Chapter One: A World of Art

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- An American Vista
- A Chinese Landscape
- An Aboriginal “Dreaming”
- A Modern Earthwork
- The Physical Process of Seeing
- The Psychological Process of Seeing

Works in Progress
Albert Bierstadt’s *Rocky Mountains* and Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*

The Critical Process
Thinking about Making and Seeing: Andy Warhol’s *Race Riot*

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This Chapter Will:
- evaluate the criteria that defines art
- examine the functions of art and artists in various world civilizations
- discuss perception and the creative process
- introduce the student to the world as the artist sees it
- discuss the roles of artists
- examine the physical and psychological processes of seeing

KEY TERMS

Yin
Yang
sublime
aesthetic
corroboree
earthwork
LECTURE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. A World of Art
Provide a historical overview of the variety of artworks illustrated in the chapter in order to familiarize the students with cultural and historical differences and similarities. Emphasize to students the potential dangers of viewing and interpreting artworks with 21st century eyes. Stress the point that all art is culturally determined and it must be viewed according to the context of the time and place it was created, otherwise we tend to judge artworks from our own cultural standards. Illustrate this argument with an examination of the featured landscape artists, Albert Bierstadt, Wu Chen, Erna Motna, and Richard Serra, with attention to philosophical and cultural similarities and differences. Examine how each landscape artist addresses the four roles of the artist to some degree.

2. The World as Christo and Jeanne-Claude See It
Examination of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s Umbrella Project (figs. 1 and 2) has the potential of discussing several topics at once: cultural differences, artists’ intention, symbolism of space and color, and the creative process. The Umbrella Project is a complex piece that warrants an explanation of how temporary, public art installations function differently than traditional freestanding sculptures or paintings, which are traditionally viewed in museums or galleries. Discuss how the Umbrella Project pushes the three-dimensional space of art to a new level by creating a work that exists in “global” space. This lecture could then lead into a discussion session and assignment in which students answer the following questions: What is the work’s purpose? What were the artists’ intentions? Is this art? Do I like this type of art? Stress to students the significance of personal preference in assessing the question of what art is and the fact that what is considered art for one person may not be art for someone else.

3. The World as Other Artists See It
Compare and contrast how artists see the world in various cultures. Discuss Erna Motna’s Bushfire and Corroboree Dreaming (fig. 5) with attention to Australian aboriginal concepts of “Dreamtime.” Explain the significance of “dreamtime” that it functions as the foundation of Australian creation myth as well as a record of their ancestral spirits. Contrast this image with Wu Chen’s Central Mountains (fig. 4) to illustrate how both artists reveal hidden or universal truths in two completely different cultural ideologies that manifest themselves in two distinct representations of the landscape. In your discussion, describe how the process of seeing might be different for a person of aboriginal or Asian descent versus a person of western European descent when viewing these works.

Introduce the concept that art has the ability to function on a variety of aesthetic levels and can be visually appealing while also expressing the artist’s personal concerns. Discuss Albert Bierstadt’s The Rocky Mountains (fig. 3) to point out how the painting is the artist’s invention of an American cultural landmark seen through the eyes of a European artist and how the painting simultaneously functions as both American vista
and European landscape. Or, illustrate how Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (fig. 6) combines ancient symbolism with modern ecology.

4. How do We See the World?
With examples from the chapter, discuss the physical and psychological processes of seeing. Using a biological diagram of the human eye, discuss the physical process of seeing by dividing the explanation into the 3-step description found in the Sayre text: reception—extraction—inference. Show Jasper John’s *Three Flags* to illustrate the difference between looking and “seeing = understanding” images. Articulate John’s intentional use of images that, according to the artist, are “looked at but never seen, never examined.” Ask students how well they see/understand the American flag. From memory, ask students if they can answer the following questions. *What are the flag’s dimensions? How many red stripes, white stripes? Why is the flag rectangular in shape? Do the colors red, white and blue have symbolic significance? What does the compositional arrangement represent?* Have students research the American flag and present their findings in class. On another level, discuss the symbol of the flag itself by discussing the terrorist events of September 11 and how the prominent display of the American flag after that time has actually increased our appreciation of the flag and all it symbolizes. Illustrate, through other events in American history like McCarthyism or the Civil Rights Movement, for example, how the flag has not always been a positive symbol of patriotism. Examine the variety of artworks that express specific viewpoints concerning the American flag with artists Child Hassam, Jasper Johns, De Weldon, The Baby Crib Quilt, Faith Ringgold, Scott Tyler, and Andy Warhol.

