are delighted to present this new educators guide featuring twenty artworks by Latin American and Caribbean artists. The guide was written on the occasion of *MoMA at El Museo: Latin American and Caribbean Art from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, a collaborative exhibition between MoMA and El Museo del Barrio. The show, which runs from March 4 through July 25, 2004, celebrates important examples of Latin American and Caribbean art from MoMA's holdings, reflecting upon the Museum's collection practices in that region as they have changed over time, as well as the artworks' place in the history of modernism.

The works discussed here were created by artists from culturally, socioeconomically, politically, and geographically diverse backgrounds. Because of this diversity we believe that educators will discover multiple approaches to using the guide, as well as various curricular connections. The guide can be tailored to any age group within the K–12 range—you may communicate the information to your students using language appropriate to their age level. There are many ways to incorporate a discussion about art in the classroom, and it is our hope that this guide will be flexible and useful in a wide range of classroom settings. You may choose to use the guide as part of a module about art, history, or literature. You may decide that some of the activities and projects will not resonate in your classroom, either because of the nature of the work or the age of your students. Feel free to pick and choose among the activities and to use the lessons in any order that you find appropriate.

This guide has been produced in both English and Spanish. If you are interested in obtaining copies in Spanish, please contact us at [tic@moma.org](mailto:tic@moma.org). Users of the guide may also enjoy having a copy of the exhibition catalogue in the classroom, giving students access to additional images and information. (The catalogue may be purchased at the Museum and online, at [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).)

If you would like to share with us how you have used this guide, or have suggestions for future MoMA educator guides, please write to us at [tic@moma.org](mailto:tic@moma.org). We are eager to make MoMA's collection available to teachers and students, and your feedback is valuable to us.

## USING THE EDUCATORS GUIDE

The organizational structure of this guide gives direct access to the individual artists (arranged in alphabetical order) and their artworks. Each entry includes discussion questions, information about the artwork, follow-up questions, activities, and a brief biography of the artist. The discussion questions are artwork-specific, and serve to assist students in their visual investigations; “About This Work” provides historical and stylistic information on each painting; the follow-up questions encourage students to reflect upon the information and deepen their understanding of the art that they have just encountered; the activities comprise hands-on projects, research lessons, and creative-writing assignments (building on ideas raised during class discussions), and may also be given as homework when appropriate.

The guide’s concluding section, “Thematic Approaches to the Artworks,” invites comparisons between works of art by employing the themes “Environment,” “People,” and “Expression” as vehicles for students to compare and contrast works of art within the frameworks of particular concepts, encouraging the sense of a given artwork’s multiple meanings and the various ways in which it can be approached. Throughout the guide, each “About This Work” section is tagged with the theme, or themes, to which the work relates in the “Thematic Approaches to the Artworks” section. Turn to the specified pages for the description of the theme, artwork comparisons, and questions.

### IMAGES

All of the questions, discussions, and activities in this guide are based on the accompanying images available as slides or on CD-ROM. Please examine each image carefully prior to showing it to your students. Your classroom should be equipped with a computer and LCD projector or a slide projector, an extension cord, and a slide screen, white paper, or plain white wall.

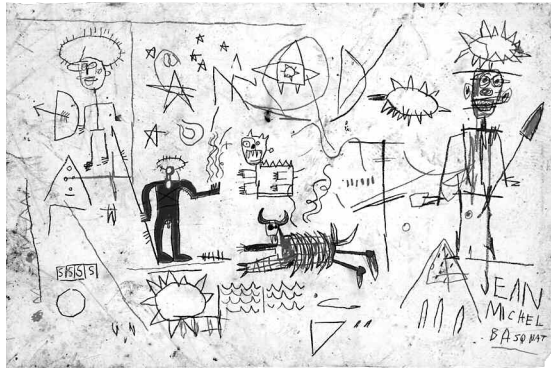
### DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES

**Restating** students’ responses, periodically **reviewing** students’ comments, and **summarizing** the discussion all help to validate students’ thoughts, focus the discussion, and generate additional ideas about a work of art.

Using phrases such as “might be,” “perhaps,” “seems like,” “looks like,” and “as if” encourages multiple interpretations of the artwork.

## ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS

**SLIDE 1:** Jean Michel Basquiat, American, 1960–1988. *Untitled*. 1981. Oilstick on paper, 40 x 60" (101.6 x 152.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fractional gift of Sheldon H. Solow. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe all the images that you see in this artwork. How would you compare this picture to other artworks that you have seen? How is it similar and how is it different?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Expression, Group B (pp. 46–47)

At the time the U.S. artist Jean-Michel Basquiat created *Untitled*, he was focusing his efforts on designing a visual poetry inspired by his childhood experiences and the streets of New York City, filled with numerous signs, symbols, and images that together comprise a language of multiple meanings. For example, the halos or crowns of thorns above the skeletal, masklike faces were the artist's way of signaling the figures' importance. Basquiat had begun his artistic career as a graffiti artist, painting on subways and buildings, and signing his street art SAMO (for Same Old Shit; often, he simply used the letter "S" to reference the acronym). For Basquiat, SAMO represented an imaginary charlatan who made a living selling religion. The artist's rich pictorial language was derived from many varied sources. When Basquiat was seven years old he was in a car accident, and his mother gave him *Gray's Anatomy* to read during his recovery, a book that sparked his interest in depicting the human figure with exposed skeletons and organs and creating images of discrete body parts. As a child, Basquiat had visited The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art, among other New York museums, leading him to borrow from Greek, Roman, and African art as well as from the work of such modern artists as Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock, all of which he interwove with his beloved popular culture—comic books, television, and movies—and his Haitian and Puerto Rican heritage.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Does knowing the above information about Basquiat's influences affect your ideas about this artwork? Why or why not?
- When once asked with whom he liked to discuss art, Basquiat replied, "I don't like to discuss art at all."<sup>1</sup> Why do you think an artist might choose not to discuss his or her art? Explain.

1. Jean-Michel Basquiat, quoted in Lichitra Ponti, "Basquiat." *Domus Magazine* (January 1984): 68.

### ACTIVITY

Encourage your students to think about the different sources from which they might get inspiration for a work of art (for example, school, family, their neighborhood). Have them create signs and symbols that represent actual places and objects as well as significant people in their lives, choosing their images carefully. Remind them that they may incorporate words, too, into their artworks. When they are done, students may wish to develop a glossary to aid their classmates in deciphering their visual language.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in 1960, in Brooklyn, New York. He drew cartoons from an early age, and even made a book of drawings with a friend when he was seven years old. He studied at Edward R. Murrow High School, in Brooklyn, and then at City-As-School, in Manhattan, whose curriculum incorporates the city as an educational resource. In the late 1970s, Basquiat chose to be homeless, living for several years in abandoned buildings or with friends. Toward the end of the 1970s he began to create graffiti art that expressed his urban culture and multiethnic background, to which he signed the name SAMO. He also painted T-shirts and made artworks, which he sold on the street outside of The Museum of Modern Art.

*Times Square Show*, his first exhibition, took place in 1980, and was held in the untraditional venue of New York City's bustling 42 Street area, reflecting the wish on the part of Basquiat and fellow artists David Hammons, Jenny Holzer, and Kiki Smith to challenge the sanctity of art and the city's museums. Basquiat collaborated regularly with Andy Warhol, who shared his interest in combining popular culture with his art. In 1984, Basquiat's artwork was included in The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture*. Basquiat died in 1988, in New York.

**SLIDE 2:** Antonio Berni. Argentine, 1905–1981. *New Chicago Athletic Club*. 1937. Oil on canvas, 6' ¾" x 9' 10¼" (184.8 x 300.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Examine the different groups of figures. What activity do you think the people in the painting will be doing next? What clues tell you that?
- Now look at the whole work of art. What does the background of this picture tell us about the figures?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: People, Group C (pp. 44–45)

In the early 1930s, the Argentine artist Antonio Berni banded together with other young artists to start the *Nuevo realismo*, or “New Realism,” movement, dedicated to highlighting the social injustice, class struggle, and political division that he experienced in his native Argentina. In his monumental painting *New Chicago Athletic Club*, Berni depicts working-class youths posing for their portrait. Two years earlier, Berni had worked with the well-know Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, but he ultimately disagreed with Siqueiros’s conviction that large-scale murals (wall paintings) on public buildings could effect social change in Argentina, as it had in Mexico. Berni not only believed that many forms of art were necessary in the struggle against social injustice, he even went so far as to imply a connection between Siqueiros’s artwork and the privileged classes in Argentina, declaring, “Mural painting is only one of the many forms of popular artistic expression.... For his mural painting, Siqueiros was obliged to seize on the first board offered to him by the bourgeoisie.”<sup>2</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think Berni wanted to communicate with his painting *New Chicago Athletic Club*?
- How does this relate to Berni’s criticism of Siqueiros?

### ACTIVITY

Encourage your students to use what they have discovered so far about this artist and his work to write a short story in which they imagine they are one of the people in the painting. After your students have completed their work, they can share their story with their classmates. As a follow-up, students may choose to focus on a small group of the people depicted, imagining a dialogue that they might be having.

2. Antonio Berni, quoted in Michel Troche and G. Gassiot-Talabot, *Berni* (Paris: Musée D’Art Moderne de La Ville de Paris, Nov. 1971–Jan. 1972), 29.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Antonio Berni was born in 1905, in Rosario, Argentina. As a child Berni worked as an apprentice for a stained-glass manufacturer. In 1925, he received a scholarship from the Rosario Jockey Club to live and study in Europe. In Spain and Paris on a different scholarship, Berni became greatly influenced by the work of Surrealist artists, who drew inspiration from the subconscious and incorporated accident and chance into their artworks. He began experimenting with collage, photomontage, and assemblage, as well as painting and drawing, and on his return to Argentina in 1931 he exhibited his Surrealist works in Buenos Aires, to the harsh attack of art critics. He then moved away from Surrealism and its subtle political commentary to create monumental, highly realistic paintings highlighting unemployment and the social ills experienced by the working class. From 1935 to 1945, Berni was a professor at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, in Buenos Aires. Although he resisted the social impact of mural painting and its street sensibility, later on in his artistic career he created artworks using refuse materials, making an implicit correlation between waste and the human condition. In 1943, Berni was awarded first prize for his submission to the Salón Nacional, in Buenos Aires. Starting in the late 1950s and continuing through the 1960s, he executed an important series of mixed-medium artworks that continued his efforts to highlight social injustice. In the mid-1960s, the artist expanded his critique of society through a series of intimidating, large-scale, multimediate constructions, returning in part to his Surrealist past. Berni continued to exhibit in both Argentina and Europe until his death, in 1981, in Buenos Aires.