**CRITICAL THINKING: More Opportunities to Think About Art**
Several artworks are detailed in the Critical Thinking and Works in Progress features found in this chapter. In addition, diverse opportunities for studying these works are located on the Companion Website and Companion CD-ROM.

1. The Creative Process
Flexibility and openness are two fundamental characteristic of creativity. Under the heading *The Creative Process*, the author describes the creative process using preliminary drawings for two completely different artworks—Albert Bierstadt’s painting, *Rocky Mountains* (fig. 3) and Robert Smithson’s earthwork, *Spiral Jetty* (fig. 6). In order for students to understand the nature of creativity, have students compare the preliminary drawings *Study for the Rocky Mountains* (fig. 7) and *Spiral Jetty* (fig. 8) with the finished works. Point out the differences between Smithson’s and Bierstadt’s processes and style. Consider the historical context in terms of how nature was perceived during the lives of these two artists. Bierstadt was inspired by the appearance of the American landscape, whereas Smithson was more interested in its geological properties.

Earthworks, like Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* are often large environmental sculptures produced outdoors that employ rocks, earth, and other natural materials. Another earth artist, Walter de Maria, creator of *Lightning Field* (fig. 395), is featured on a website for the DIA Center for the Arts, the organization which manages *Lightning Field*. Consider
De Maria's *New York Earth Room*, exhibited at the DIA Center for the Arts in New York City, as a comparison with Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*. Ask students how natural elements change when they are brought indoors? How does De Maria's room contradict the traditional architectural form...conversely? Is the earthwork an unnatural phenomenon created in nature? What is De Maria's statement about our environment? How is it similar to Smithson's? Does either artist seek to isolate something? Visit the Robert Smithson website, www.robertsmithson.com/index_.htm, to view more of his artworks. Discuss additional earth works by artists such as Michael Heizer, James Pierce and Walter de Maria.

2. Thinking About Andy Warhol’s *Race Riot*

Engage students in a critical discussion about the subject matter depicted in artworks such Andy Warhol’s *Race Riot* (fig. 15). Ask students how they respond to this type of artwork, and others that depict disturbing events. Point out that Warhol expresses one of the traditional roles of the artist, in that he gives visible form to ideas, philosophies, and feelings. Have students discuss how Warhol has arranged the subject matter for emotional impact. Introduce students to the langue of elements and design by having them describe and interpret the effectiveness of such compositional elements as repetition, color, balance, and design. To broaden this discussion, show the works of more contemporary artists such as Kara Walker, Jake and Dinos Chapman or Sue Coe.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Writing Assignments as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here.

1. Wrapping up Christo and Jeanne-Claude

Have students visit the Christo and Jeanne-Claude website. Instruct students to look at the variety of sculptural projects the Christo and Jeanne-Claude have created over the past decades. Have students write a short essay that includes a history of the artists and their significance in the history of art.

2. The Commodification of Ancient Ideas

“Dreamtime” is a complicated concept associated with ancient Australian Aboriginal ideology. Erna Motna uses this concept in his contemporary artwork, which met with some controversy concerning its commodity status. Using Motna’s work as an example, have students write an essay discussing the contradictory nature of turning an extinct tradition into profit. Ask students if they can think of any other ancient traditions that have been employed for commercial purposes.