**SLIDE 3:** Fernando Botero. Colombian, born 1932. *The Presidential Family*. 1967. Oil on canvas, 6' 8½" x 6' 5¼" (203.5 x 196.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Warren D. Benedek



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think the relationship between these people might be? How do you know?
- Look at the figures one by one and describe what they are wearing. What are they holding in their hands?
- What do you think the figure in the background to the left might be doing?
- What does this painting's title imply?
- What do you think this painting says about government and power?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Themes: People, Group B (pp. 44–45); Expression, Group A (pp. 46–47)

In this exaggerated portrait, the Colombian artist Fernando Botero satirizes Latin America's society and government. Botero once said, "One always paints what is best known, and it is rooted in childhood and adolescence. That is the world I paint. I have done nothing else. I have lived in the United States for many years and have never painted a North American subject."<sup>3</sup> In developing new means of expression, and thereby creating new styles, many modern and contemporary artists have responded to the art of their predecessors, often by referencing canonical works of art—in this case, Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) and Francisco de Goya's *Charles IV and His Family* (1800), both in the collection of the Museo Nacional del Prado, in Madrid, Spain. *The Presidential Family* draws upon the tradition of Spanish court painting, which grandly celebrated the monarchy, to satirize Latin American politics. Here Botero's inflated caricatures—establishment figures, whether of the Catholic, military, or government institutions—mock the subjects' overbearing positions in society. The ominous serpent at their feet and distant erupting volcano add to the symbolic effect. Botero's inclusion of himself, standing in the background with his canvas, is a direct reference to *Las Meninas*, which similarly positions the artist as watchful critic of the world. Botero once remarked, "Painters have no other reason to paint than to create a world."<sup>4</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How does knowing the above information change your understanding of the work?
- Why do you think Botero chose to incorporate aspects of other artworks in his paintings?
- What kind of "world" do you think Botero has depicted in this artwork?

3. Fernando Botero, quoted in Ana María Escallón, *Botero: New Works on Canvas* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1997), 10.

4. Botero, quoted in Pascal Bonafoux, "Interviews (Excerpts)," in *Fernando Botero: Monograph and Catalogue Raisonné, 1975–1990*, ed., Carole Hobi (Lausanne: Acatos Publisher, 2000), 60.

### ACTIVITY

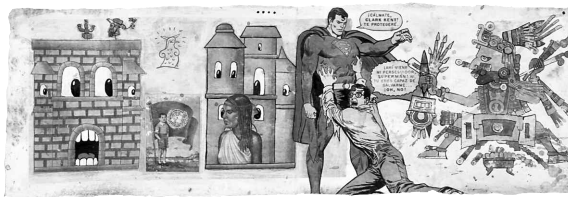
Have your students research political cartoons in newspapers and magazines, and ask them to compare present-day caricatures with Botero's painting. Encourage them to notice the subtle details in each work, to explore the differences between the painting and the cartoons, and to examine how artists create humorous yet poignant depictions. Ask your students to choose a theme from current events or a popular topic from which to design their own parodies.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Fernando Botero was born in 1932, in Medellín, Colombia. As a boy, he studied bullfighting, which would become the subject of his earliest paintings. When he was a young man he worked as an illustrator for the Medellín newspaper *El Colombiano*, and when he was nineteen years old, he moved to Bogotá, where he had his first solo exhibition. At the age of twenty he traveled to Europe, studying art in Spain and in Italy. In the 1960s, Botero developed his distinctive style of painting inflated images, about which he remarked, "When I inflate things I enter a subconscious world rich in folk images. For me, rotundity in art is linked to pleasure. Basically, it's a matter of rationalizing natural impulses."<sup>5</sup> In the 1970s Botero began creating large-scale bronze sculptures with the same exaggerated proportions of his paintings. He lives in Paris, New York, and Bogotá, and exhibits his work internationally.

5. Botero, quoted in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 130.

**SLIDE 4:** Enrique Chagoya, Mexican, born 1953. *The Illuminated Cannibal* (detail). 2002. Transfer drawing, cut-and-pasted painted papers, ink, and synthetic polymer paint on pieced amate paper, sheet 8" x 10' (20.3 x 304.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2004 Enrique Chagoya



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Where have you seen characters like these before? How do these images compare to similar ones you are familiar with?
- Think about the placement of the characters in this drawing. What do you think the artist was trying to say by positioning them next to each other?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Themes: People, Group C (pp. 44–45); Expression, Group B (pp. 46–47)

The Mexican artist Enrique Chagoya creates abrupt juxtapositions in his artwork by combining twentieth-century U.S. popular culture (such as comic book characters like Mickey Mouse and Superman) with pre-Columbian mythology. Setting modern popular images side-by-side with ancient, sacred ones, Chagoya makes worlds collide, aiming, as the artist has explained, “to create a kind of tension, a dialogue between different cultures”<sup>6</sup>: contemporary and ancient, North American and South American, “high” and popular. In *The Illuminated Cannibal*, Clark Kent, fleeing an Aztec god, cries out, “There comes my persecutor, Superman! Not even you are capable of saving me.... Oh no!” Towering over him, Superman declares, “Calm yourself Clark Kent! I’ll protect you.” Chagoya chose this narrow horizontal format to reference ancient Meso-American manuscripts.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think about Superman’s and Clark Kent’s dialogue? How does it affect your ideas about of the drawing?
- Chagoya chose the title *The Illuminated Cannibal* for this artwork. What do you think he meant by this title?
- How do you think popular culture influences the ways we see and define ourselves?

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

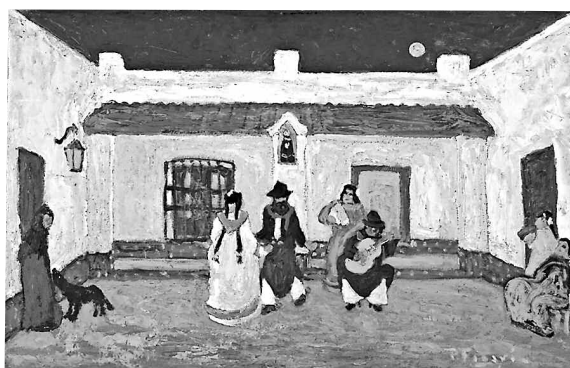
Enrique Chagoya was born in 1953, in Mexico City, Mexico. His nurse told him ancient stories from Mexico’s indigenous culture, and his father, a painter himself, introduced him to art when he was a young boy. In 1977 Chagoya moved to the United States, working briefly with farm laborers in Texas. He has described immigration as “an inner experience, almost a spiritual experience. You travel inside and you change inside, according to the kinds of experiences you have. And at a time in history in which masses of people in the world are

6. Enrique Chagoya, quoted in Diane Deming, “Interview with Enrique Chagoya,” in *Enrique Chagoya: Locked in Paradise* (Reno: Nevada Museum of Art, 2000), 67.

moving, I think everybody is some kind of immigrant who has left something behind very dear to that person.”<sup>7</sup> In 1979 Chagoya moved to California, where he enrolled in the San Francisco Art Institute; later, he continued his studies at the University of California, in Berkeley. A recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Chagoya currently teaches at Stanford University, and continues to develop his politically charged works, which focus on traversing cultural and historical boundaries.

7. Chagoya, quoted in Diane Manuel, “The Prince of Darkness and Light,” in *Stanford Today Online* (Jan./Feb. 1997): 3. [www.stanford.edu/dept/news/stanfordtoday/](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/news/stanfordtoday/)

**SLIDE 5:** Pedro Figari. Uruguayan, 1861–1938. *Creole Dance*. c. 1925? Oil on cardboard, 20½ x 32" (52.1 x 81.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Honorable and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the different ways the figures in this painting relate to one another. What can we tell about these people by looking at their surroundings?
- How has the artist used color and detail to distinguish the figures and objects?
- How has the artist used line and scale to create a sense of space in this painting?
- How has the artist created a sense of movement?

## ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group A (pp. 42–43)

Pedro Figari’s painting *Creole Dance* is a rural scene depicting the artist’s native La Plata region, in Uruguay. The delicately painted figures surrounded by colonial buildings suggest a sense of movement and rhythm against the linear architecture. Figari’s small-scale, introspective paintings are often populated by stock social types, places, and events—in this case, gauchos (South American cowboys) and estancias (colonial ranch houses), providing the viewer with glimpses of everyday traditional domestic and agricultural life. About his work, Figari has said humbly, “I am not a painter. My intention is to stir certain memories, call to mind some episodes that genuinely reflect our social life, so that artists see the area that they can embellish upon in those memories.”<sup>8</sup> Painting almost exclusively from memory, Figari’s scenes are imbued with a sense of nostalgia and timelessness. In a letter written on January 6, 1933, to his friend the artist Eduardo Salterain Herrera, Figari declared, “I do not try to define or give a precise view of everyday, objective reality; rather I offer, through glimpses of reality more or less poeticized according to my personal manner of reacting, that reality which I have been able to locate in my observation and my memories.”<sup>9</sup> In this way, Figari was able to recreate and celebrate the regional lifestyles of his birthplace. “My painting is not a way of painting,” he has said, “but a way of seeing, of thinking, of feeling, and of suggesting.”<sup>10</sup>

## FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think of Figari’s statement, “I do not try to define or give a precise view of everyday, objective reality?”
- How does this statement relate to his painting?

8. Pedro Figari, quoted in Marianne Manley, *Intimate Recollections of the Rio de la Plata: Paintings by Pedro Figari, 1861–1938* (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, 1986), 12.

9. Figari, in letter to Eduardo Salterain Herrera, January 6, 1933, Paris, quoted in *ibid*, 14.

10. Figari, in letter to Herrera, May 27, 1933, Paris, quoted in *ibid*, 16.

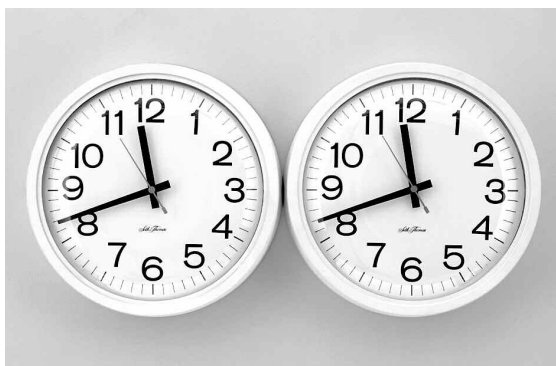
### ACTIVITY

Pedro Figari drew inspiration from his memories. He also depicted everyday happenings of his native Uruguay. Ask your students to write about their significant memories of a place. Encourage them to think about their daily environment, then have them recall any special memories they might have of a place from their childhood. Students who have emigrated from other countries might choose to focus on images of their homeland.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pedro Figari was born in 1861, in Montevideo, Uruguay. As a young man he served as a civil and criminal lawyer, and was subsequently elected a member of parliament. Deeply committed to political issues, Figari was also a fervent supporter of the visual arts, and he painted on the side. While traveling in Europe at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, he encountered Post-Impressionist and early modernist art, and their visible brushwork and non-naturalistic color influenced his painting. In 1912 he published *Arte, Estética, Ideal* (Art, Aesthetics, the Ideal), a critical literary work presenting his teachings on art. In 1915 he became the director of the Escuela Nacional de Artes y Oficios, in Montevideo, and spearheaded new approaches to teaching art. It was only after declining the position of Uruguayan ambassador to Peru in 1921, when he was nearly sixty years old, that Figari decided to dedicate himself fully to his art. That same year he had his first exhibition at Galería Müller, in Buenos Aires—and the Galerie Druet, in Paris, later dedicated an exhibition exclusively to his work. In 1924 he became one of the cofounders of Amigos del Arte, an organization created to promote modern art in Buenos Aires. In 1925 he moved to Paris, where he resided for the following nine years. He returned to Montevideo in 1933, and died in 1938.

**SLIDE 6:** Felix Gonzalez-Torres. American, born Cuba. 1957–1996. “Untitled” (*Perfect Lovers*). 1991. Clocks, paint on wall, overall, 14 x 28 x 2¾” (35.6 x 71.2 x 7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Dannheisser Foundation



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you first looked at the objects in this artwork, what was your response?
- What elements were used to create this artwork? Describe the background.
- The title of this work is “Untitled” (*Perfect Lovers*). How does the work reflect its title?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Expression, Group C (pp. 46–47)

The U.S. artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s enigmatic work “Untitled” (*Perfect Lovers*) was created in 1991, the same year that his life partner, Ross Laycock, died of AIDS. In a 1993 interview, the artist declared, “Love is very peculiar because it gives a reason to live but it’s also a great reason to be afraid, to be extremely afraid, to be terrified of losing that love....”<sup>11</sup> Gonzalez-Torres stipulated several guidelines regarding how the work should be arranged and displayed: When installed, the two clocks were to touch; the clocks could be replaced with white plastic commercial clocks of similar dimensions and design; the minute and second hands were to be set in sync, with the understanding that eventually they might go out of sync during the course of the exhibition; if one of the clocks needed the batteries replaced, it was to be done, and the clocks were to be reset accordingly; the clocks were to be displayed on a wall painted light blue. When asked about his frequent use of the color blue, Gonzalez-Torres said, “For me if a beautiful memory could have a color that color would be light blue.”<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez-Torres’s art subtly tackles emotional issues as well as political ones, such as the post-1980s activism around AIDS and gay rights. Many of his works focus on themes of death, relationships, and memory. Although initially his artwork might not look like the political art associated with many contemporary Latin American artists, it blends private and public experience as well as criticism of the politics of the day. As the artist himself said, “It depends on the day of the week. I choose from many different positions. I think I woke up on Monday in a political mood and on Tuesday in a very nostalgic mood and Wednesday in a realist mood. I don’t think I’ll limit myself to one choice. I’m shameless when it comes to that, I just take any position that will help me best express the way I think or feel about a particular issue.”<sup>13</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How does the above information affect your ideas about this work?
- Why might an artist choose to make an artwork out of found objects?

11. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in interview by Tim Rollins, in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: A.R.T. Press, 1993), 14.

12. Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in *ibid.*, 15.

13. Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in *ibid.*, 6.

- Gonzalez-Torres provided specific instructions regarding the installation of this artwork. How do these instructions affect what you think about the work?
- What do you think about the artist's comment, "...I just take any position that will help me best express the way I think or feel about a particular issue?"

### ACTIVITY

Gonzalez-Torres imbued two ordinary store-bought clocks and the color light blue with a deeply personal meaning. Ask your students to create a sculpture using objects they have specifically chosen for this purpose, stressing that they should pay careful attention to their selection. Encourage them to reflect upon what these objects might imply and to assemble their juxtapositions thoughtfully. At the end of the exercise, ask your students to write about their artworks and share their impressions with their classmates.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was born in 1957, in Guaimaro, Cuba. When he was twenty-two years old, Gonzalez-Torres moved to New York City, where he received his art education at Pratt Institute, New York University, and the International Center of Photography. In 1981, his parents were part of a boat exodus of Cubans leaving their native land for the United States. In 1986, Gonzalez-Torres traveled to Europe and studied in Venice. When asked about the lack of "Latino" content in his artwork, Gonzalez-Torres responded, "...multiculturalism is not about numbers, it's about inclusion. It's about opening up the terms of the argument, opening up the terms of the discourse so that everybody can participate with equal footing. It's not about naming two female, three Hispanics, four whites, five blacks...it's about re-addressing the issue of quality and who dictates and defines 'quality.'"<sup>14</sup> The artist's work has appeared in solo exhibitions throughout the United States and internationally, including a retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, in New York. Gonzalez-Torres died of AIDS in 1996, in New York City.

14. Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in *Ibid.*, 18.



**SLIDE 7:** Frida Kahlo. Mexican, 1910–1954. *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*. 1940. Oil on canvas, 15¼ x 11" (40 x 27.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would you describe this person's facial expression?
- Consider the clothing worn by the sitter. What does it reveal about the person's self-image? What accessories do you notice?
- What do you think is the setting of this painting? What does it tell us about this person?
- This is a self-portrait. Looking at the details in the portrait, what do you think this artist might have been trying to communicate about herself? Discuss.

### ABOUT THIS WORK—THEMES: PEOPLE, GROUP A (PP. 44–45); EXPRESSION, GROUP C (PP. 46–47)

In this self-portrait, the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo includes lyrics and musical notes from a Mexican folk song that was popular in 1940, the year that she created this painting. The Spanish words state, “Look, if I loved you it was because of your hair, now that you are bald I don’t love you anymore.” The painting reflects a particular moment in Kahlo’s life, and expresses profound personal feelings and experiences. In 1929, Kahlo had married Diego Rivera, the renowned Mexican muralist who painted *Agrarian Leader Zapata* and *Flower Festival: Feast of Santa Anita* (both 1931; see pp. 32–35). After a rocky ten-year marriage, they divorced, and later remarried. Kahlo, who had previously celebrated her Mexican identity by arranging her long hair in various native Mexican styles, chopped it off in an act of rebellion against Rivera. The following year, she painted herself with short hair and wearing an enormous suit rather than the traditional regional costumes she usually wore. It is thought that the suit symbolizes one of Diego’s outfits. “I paint my own reality.... The only thing I know is that I paint because I need to, and I paint always whatever passes through my head, without any other consideration.”<sup>15</sup> Many of Kahlo’s other paintings contain references to Mexican ex-votos, *retablos*, or devotional paintings, and popular imagery.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think the lyrics in this work reveal about Kahlo’s state of mind and her relationship with her husband?
- How does knowing about Kahlo’s life add to what you think about this painting?

15. Frida Kahlo, quoted in Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), xi.

## ACTIVITY

Ask your students to make a self-portrait. Remind them to consider all the choices that they have as artists, and encourage them to consider how they might convey their individual personality through their artwork. Have them consider how their pose, clothing, and surroundings will affect their audience's understanding of who they are.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Frida Kahlo was born in 1907, in Coyoacán, Mexico. She met her future husband, the Mexican artist Diego Rivera, while he was completing a mural at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, the school that she attended from 1922 to 1925, in Mexico City. When Kahlo was eighteen years old, she was in a terrible accident involving a bus and a trolley car in Mexico City, the results of which left her seriously injured for the rest of her life. She suffered through numerous spinal operations, which often rendered her immobile and trapped in full body casts. "From that time [of the accident]," Frida said, "my obsession was to begin again, painting things just as I saw them with my own eyes and nothing more... the accident changed my path, many things prevented me from fulfilling the desires which everyone considers normal, and to me nothing seemed more normal than to paint what had not been fulfilled."<sup>16</sup> Kahlo and Rivera, who were married in 1929, were both politically active in the Communist Party (Kahlo would proudly claim that her date of birth coincided with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution), and the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky lived in exile at their home in Coyoacán, from 1937 to 1939. In 1938, the French Surrealist poet André Breton visited Mexico City, and described Kahlo's art as "a bomb with a ribbon tied around it." Kahlo exhibited in New York and Paris, where the Musée du Louvre purchased one of her self-portraits. In 1943 Kahlo began teaching at the Escuela Nacional de Pintura, Escultura, y Grabado, in Mexico City. She continued painting throughout her life, despite her worsening health. Kahlo died in 1954, and her home was turned into a museum, the Museo Frida Kahlo.

16. Kahlo, quoted in *ibid.*, 74–75.

**SLIDE 8:** Guillermo Kuitca. Argentine, born 1961. *Untitled*. 1992. Mixed mediums on canvas, 8' 4½" x 6' 1¼" (255.7 x 186.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in memory of Thomas Ammann. © 2004 Guillermo Kuitca



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look at this work carefully. What parts of this picture seem familiar? What parts are unrecognizable? List the letters and words that you are able to discern.