3. The Power of the Visual Image

Have students research and write about the Civil Rights Movement in order to understand the imagery portrayed in works such as Andy Warhol’s *Race Riot* (fig. 15) and Faith Ringgold’s *God Bless America* (fig 12). How do these works express the artist’s personal feelings about growing up in an intensely political time in American history?
4. The Language of Art
As an in-class assignment, have students create a list of adjectives they have used to describe artworks such as pretty, nice, interesting, different, etc. and have them replace those words with new vocabulary they have learned in chapter 1.

HANDS-ON PROJECTS
Direct students to their Student Study Guide when assigning Hands-On Projects as the following assignments are written as instruction for the student and are contained in the guide as they are here. For additional project ideas, remember to investigate the Hands-On Projects found on the Companion Website.

1. A World of Art Companion Website Featured Project: Context and Content
In this project, students will create two simple collages. Each collage will use the same icon as its primary image (similar to Jasper John’s Flags)—the challenge is to cause the viewer to respond to the image differently in each collage. Students will do this by surrounding the icon with a different set of images in each collage. See A World of Art Companion Website for detailed instructions and illustrations.

2. Here Today, Gone Tomorrow
Have students propose a temporary artwork in the manner of Christo and Jeanne-Claude or Robert Smithson. As part of the assignment, have them draw a schematic design that illustrates their proposed work, including notes on their intentions, color choices, intended symbolism, materials, region, space, etc.

3. What’s Your Story?
Have students visit the Faith Ringgold website to learn about the artist and her artworks. In the manner of Ringgold, assign students to create their own story based on personal reflections concerning September 11th. Ask students to contemplate their feelings concerning the American flag and compose their story as Ringgold would, in an artwork that relates imagery to the content of the story.

4. Scrolling Along
Have students research the history of the Chinese hand scroll. Using landscape elements in the students’ geographic region, have them create their own hand scroll that illustrates a personal or universal philosophy. In class, have each student unroll one section of the hand scroll a day/each week until the entire “story” has been revealed.

RESOURCES
A World of Art Companion Website:
Remember to direct students to A World of Art companion website (www.prenhall.com/sayre) to help further their understanding of the materials discussed in this chapter with ideas for completing hands-on projects and exercises. Self-testing
materials are also available and offer students the opportunity to evaluate their understanding of the chapter materials in a variety of formats. In addition, links to websites featuring contemporary artists, and museum and gallery exhibitions related to this chapter will enhance discussion and comprehension. Links for this chapter include:

**CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS:** Faith Ringgold has been a powerful voice for African-American women's issues as well as artists' rights. She employs many media to reach an audience—she is a painter, author, storyteller, and quilt maker. This site is quite extensive, both for text and images, and it allows you to navigate across the images by double-clicking.

**GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS:** Smithsonian - Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Exhibitions web page. Scroll down to the Freer Gallery heading and select from the list of exhibits. The Freer Gallery houses a renowned collection of art from China, Japan, Korea, South and Southeast Asia, and the Near East. Included are Chinese paintings, Japanese folding screens, Korean ceramics, Indian and Persian manuscripts, and Buddhist sculpture. If you like *The Central Mountain*, by Wu Chen (pages 7-8), you might enjoy looking at some of the sculptural works featured at this site. While you're there, it's an easy link over to the Sackler Gallery next door.

**Other Suggested Websites:**

Christo and Jeanne-Claude Homepage at www.christojeanneclaude.net/ provides extensive photos of *The Umbrella Project* as well as many other works such as the *Running Fence*, *Wrapped Islands* and *Canyon Curtain*.

The United States Flag Page presents an inclusive history of the American flag at www.usflag.org/

Robert Smithson respected earthworks can be viewed at his official web site at www.robertsmithson.com/index_.htm

**Suggested Videos:**

*Videos and other resources are available for purchase through any of the distributors listed in the Resources section of this manual.*

Wild Wheels, Harrod Blank, 1992  
Faith Ringgold, The Last Story Quilt, 1992  
Aborigine: Great Cultures—Triumph of Nomads, 1997  
Christo, Running Fence, 1978  
Jasper Johns: Ideas in Paint, 1992  
Museum of Modern Art: Jasper Johns—Take an Object