### ABOUT THIS WORK—THEMES: ENVIRONMENT, GROUP C (PP. 42–43); EXPRESSION, GROUP C (PP. 46–47)

At first glance, *Untitled* might seem like an abstract painting, but one can make out words such as “Zurich” through what seems like a haze or dark cloud that has descended upon the painting. In the mid-1980s, the Argentine artist Guillermo Kuitca began creating paintings that incorporated road maps and city plans. When asked about his interest in maps, the artist explained, “They reflect the human condition. But not the geopolitical condition. All the maps I have painted have something to do with the human obsessions.”<sup>17</sup> Kuitca frequently chooses not to include figures in his work, but the bird’s-eye view he adopts makes us conscious of our distant, even alienated, relationship to the artist’s image or place. He generally does not exhibit paintings that depict the area or city in which the artwork is being shown, and often alters the names of places, deliberately foiling our expectations of what a map should be, and undermining its utilitarian purpose. He explains, “I painted a road map of Michigan, and I replaced all the names of the big cities with ‘Strasbourg.’ But the names of the other cities are real, and the distance is real. I like to imagine that there is a person who takes this map in his back pocket. It could be a psychological map—that we are always in the same place even when we are somewhere else.”<sup>18</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How does Kuitca’s map painting differ from other kinds of maps that you are familiar with?
- What do you think about this painting now that you are familiar with some of Kuitca’s comments about using maps in his work?
- What do you think Kuitca might have meant when he described his work as a “psychological map?”

### ACTIVITY

Kuitca incorporates maps, charts, blueprints, city plans, and even apartment floor-plans in his paintings. Sometimes he focuses on places that are significant to him, as with his first map paintings, which depict his grandparents’ neighborhood in Odessa, Russia; sometimes he selects unfamiliar destinations. Invite your students to create a collage of an actual place

17. Guillermo Kuitca, quoted in Don Greenlees, “Guillermo Kuitca: How to Map the Universe,” in *ArtNews* (Oct. 1991): 2.

18. Kuitca, quoted in Edith Newhall, “A Map of the World,” in *New York Magazine* (Sept. 30, 1991): 72.

that is familiar to them or of an imaginary place, using newspapers, magazines, and any other materials they can come up with. Some students may choose to create what Kuitca calls a “psychological map.” Their “place” can show the passage of time, blending different locales that they may have visited and that were significant to them, or which they would like to visit.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1961, in Buenos Aires, Guillermo Kuitca grew up during Argentina’s military dictatorship. Considered a child prodigy by many, Kuitca, at the age of thirteen, had his first solo exhibition, *Expressionistic Portraits with Distorted Faces*, at the Lirolay Gallery, in Buenos Aires. In the early 1980s the artist began using bed imagery, and later incorporated actual beds into his work, which ultimately led to his maps. Kuitca explains it this way: “I imagined the apartment in a city, and after that I imagined the city in a country. It was a very trivial approach to space—to take a bed, afterwards a plan of an apartment, and after that, a plan of the country, including, ultimately, maps of the stars.”<sup>19</sup> Internationally recognized, Kuitca currently directs workshops and organizes scholarships for young artists. He continues to live and work in Buenos Aires.

19. Kuitca, quoted in Greenlees, “Guillermo Kuitca”: 2.

**SLIDE 9:** Wifredo Lam. Cuban, 1902–1982. *The Jungle*. 1943. Gouache on paper mounted on canvas, 7' 10" x 7' 6" (239.4 x 229.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would you describe the characters in this picture?
- Can you figure out what might be happening? Explain how you can tell.
- Imagine being in this place. What do you think it would be like?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group C (pp. 42–43)

The scene depicted in this larger-than-life-size gouache on paper is the metamorphosis of human, animal, and vegetable figures and forms. Painted in 1943, when Wifredo Lam had recently returned to his native Cuba from Europe, *The Jungle* depicts exaggerated body parts that transform into bamboo trunks and sugarcane stalks in a dense jungle. At the time Lam created this work, Cuban writers, artists, and intellectuals had become deeply interested in Afro-Cuban traditions, in particular, the religion of Santería, which Lam's godmother practiced. Santería stems from West African Yoruba traditions, which combined with Catholicism when Spanish and Portuguese traders brought African slaves to the Caribbean and Central and South America, and seeped into popular Cuban culture. Practitioners, forced to conceal their forbidden African beliefs, conducted rituals in hidden settings, such as the jungle depicted in this work. Lam has said, "I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the black spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood by either the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work even if it takes time."<sup>20</sup> In *The Jungle*, Lam combines his own Afro-Cuban heritage with his European education in modern art. While in Paris, Lam became aware of the multiple points of view in Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's Cubism, which was in part inspired by the seemingly abstract forms present in the African masks that they collected. This can be seen in the masklike faces of *The Jungle's* female figures, in which Lam has synthesized Afro-Cuban culture and modern art.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think Lam meant when he said, "I could act as a Trojan horse?"  
How does this relate to his definition of a "true picture?"
- How do Lam's comments affect your understanding of this artwork?

20. Wifredo Lam, quoted in Max-Pol Fouchet, *Wifredo Lam* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, S.A., 1976), 188–89.

### ACTIVITY

Lam's artwork personifies his varied experiences and travels, as well as his multiethnic heritage. Ask your students to research and write about their own background and history. They may choose to write about their emigration from another country, or they may have particular traditions that they wish to describe. Take the time to discuss your students' essays in class, and ask them to consider how their classmates' descriptions can add to their own creativity. Then have your students compare experiences.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Wifredo Lam was born in 1902, in Sagua la Grande, Cuba. His mother was of Spanish and Afro-Cuban descent, and his father originated from Canton, China. Lam moved to Havana in 1916 to study art at the Academia San Alejandro, and in 1923 he went on to Madrid, Spain, to study painting. In 1938, Lam fought in the Spanish Civil War, and then traveled to Paris, where he met Pablo Picasso. Picasso would become an important friend and a supporter of Lam's work, introducing him to collectors and many other prominent artists. Escaping German-occupied Paris in 1940, Lam went south to Marseilles, where he joined forces with the poet André Breton and other Surrealist artists. When he returned to Cuba in 1941, Lam rediscovered his African heritage, frequenting Santería rituals with other Cuban artists and writers, such as Lydia Cabrera and Alejo Carpentier. Shortly after including Lam's work in the 1943 exhibition *The Latin American Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, MoMA purchased *The Jungle*. Moving back to Paris in 1952, Lam continued to paint and to exhibit internationally until his death, in 1982.

**SLIDE 10:** Marisol (Marisol Escobar). Venezuelan, born France 1930. *The Family*. 1962. Painted wood and other materials in three sections, overall, 6' 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 65 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (209.8 x 166.3 x 39.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Advisory Committee Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think might be the relationship between these figures?
- How does the artist convey this relationship?
- Can you identify the objects used to make this sculpture? Describe how the objects were organized to form an artwork.

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: People, Group B (pp. 44–45)

In the 1960s, the Venezuelan artist Marisol developed a unique style of assemblage, in which she played on the tradition of portrait sculpture by cleverly combining large wooden blocks with actual objects, such as a hat, a purse, or even a baby carriage. Using a variety of tools, Marisol chisels, saws, and paints the individual wooden cubes to create her figures' bodies. *The Family* was inspired by an old discarded photograph that the artist had found near her New York City studio. This family portrait suggests destitute farmers during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Combining an actual door and shoes with drawing and painting, Marisol created an interesting tension between the real and the composed. Describing her technique, Marisol has remarked, "I first started drawing faces on wood to help me carve them. Then I noticed that drawing looked like carving, so I left it. Then, once, I couldn't get a drawing the way I wanted it, so I put a photograph up to help me. I liked it there. So I thought, 'Why not use a photograph?'" She has said further, "All my early work came from the street. It was magical for me to find things."<sup>21</sup> Like the U.S. artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Marisol challenges the parameters of traditional art by combining commonplace objects with conventional painting and sculpture.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- The source of this artwork was an old photograph. How does that add to your discussion of the sculpture?
- How does Marisol's description of her process affect your interpretation of this artwork?

### ACTIVITY

As a follow-up activity for your class, have your students create their own found object portrait-sculpture. Students can choose between creating a self-portrait, a portrait of someone they know, or even a celebrity's portrait. Ask your students to bring in cardboard boxes and

21. Marisol, quoted in Avis Berman, "The Cutting Images of Marisol," in *Smithsonian* (Feb. 1984): 60.

a variety of discarded objects to create the base of their sculpture. Challenge your students to be as creative as possible when selecting their materials. Ask them to carefully consider what objects would best highlight the personality and character traits of their subject. Students may also choose to incorporate painting, drawing, and collage into their sculpture.

**ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Marisol was born in 1930, in Paris, France, of Venezuelan parents. Between 1949 and 1950, Marisol studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian, in Paris. While working in New York in the 1950s, in the milieu of such Abstract Expressionist artists as Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, she began creating painted sculptures made of carved wood and found objects. In 1961, her work was included in The Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, in New York. Marisol’s portrait sculptures have encompassed a wide range of characters, including Native Americans, world leaders such as Charles de Gaulle, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Francisco Franco, and figures from famous paintings such as Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* and *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.



**SLIDE 11:** Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren). Chilean, 1911–2002. *Listen to Living*. 1941. Oil on canvas, 29½ x 37⅞" (74.9 x 94.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look closely at the brushstrokes and colors of this painting. How would you describe this image to someone who couldn't see it?
- What gives this painting its dreamlike quality?
- What do you think might be happening in this painting?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group C (pp. 42–43)

*Listen to Living* seems to defy physical reality. “The power to create hallucinations,” the Chilean artist Matta once wrote, “is the power to exalt existence.”<sup>22</sup> The lower part of this painting hints at a landscape—a horizon line is discernable in the shift from the mustard yellows in the lower part of the painting to the icy grays and blues in the upper portion, where fluid forms morph into one other. Toward the left of the painting, a volcano-like form spews floating fragments that swirl and merge with the environment. The Surrealist artist referred to his paintings, which focus less on the physical world than they do on inner states of consciousness, as “psychological morphologies,” or “inscapes.” He once said, “A picture is not a canvas on the wall, it is the impact that hits the bull’s eye of your mind.”<sup>23</sup> Matta’s preoccupation with the human subconscious was one that he shared with other Surrealists, who in their work used the element of chance as well as automatic drawing, a method by which the artist lets his or her subconscious guide the process. Like the other Surrealists, Matta’s challenge to the structures and mores of society was spurred on by what he perceived as ridiculous acts of violence during World Wars I and II; indeed, in *Listen to Living*, it appears that the world has returned to its primordial state in the aftermath of a natural or man-made disaster. This work most likely depicts an internal, psychological landscape shaped by the aftermath of World War II. Matta once said that his intention was to “be conscious of the web of relations which is the structure of life; to paint the colossal structure of life as science relates it, in a town-like geometry.”<sup>24</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What do you think might be some of the reasons why Matta created a painting in this style?
- How does the title affect what you think about the painting? How does it change what you see in the painting?
- What do you think Matta meant by the phrase “the bull’s eye of your mind?”

22. Matta, quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Eight Painters* (Syracuse, N.Y.: at the University Press, 1948), 110.

23. Matta, quoted in *Matta: Coiguitum* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1977), 8.

24. Matta, quoted in *Three Generations of Twentieth Century Art: The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 74.

### ACTIVITY

Matta collaborated with other Surrealist artists to create artworks inspired by the element of chance in order to tap into the unconscious mind. One such collaboration was a game they called “exquisite corpse,” which began with a piece of paper folded to create three equal sections, and then unfolded for drawing. One artist would sketch the head and shoulders of a person, animal, or invented creature of any sort in the top section, and then fold the section over so as to conceal the drawing, leaving just a minor indication of where the next artist should begin drawing the torso. Once that artist had finished and folded his or her section over, the third artist would complete the lower part of the figure. The paper would then be unfolded to reveal the results. Arrange students in groups of three with one sheet of paper per group, and have them create their own “exquisite corpses.”

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren) was born in 1911, in Santiago, Chile, where he was educated as an architect at the Universidad Católica. He also studied drawing at the Academia de Bellas Artes, also in Santiago. In the mid-1930s Matta worked in Paris for the architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), who at the time was engaged in grand utopian projects. While in Paris Matta joined the Surrealists, working closely with the painter Salvador Dalí and the poet André Breton. At the outbreak of World War II, Matta fled from Europe to New York, where his Surrealist style had a profound affect on the development of Abstract Expressionism, particularly in the work of Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko. In 1940, Matta traveled to Mexico with Motherwell to see the striking political work by the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. In 1956, his work was exhibited in a retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. A strong supporter of left-wing politics, Matta spoke at the 1968 Congress of Culture in Havana, Cuba, and continued to support political activism throughout his life. He died in 2002, in a small town north of Rome, Italy.

**SLIDE 12:** José Clemente Orozco, Mexican, 1883–1949. *The Subway*. 1928. Oil on canvas, 16½ x 22⅞" (41 x 56.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look closely at the poses of the figures in this picture. What mood do you think the artist was trying to convey in this work?
- Can you imagine what it was like to ride in a train like this?
- How does this train differ from ones that you have been in?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group A (pp. 42–43)

The Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco painted *The Subway* during the first of the seven years that he lived in the United States. In it he captured his early New York experience and the bleak and pessimistic view he had of mankind. Orozco conveyed his feelings of isolation and the grim and brutal conditions he witnessed in New York City with this empathetic image of a mundane moment: riding alone in a near-empty subway car. Although Orozco had worked on a series titled *Los horrores de la revolución* (The horrors of the revolution) and murals for the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, in Mexico City, just prior to his New York sojourn, his move to the United States was spurred on by dwindling government commissions, diminishing cultural programs, and the wish to separate himself from the glorification of the Mexican Revolution and the country's technological advances, as visually articulated by fellow Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Orozco's spirits seemed only to worsen in New York as he dealt with Rivera's immense popularity in the United States and the growing emotional and financial burden of the family that he had left behind. In a letter written on February 22, 1928, to his friend Mrs. A. Charlot Goupil, Orozco declared, "Here in New York there is only self-interest and deception and bad faith. I am completely alone, relying on my own forces, which happily are still considerable. A foreign country is where one gets to know people best. Here my 'friends' have scorned and humiliated me. This is a very hard struggle. As far as painting is concerned, it is necessary to start over again and get rid of every trace of 'Mexican' if one wants to have a personality of his own, because otherwise we shall be forever 'Rivera's disciples.'"<sup>25</sup> Five months later, in a letter to Mrs. Goupil's son, the artist Jean Charlot Goupil, he wrote "Try to rest because a terrible struggle awaits you here, as it does everyone. It is here that all your doubts of every sort will be dispelled, in this atmosphere of crudity, of the most sordid egoism, of commercialism and stupidity. I think that here you'll have to change many of your opinions about people, ideas, and things."<sup>26</sup> Difficulties notwithstanding, during Orozco's stay in New York he participated in several group exhibitions. He also created other images of the city, such as *Coney Island Side-Show* (1928) and *Puente de Queensborough* (1932), and developed artworks depicting the Great Depression. While in

25. José Clemente Orozco, in letter to Mrs. A. Charlot Goupil, February 22, 1928, New York, quoted in *The Artist in New York: Letters to Jean Charlot and Unpublished Writings, 1925–1929* (Austin and London: The University of Texas Press, 1974), 34–35.

26. Orozco, in letter to Jean Charlot Goupil, July 8, 1928, New York, quoted in *ibid.*, 55–56.

the United States, Orozco was commissioned to complete several important mural projects: for Pomona College, California (1930); the New School for Social Research, New York (1930–31); and the Baker Library, at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire (1932–34). Shortly after he returned to Mexico, in 1934, Orozco painted a series of murals for several buildings in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Why do you think that Orozco chose to create a painting of the New York City subway?
- What are some of the choices that you think Orozco made to create the mood of this artwork?
- How do the artist's letters add to your understanding of this work?

### ACTIVITY

Compare *The Subway*, executed in New York City, to Orozco's *Zapatistas* and *Self-Portrait* (pp. 27 and 28), which he painted later in life after he had returned to Mexico. Consider the differences in the paintings' compositions, colors, and overall atmospheres.

For "About the Artist," see pp. 28–29.

**SLIDE 13:** José Clemente Orozco. Mexican, 1883–1949. *Zapatistas*. 1931. Oil on canvas, 45 x 55" (114.3 x 139.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously



**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- What do you think is unusual about the way that the figures in this picture are depicted?
- How do you think the artist created a visual rhythm in this painting? Describe the repeated patterns or shapes that you see.
- How does the artist use color and shadow to create the mood of this painting?

**ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group B (pp. 42–43)**

Like Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican artists with whom he studied between 1903 and 1911, José Clemente Orozco was well-known for painting Mexican cultural, political, and historical events in bold forms and vivid colors. In *Zapatistas*, followers of the revolutionary Mexican leader Emiliano Zapata, who encouraged the violent revolt of the laborers against the hacienda (estate/plantation) landowners, are painted marching in a seemingly endless procession of misery, followed by four peasant women. The procession is headed by a crouched figure, and four men on horseback loom over the scene. Orozco used somber colors and a repetitive compositional structure in this painting to emphasize the impact of war on the human condition. Orozco himself had witnessed the rounding up of Zapatista prisoners by the followers of Venustiano Carranza, Mexico’s president following Zapata’s assassination. Whereas Rivera and Siqueiros often glorified the revolution and did not hide their political bias toward its cause, Orozco focused on condemning acts of war and violence in general by emphasizing the destruction of the Mexican people and culture. Unlike Rivera, with his heroic image of Zapata in *Agrarian Leader Zapata* (1931; p. 32), Orozco’s sympathy was with the victims of the war. In 1934 he returned to Mexico, and continued to paint murals throughout the country until his death, in 1949.

**FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS**

- What do you think were some of the ideas Orozco wanted to convey with his painting *Zapatistas*?
- What do you see that makes you say that?

For “About the Artist,” see pp. 28–29.

**SLIDE 14:** José Clemente Orozco, Mexican, 1883–1949. *Self-Portrait*. 1940. Tempera on cardboard mounted on composition board, 20¼ x 23¾" (51.4 x 60.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look carefully at this man. What does he look like? What is he wearing? How is he posed? Describe in detail.
- Looking at this self-portrait, what do you think the artist wanted to convey about himself?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: People, Group A (pp. 44–45)

In *Self-Portrait*, one of a series of expressionistic portraits by Orozco, the artist depicts himself wearing his signature eyeglasses and dominating a field of loosely painted, deep-red brushstrokes. In an unpublished text probably written for the French literary journal *La Falange*, in 1923, Orozco, who wrote extensively on his artwork, stated, “Painting is not heard, it is seen and in order to see it one merely has to have eyes. Pay no attention to what others say: judge for yourself with YOUR OWN EYES.... It is a lie that ‘one has to be a connoisseur’ in order to understand and feel a painting; the roughest and most ignorant man can be attracted and subjugated by beauty, wherever it may be found. It would be a fine state of affairs if we had to be ‘connoisseurs’ of the art of cooking in order to be able to enjoy a good meal!”<sup>27</sup> The same year that Orozco painted *Self-Portrait*, he completed several important murals in the Suprema Corte de Justicia building, in Mexico City. In 1940, in New York, The Museum of Modern Art commissioned the artist to create a portable mural on six panels, titled *Dive Bomber and Tank*, for the Museum’s exhibition *20 Centuries of Mexican Art*.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What are some of the choices the artist made in depicting himself?
- What aspects of Orozco’s personality do you think are revealed by his written statements? How do these relate to the way that he has depicted himself?

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

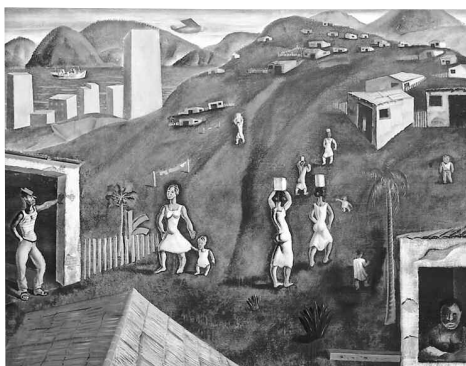
José Clemente Orozco was born in 1883, in Jalisco, Mexico. While attending the Academia de San Carlos, in Mexico City, Orozco would visit the workshop of the elderly artist José Guadalupe Posada, whose popular-culture imagery was driven by social, political, and tabloid themes. In order to support himself following his father’s death, in 1911, Orozco took a job as a caricaturist for the newspapers *El Imparcial* and *El Hijo del Ahuizote*. After time spent in the United States, Orozco returned to Mexico and worked on a series of large-scale murals at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, in Mexico City. The bold colors and narrative quality of Italian Renaissance frescos (paintings made on a wall while the plaster is still wet) deeply influenced Orozco’s murals, which similarly sought to envelop the viewer

27. Orozco, quoted in *ibid*, 93.

in historical narrative and political allegory. In 1945 Orozco returned to the United States, and in 1946 he received the Premio Nacional de Artes y Ciencias (National Prize for Arts and Sciences) from the Mexican president Manuel Avila Camacho. In 1949 he began work on a mural for the Multifamiliar Miguel Alemán building, in Mexico City, and continued working on the project until his death, later that year. Orozco's home and his studio in Guadalajara have been converted into museums.



**SLIDE 15:** Cândido Portinari, Brazilian, 1903–1962. *Hill*. 1933. Oil on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 57 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (114 x 145.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Take some time to describe what you see in this painting's foreground, middle ground, and background. What adjectives would you use to describe these people? What in particular makes these adjectives come to mind?
- How would you describe the environment?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Environment, Group A (pp. 42–43)

In the 1930s, during a period of political and economic instability in Brazil, Cândido Portinari focused on the disenfranchised and downtrodden of his country. *Hill* depicts an area surrounding Rio de Janeiro, and the peasants who fled agricultural hardship to live there. The seemingly vast surface of reddish brown earth suggests the coffee plantations where the laborers had toiled, an environment similar to the one in which Portinari was raised. Reflecting on his childhood experience, Portinari wrote, "I was impressed by the coffee plantation workers' feet. Deformed feet. Feet that could tell a story. Blending with rocks and thorns. Feet similar to maps: with hills and valleys, incisions like rivers.... Feet suffering with many, many kilometers of marching. Feet that only saints could have. On earth, it was difficult to distinguish them. Feet and earth with the same varied terrain. Few had ten toes, but less had ten nails. Feet that inspired pity and respect. Rooted to the ground, they were like foundations, many times barely supporting a frail, sickly body. Feet full of knots that expressed something of force, terrible and patient."<sup>28</sup> Portinari's solid laborers were influenced by the monumental figures populating Mexican murals of that period. Indeed, this work shares those murals' bold realism, describing a specific place and its inhabitants in broad, legible strokes. As the artist once remarked, "Every artist, who meditates on the issues troubling the world, will reach the conclusion that by making his paintings more 'readable,' his art, instead of losing, will gain much because it will receive stimulus from the poor."<sup>29</sup>

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- What details do you think were emphasized to make this painting more "readable?"
- Why do you think Portinari chose to work in a "readable" style?
- Do Portinari's statements affect your interpretation of this artwork? Explain.

28. Cândido Portinari, quoted in Annateresa Fabris, *Cândido Portinari* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1996), 70.

29. Portinari, quoted in *ibid.*, 118.



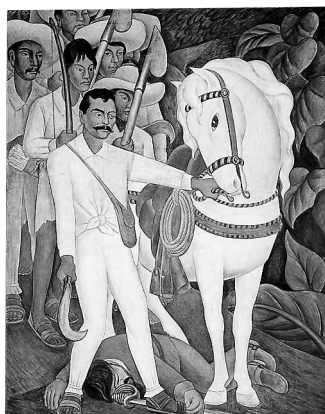
### ACTIVITY

Portinari's painting *Hill* represents the Brazilian poverty witnessed by the artist during his youth. Ask your students to think about their own environment and the people that they see on a daily basis. Encourage them to concentrate on details such as peoples' activities and clothing, as well as the surrounding architecture and landscape. Then invite them to create a painting or drawing of their neighborhood, conceptualizing the image as if for someone who has never been there, to give a sense of what it would be like to live in that place.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1903, on a coffee plantation in Brodósqui, São Paulo, Brazil, Cândido Portinari grew up in poverty, with no education beyond the primary grades. At the age of fifteen he was admitted into drawing classes at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, in Rio de Janeiro. In 1923 he was awarded a bronze medal for one of his works. In 1928, an award-winning portrait of the poet Olegario Mariano earned him the Prix de Voyage, a fellowship to travel in Europe, where he studied the Old Masters. In 1931 he returned to Brazil, where he taught, and where he received important government commissions, including a mural for the Brazilian pavilion at the New York Worlds Fair, in 1939. Portinari's work was included in several Museum of Modern of Art exhibitions in the 1940s, and in the 1950s he continued to exhibit in the United States, as well as in Brazil and in Europe. In 1957, his twin murals *War* and *Peace* were installed in the United Nations building, in New York. Portinari died in 1962.

**SLIDE 16:** Diego Rivera. Mexican, 1886–1957.  
*Agrarian Leader Zapata*. 1931. Fresco, 7' 9¼" x 6' 2"  
 (238.1 x 188 cm). The Museum of Modern Art,  
 New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you think is happening in this picture? What do you suppose occurred just before the event depicted here?
- What do you think will happen next? What are the visual clues that lead you to think that?
- Who do you think these people might be? List all of the details that influenced your opinions.

### ABOUT THIS WORK—THEMES: ENVIRONMENT, GROUP B (PP. 42–43); PEOPLE, GROUP C (PP. 44–45)

In *Agrarian Leader Zapata*, which replicates part of a larger mural that the Mexican artist Diego Rivera had painted in 1930, he depicts the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata holding a sugarcane scythe in his right hand while his left hand clutches the reins of a white horse. A lifeless figure lies at his feet; behind him stands a column of laborers carrying a bow and arrows and agricultural tools as weapons. The group is framed on the right by tropical foliage. Prior to the 1911 Mexican Revolution, the Mexican president Porfirio Díaz had enforced laws supporting the hacienda (estate/plantation) system of land ownership in Mexico. Beginning in 1910, rebel leaders, including Zapata, organized uprisings for land reform. After several years of civil war and violent government takeovers, the United States backed Venustiano Carranza's bid for presidency. The Zapatista faction remained dissatisfied with Carranza's reform efforts, and continued to fight until government supporters ambushed and then killed Zapata, in 1919.

Rivera witnessed the beginnings of the Mexican Revolution during a visit to Mexico in 1910 (he was living in Paris at the time). It was not until 1921, however, when Rivera left Europe, that he became involved in Mexican politics through his art. He was instrumental in reviving the art of mural painting in Mexico, which in Rivera's case involved painting on a wet plaster surface or wall, a technique also known as fresco. Rivera depicted current events and historical episodes with vivid colors and bold forms, celebrating his native culture on the walls of public and government buildings. In 1929, for example, Dwight Morrow, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, commissioned Rivera to paint murals in the Palacio de Cortés, in Cuernavaca, Morelos. The artist's series of panels titled *Historia del estado de Morelos, Conquista y revolución* (History of the State of Morelos: conquest and revolution), included depictions of events spanning the age of the Spanish conquistadors to the revolt led by Zapata. While in New York for his 1931 Museum of Modern Art retrospective, Rivera painted several relatively small-scale, movable frescos (i.e., he merged the fresco technique with the easel painting format), including *Agrarian Leader Zapata*, which was inspired by his Palacio de Cortés commission. In this work, the Mexican revolutionary's white horse is based on images of the legendary mount belonging to the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

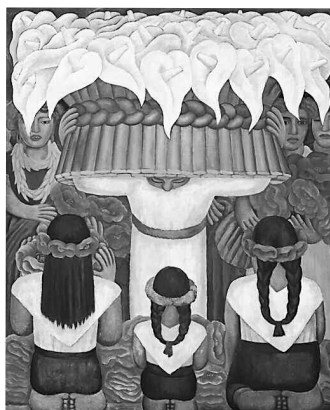
- How does the title of this painting add to your ideas about the artwork?
- What can you tell about Emiliano Zapata from this portrait? What clues does the artist provide us with?
- What do you think might have been Rivera's opinion of Zapata? What do you see that makes you say that?

### ACTIVITY

Invite your students to have a conversation about the different ways that political and public figures are depicted. Ask the class to bring in images of historical persons as well as of current politicians and famous individuals. You may even choose to have the class investigate multiple images of the same individual. Encourage them to talk about these images in the same way that they analyzed *Agrarian Leader Zapata*. Ask them to consider what they think the artist or photographer might have wanted to convey about the individual's persona, based on what they see in the images.

For "About the Artist," see pp. 34–35.

**SLIDE 17:** Diego Rivera. Mexican, 1886–1957. *Flower Festival: Feast of Santa Anita*. 1931. Encaustic on canvas, 6' 6½" x 64" (199.3 x 162.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe each person in detail, paying special attention to body language. What do you think they might be doing? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What can we learn about these people by looking at their clothes and their surroundings?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—THEME: PEOPLE, GROUP B (PP. 44–45)

In 1921, Diego Rivera returned to Mexico from Europe with newly found enthusiasm for Mexican history and popular folk culture. He would later write, “Everywhere I saw a potential masterpiece—in the crowds, the markets, the festivals, the marching battalions, the workers in the workshops, the fields—in every shining face, every radiant child.”<sup>30</sup> Throughout his artistic career, Rivera sought to develop an art with a national identity that would serve the Mexican people. In *Flower Festival: Feast of Santa Anita*, three peasants kneel before a bearer of white calla lilies accompanied by women carrying bundles of red flowers. The peasants and flowers fill the canvas with their bold color, suggesting a sense of endless bounty. Rivera took inspiration from the Catholic feast day traditions on the Santa Anita Canal, as well as the popular use of calla lilies in funerals. The stylized facial features of the bronze figures reflect Rivera’s fascination with pre-Columbian sculpture, of which he was an avid collector.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How do Rivera’s words add to your ideas about this work?
- Why might Rivera have chosen to depict the traditions of his homeland?

### ACTIVITY

In *Flower Festival: Feast of Santa Anita*, Rivera celebrates Mexican tradition and agricultural life. Have your class discuss the ideas of tradition and ritual in general. Ask them to consider why they think traditions are (or are not) important. Encourage the class to talk or write about their own cultural and family traditions.

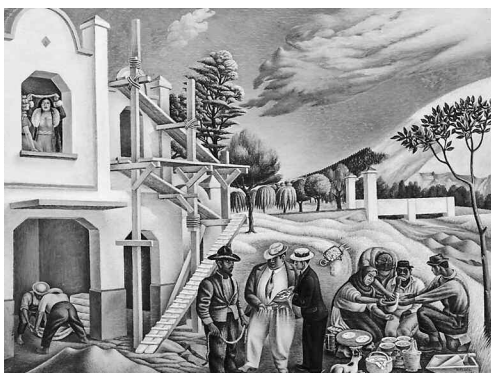
### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Diego Rivera was born in 1886, in Guanajuato, Mexico. When he was ten years old, he enrolled in the Academia de San Carlos, in Mexico City, where the artists José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros also studied. In 1907 he earned a scholarship to attend the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, in Madrid, Spain, and moved to Paris

30. Diego Rivera, quoted in Andrea Kettenmann, *Diego Rivera, 1886–1957: A Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art* (New York: Taschen, 2000), 23.

a year later, where he exhibited and worked in the milieu of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. During this time Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and other Mexican artists became committed to the development of a new art for their nation, which involved the revitalization of the mural informed by Mexican indigenous art practices and contemporary events. To this end, they founded the Sindicato Revolucionario de Obreros, Técnicos y Plásticos (Union of Revolutionary Painters, Sculptors, and Graphic Artists), launching the great age of Mexican mural painting. In 1929, Rivera married the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. Rivera had joined the Mexican Communist party in 1922, but was temporarily expelled for sympathizing with the exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who lived in his and Kahlo's home for a couple of years in the late 1930s. During the 1920s Rivera had received numerous commissions from Mexico, the United States, and even the Soviet Union for his highly sought-after murals. However, his strong political beliefs often permeated his work beyond his patrons' tolerance, as was the case, for example, with his Rockefeller Center murals, which were ultimately destroyed because of their Communist references. Rivera died in 1957, in Mexico City.

**SLIDE 18:** Antonio Ruiz. Mexican, 1897–1964. *The New Rich*. 1941. Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (32.1 x 42.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe how the figures are arranged in this painting. What are some of the differences between the groups of people?
- What type of place do you think this is? What observations support your opinion?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Themes: Environment, Group B (pp. 42–43); Expression, Group A (pp. 46–47)

In this finely detailed painting titled *The New Rich*, the Mexican artist Antonio Ruiz reveals the extremes between the social classes in Mexico at the time. With subtle and often humorous observation, Ruiz creates a microcosm of Mexican society by juxtaposing architects and building planners with laborers, peasants, and the “new rich” in a stagelike setting. In the two-story building to the left, Ruiz meticulously depicts the architectural craftsmanship reminiscent of the Spanish colonial style that is so prolific in Mexican towns. The landscape of stylized trees and luminous blue sky creates a backdrop to this theatrical scene—indeed, in the 1920s, Ruiz studied stage design and worked as an assistant film-set designer in Hollywood. Upon his return to Mexico the artist worked on many productions, creating designs for the theater, ballet, and film. In 1943, Ruiz participated in The Museum of Modern Art’s group exhibition *The Latin American Collection of The Museum Of Modern Art*, in New York.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- How does knowing that this artist worked as a set designer affect your understanding of the painting? What aspects of this painting seem like a stage set?
- What details does the artist use to illustrate differences between the figures?
- What effect does the inclusion of both interiors and exteriors have on this painting?
- What ideas do you think the artist wanted to convey with this painting?

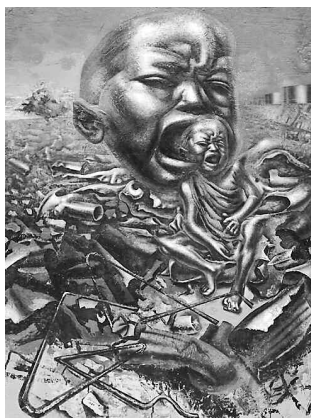
### ACTIVITY

In this painting, Ruiz created a “visual play” with a cast of characters who perform in a stagelike setting. Ask your students to write short scripts and act out vignettes based on the figures and landscape of the painting. Encourage them to pay close attention to the subtle details of each character, such as their clothing and body language, in order to develop a rich dialogue.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Antonio Ruiz was born in 1892, in Texcoco, Mexico. As a child, Ruiz was nicknamed “El Corzo” and “El Corcito” because of his uncanny resemblance to the famous Spanish bull-fighter Manuel Corzo. Trained in architecture, he taught drawing in Mexico City’s public school system. In the late 1920s and 1930s he exhibited in the United States and Europe, participating in an international exhibition of Surrealist art organized in 1940 by the poet André Breton, at the Galería de Arte Mexico, in Mexico City. In 1963, after retiring from his professorship, the Seminario de Cultura Mexicana organized a retrospective of Ruiz’s work. He died the following year.

**SLIDE 19:** David Alfaro Siqueiros. Mexican, 1896–1974. *Echo of a Scream*. 1937. Enamel on wood, 48 x 36" (121.9 x 91.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Edward M. M. Warburg



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you notice first about this painting?
- Look carefully at the child. How would you describe its facial expression, its clothing, its position, etc.?
- What kind of place do you think this is? Describe what you see in the background.

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Themes: People, Group A (pp. 44–45); Expression, Group A (pp. 46–47)

The Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros, who was ten years younger than Diego Rivera and thirteen years younger than José Clemente Orozco, completes the trio of great Mexican muralists known as “*los tres grandes*.” In 1936, the artist founded the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop, dedicated to art in service of political and social progress. Executed during this period, *Echo of a Scream* is a highly symbolic painting that represents the terrifying conditions of human suffering, tragedy, and loss. An infant cries inconsolably, its brow contorted in anguish and the frail limbs of its body perched helplessly on an endless scrap heap of tangled metal. A duplicate head balloons behind the child, a visual manifestation of its echoing scream. The field of mangled remains of machinery and other structures was based on press photographs of current events. The sources of various components of this painting have been variously traced back to news photos of the ruins of a bombed Manchurian railroad station, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, the Spanish Civil War, and famines in Africa. Commenting on his use of photojournalistic sources, Siqueiros declared, “...I consider that photography in and of itself constitutes our most important ally.”<sup>31</sup> He saw art as an impetus to action and as a way to shake the masses. An avid Communist and political activist, Siqueiros was committed to speaking out against society’s inhumanity and the use of technology in the service of war.

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Think about the title of this artwork, *Echo of a Scream*. How do you think the title relates to the painting?
- What messages do you think Siqueiros wanted to communicate with this painting? What specific choices did he make in creating this work?
- How does knowing about Siqueiros’s technique of working from photographs add to your thoughts about this work?

31. David Alfaro Siqueiros, quoted in *Portrait of a Decade, 1930–1940: David Alfaro Siqueiros* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1997), 90.



### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born 1896, in Chihuahua, Mexico, David Alfaro Siqueiros was accepted into the Academia de San Carlos, in Mexico City, at the age of fifteen. Enlisting in the army in 1914, he served during the Mexican Revolution and was assigned military attaché to Barcelona, Spain. Returning to Mexico, he executed several murals inflected by his political beliefs. He served on the executive committee of the Mexican Communist Party with Diego Rivera, and focused on Mexican union activities almost to the exclusion of his artwork. He fought in the Spanish Civil War in 1937, and stayed on in Spain until 1939. Arrested on several occasions for his political activism, Siqueiros was forced into exile until the Mexican government pardoned him, in 1943. In the 1950s Siqueiros painted murals in Mexico City for the Ciudad Universitaria and the Museo Nacional de Historia. An activist, he was imprisoned again in 1960 and then pardoned in 1964. In 1967 he received the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union. Siqueiros died in Mexico City, in 1974.

**SLIDE 20:** Joaquín Torres-García. Uruguayan, 1874–1949. *Composition*. 1932. Oil on canvas, 28¼ x 19¼" (71.8 x 50.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Dr. Román Fresnedo Siri. © 2004 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VEGAP, Madrid



### DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Describe all the shapes and symbols that you see in this picture. What do you think the individual symbols might represent?

### ABOUT THIS WORK—Theme: Expression, Group B (pp. 46–47)

*Composition*, by the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García, presents the viewer with an array of abstract forms and symbols. A series of pictographs that includes stick figures, a ladder, a shell, a fish, and other more or less recognizable objects are organized in a structural grid and painted in grey. Torres-García developed a style of art that he called “Constructive Universalism,” in which he perceived his symbols as the “materializations of the universal spirit” and as a way of “returning to origins.” He sought to create a language of visual archetypes based on symbols rooted in the pre-Columbian past that the general public could easily identify. Although Torres-García wanted to develop an aesthetic independent of the prevalent European avant-garde styles, he was nevertheless interested in Cubism and its use of African art. Torres-García even applied his Constructive Universalism to the design of wooden toys for the education of his children (and which he intended to mass-produce).

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Torres-García developed his own style, called “Constructive Universalism,” based on the idea that simple, everyday objects and symbols can be understood by everyone, regardless of cultural or social background. Do you think that a work of art can be understood by everyone? Explain.
- What do you imagine could be some of the advantages and disadvantages to artworks based on this ideal?
- What symbols do you encounter in everyday life that are understood by everyone?

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Joaquín Torres-García was born in 1874, in Montevideo, Uruguay. In 1892, he moved with his parents to Catalonia, Spain, his father’s homeland, and began his art education in Barcelona, at the Escuela Oficial de Bellas Artes, and the Academia Baixas. The young artist quickly rejected the academic rigidity of these institutions and was drawn to the avant-garde artists, including Pablo Picasso, who congregated at the café “Els Quatre Gats.” Subsequently living and working in New York and Paris, Torres-García encountered many of the most notable artistic figures of the time, including the Spanish architect Antonio

Gaudí and the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, whose austere abstraction deeply influenced his painting. Returning to Montevideo in 1935, more than forty years later, Torres-García founded the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (Association of Constructivist Art), and published his theoretical book *Estructura* (Structure). He founded the workshop “Taller Torres-García” in 1943, which continued to operate for more than ten years after his death, in 1949, in Montevideo. A posthumous retrospective was held the following year by the Sidney Janis Gallery, in New York.

## THEMATIC APPROACHES TO THE ARTWORKS

The themes offered in this section—“Environment,” “People,” and “Expression”—are informed by issues and topics covered in such curricula as language arts, social studies, and visual and performing arts. We suggest that you read through this section to find the theme that is most relevant to your class study.

Each theme is explored in three segments comprising three images and supported by additional questions and supplementary information. Most of the selected artworks are linked to more than one theme in order to emphasize that the works of art can be investigated more than once and from multiple points of view.

### ENVIRONMENT

The theme “Environment” considers the setting or location represented in a painting—whether a landscape or cityscape, from the realistic to the ideal and imagined—and includes broader implications of environment, with attention to historical, social, and cultural contexts. Group A examines representations of place. Group B explores the historical, socioeconomic, and political contexts that inspired the paintings. Group C includes works of art whose environments are informed by visualizations of ideal places as well as of modernization, war, and chaos.

#### Environment: Group A

Pedro Figari. *Creole Dance*. c. 1925? (p. 11)

- How would you go about describing the setting of this painting?
- Can you tell what kind of place this is?
- What do you think the climate might be? What do you see that makes you say that?

José Clemente Orozco. *The Subway*. 1928 (p. 25)

- What are the similarities and differences between the environments Figari and Orozco depicted?
- Taking into account Orozco’s letters, what do you think he wanted to convey about the environment in New York through his painting *The Subway*?

Cândido Portinari. *Hill*. 1933 (p. 30)

- Compare the environment in *Hill* with that of *Creole Dance* and *The Subway*. What are some of the choices the artists made in creating the environments depicted in their paintings?

- Portinari once said, "I am a son of the red earth. I decided to paint the Brazilian reality, naked and crude as it is."<sup>32</sup> How does Portinari convey this Brazilian environment in *Hill*?

#### Environment: Group B

Diego Rivera. *Agrarian Leader Zapata*. 1931 (p. 32)

- How does knowing about the political environment of the Mexican Revolution add to what you see in this painting?
- Given the fact that Zapata was murdered, and that this artwork was created many years after the Mexican Revolution, what do you think Rivera wanted to communicate with this painting?

José Clemente Orozco. *Zapatistas*. 1931 (p. 27)

- Compare and contrast Orozco's *Zapatistas* with Rivera's *Agrarian Leader Zapata*.
- What are some of the choices the two artists made in their paintings to project their different political viewpoints through their art?

Antonio Ruiz. *The New Rich*. 1941 (p. 36)

- Compare all three images in this group with respect to their different social and political environments.

#### Environment: Group C

Wifredo Lam. *The Jungle*. 1943 (p. 19)

- This painting depicts the Afro-Cuban traditions of Lam's homeland, Cuba, and his awareness of modern art as well as his knowledge of African masks. What do you think Lam wanted to communicate about his vision of Cuba?

Matta (Roberto Sebastián Antonio Matta Echaurren). *Listen to Living*. 1941 (p. 23)

- Matta expressed an interest in the unknown. In what way might this interest have informed the type of environment Matta depicted here?

Guillermo Kuitca. *Untitled*. 1992 (p. 17)

- Kuitca once said "...we are always in the same place even when we are somewhere else."<sup>33</sup> How does Kuitca's statement add to your ideas about this work?
- Compare and contrast Matta's environment with the ones created by Lam and Kuitca.

32. Cândido Portinari, quoted in "Cândido Portinari Dies at 58: Outstanding Brazilian Painter," in *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1962): 29, 1.

33. Kuitca, quoted in Newhall, "A Map of the World," in *New York Magazine*: 72.

## PEOPLE

The theme “People” explores figurative works of art, such as self-portraiture, and encourages students to look at the different ways Latin American and Caribbean artists depict the human figure. Group A considers aesthetic choices made by the artists in their portraits. Group B explores a variety of depictions of women. Group C considers the male figure.

### People: Group A

José Clemente Orozco. *Self-Portrait*. 1940 (p. 28)

- Focus on the artist’s facial expression. What do you think it reveals about his personality?
- What words can be used to describe Orozco’s disposition? What devices does the artist use to communicate his attitude?

Frida Kahlo. *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*. 1940 (p. 15)

- Compare Orozco’s self-portrait with Kahlo’s.
- How do their facial expressions affect your perception of the artists?
- “I paint myself because I am so often alone,” Kahlo once reflected, “because I am the subject I know best.”<sup>34</sup> What does this statement add to your ideas about Kahlo’s self-portrait?

David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Echo of a Scream*. 1937 (p. 38)

- What is different about this work compared to the two portraits you have just discussed?
- How does Siqueiros’s focus on a single figure differ from that of Orozco and Kahlo? Do you think Siqueiros’s work can be considered a portrait?

### People: Group B

Marisol (Marisol Escobar). *The Family*. 1962 (p. 21)

- Why do you think Marisol chose to draw or paint two-dimensional images on the wood’s surface instead of carving the wood into a more “realistic” three-dimensional sculpture?

Fernando Botero. *The Presidential Family*. 1967 (p. 7)

- Describe the similarities and differences between the women depicted in Marisol’s *The Family* and those in Botero’s *The Presidential Family*.
- Can you describe what roles the women in these two works might be portraying?
- Botero once said, “If you start wandering in the history of art, almost everything has been done on the subject of the woman, seated, lying down, or standing up. It is fascinating to see that one always takes off from an idea that is incredibly specific. This is where the artist has to test his originality and make his mark, show that he really has something to say. This is the problem and the marvel of art.”<sup>35</sup> How does the above statement relate to the depictions of women in these two paintings and to the artists who made the paintings?

34. Kahlo, quoted in Herrera, *Frida*, 74.

35. Fernando Botero, quoted in Marie-Pierre Colle, *Latin American Artists in Their Studios* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Limusa, S.A. de C.V. Grupo Noriega Editores, 1994), 49.

Diego Rivera. *Flower Festival: Feast of Santa Anita*. 1931 (p. 34)

- What roles do you think the women are portraying in Rivera's painting? Compare these roles with those in Marisol's *The Family* and Botero's *The Presidential Family*.

#### People: Group C

Diego Rivera. *Agrarian Leader Zapata*. 1931 (p. 32)

- What roles do you think the men are portraying in Rivera's painting?
- How does Rivera convey his opinions about these men, in particular, Emiliano Zapata, through his painting?

Antonio Berni. *New Chicago Athletic Club*. 1937 (p. 5)

- Compare the men in Berni's painting to those in Rivera's.
- What can you discover by focusing on the body language of the men in both paintings?

Enrique Chagoya. *The Illuminated Cannibal*. 2002 (p. 9)

- What can we determine about the men in Chagoya's drawing? How do they compare to the men in Rivera's and Berni's paintings?

## EXPRESSION

The theme “Expression” demonstrates the different visual vocabularies developed by artists. Group A explores artists’ varied methods of communicating social issues. Group B examines works that use symbolic language to reference the artists’ personal experiences or articulate an idyllic universal role for their art. Group C looks at different ways the artists express their relationships with other individuals as well as their relationship to the world.

### Expression: Group A

Antonio Ruiz. *The New Rich*. 1941 (p. 36)

- What aspects of contemporary Mexico do you think Ruiz wanted to express through his painting?

David Alfaro Siqueiros. *Echo of a Scream*. 1937 (p. 38)

- How does this painting relate to contemporary events in Siqueiros’s time?
- How did Ruiz and Siqueiros choose to communicate social issues in their artworks? In what ways do their methods differ?

Fernando Botero. *The Presidential Family*. 1967 (p. 7)

- What do you think Botero wanted to communicate with this painting?
- How does Botero’s method of communicating social issues differ from that of Siqueiros and Ruiz?
- Botero once declared, “...a painter can do things a photographer can’t do, because a painter can make the invisible visible.”<sup>36</sup> What do you think Botero meant by this, and how might it relate to this painting?

### Expression: Group B

Joaquín Torres-García. *Composition*. 1932 (p. 40)

- Why do you think that Torres-García wanted to develop his own visual vocabulary?

Jean-Michel Basquiat. *Untitled*. 1981 (p. 3)

- Compare Basquiat’s visual language with Torres-García’s signs and symbols.
- When asked what his subject matter was, Basquiat replied, “Royalty, heroism, and the streets.”<sup>37</sup> How does Basquiat express this in his drawing?

Enrique Chagoya. *The Illuminated Cannibal*. 2002 (p. 9)

- What symbols can you find in this work, and what do you think they signify?
- Chagoya combines images from pre-Columbian mythology, North American popular culture, Catholicism, modern-day Mexican culture, and ethnic stereotype to create his visual vocabulary. How does his vocabulary compare with those crafted by Torres-García and Basquiat?

36. Botero, quoted in René Rodríguez, “Colombia’s Fernando Botero,” in *Hispanic* (Jul./Aug. 2001): 96.

37. Jean-Michel Basquiat, quoted in Henry Geldzahler, “Art: From Subways to Soho, Jean-Michel Basquiat,” *Interview*, 13 (January 1983): 46



**Expression: Group C**

Frida Kahlo. *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair*. 1940 (p. 15)

- Kahlo once described her paintings as the most frank expression of herself. What message do you think she wanted to communicate with this self-portrait?

Felix Gonzalez-Torres. *“Untitled” (Perfect Lovers)*. 1991 (p. 13)

- Compare Gonzalez-Torres’s work with Kahlo’s painting.
- What do you think these two artists wanted to communicate about their relationships with their partners?
- Gonzalez-Torres once declared, “I can’t separate my art from my life.”<sup>38</sup> How does his statement relate to this artwork?

Guillermo Kuitca. *Untitled*. 1992 (p. 17)

- Kuitca once described the act of painting as a means of trying to understand the world in which he lives. How does this idea relate to the theme of expression and to the other artworks in this group?

38. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, quoted in Anne Umland, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Projects 34*, exh. brochure (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 1.

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