Chapter Four: Seeing The Value In Art

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Art and Its Reception
- Art, Politics and Public Space
- Three Public Sculptures
- The “Other” Public Art

Works in Progress
Guillermo Gomez-Pena’s Temple of Confessions

The Critical Process
Thinking about the Value of Art: The Names Project, AIDS Memorial Quilt

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This Chapter Will:
- evaluate the term value relative to the study of art by identifying the monetary, cultural, and historical valuation of artworks
- identify and distinguish among the four roles of the artist as experiencer, reporter, analyst, and activist
- discuss the reception of artworks, art movements, and art exhibitions that challenged tradition and subsequently broadened the definition of art
- present contemporary visual artworks with multiple functions and motives, such as activist, political, public, and performance
- outline the objectives and roles of public agencies involved in supporting the creation of art

KEY TERMS

Armory Show
public art
activist art
four roles of the artist: experiencer, reporter, analyst, activist
LECTURE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Defining the Value of Art
The previous chapters have clearly identified that art can have many complex meanings and functions. This chapter looks at the ways art is of value aesthetically, monetarily, historically, and specifically, as cultural representation. The chapter reveals that as artists challenged existing constructs of art, they created works that were not always received favorably by the public. When discussing these ‘radical’ works, identify their cultural influence, and vice versa. What cultural constructs influenced their creation? In addition, discuss various influences, such as scientific discoveries, social morés, or heritage on other art forms, such as music and literature. With each example, consider the various definitions of value discussed in the chapter.

2. Robert Mapplethorpe and Censorship
The work of Robert Mapplethorpe is discussed again in this chapter as Sayre presents us with the controversial issue of first amendment rights versus government censorship. When chronicling the events that surrounded this controversy, include the various definitions of value, and the subjective judgments that were made based upon various individual’s definitions. For example, contrast the judgment of the Director of Cincinnati Museum, Dennis Barrie, who was arrested for showing the art with that of Senator Jesse Helms who thought the work had no artistic value. Consider how the public reacted to Mapplethorpe’s work after the controversy. Point out that record crowds attended the exhibit after the Cincinnati show moved to another venue, and the monetary value of Mapplethorpe’s work skyrocketed. Figure 71 is a duplication of an advertisement placed in *The New York Times* by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1989 during the height of this public controversy. Discuss how this advertisement itself may have influenced public definitions of value. Finally, compare Ajitto (fig. 72), a photograph from the X Portfolio to Parrot Tulip (fig. 70). Present other images from these portfolios for student contemplation. As was practiced when the exhibitions of these works was on public display, offer students the option of viewing the X Portfolio. Challenge students to make a decision regarding the funding and exhibition of Mapplethorpe’s work. Would they agree with the judge’s ruling that each photograph should be judged separately and not compared with related works?

3. Four Roles of the Artist
Suzanne Lacy’s diagram from her book, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* identifies the varied roles an artist participates in as they create art. An activist artist, Lacy’s work is also discussed in the later part of this chapter in an analysis of her collaborative performance piece titled *In Mourning and Rage* (fig. 91). Using Lacy’s diagram of the four roles of the artist, view several different works of art from varied time periods. Take note of the adjectives and verbs used by students as they describe the four roles while viewing different artworks.

4. Manet, What A Radical
Edouard Manet’s *Luncheon on the Grass* (fig. 74) was rejected from annual Parisian Salon exhibit of 1863 because it was considered too ‘modern’ by the jurors. Although he
had copied Raimondi's *Judgment of Paris* (p. 57) for the composition of the three primary figures, his apparent lack of respect for established painting techniques and rules of composition infuriated the critics as much as the "moral" implications of the scene. Imagery of nudes typically provided a rather voyeuristic view for an audience. In this painting, Manet challenges that tradition by forcing the viewer to make eye contact with the model in front. Discuss “the gaze” of the female figure in the front as another challenge to tradition.

In a bold political move, Napoleon III created a *Salon des Refuses*, an exhibition of rejected works with an underlying premise of letting the public decide the merits of the works. Reception by the public and Manet’s peers of *Luncheon on the Grass* was mixed, as dramatized in the writing by Emile Zola on page 60 of this chapter. Compare Manet’s work to that of Mapplethorpe’s, and compare Napoleon’s actions to those of Dennis Barrie and Jessie Helms.

5. **The Armory Show**

Now known as *The Armory Show*, after the building in which the exhibition was held, *The International Exhibition of Modern Art* of 1913 was the first opportunity Americans had to view work of 20th century "modern" artists from Europe such as Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse. The exhibition opened in New York City, and was organized by a group of progressive artists. This first large-scale exhibit included a number of ultra-modern French paintings whose technique and style quickly become the focus of intense controversy. Marcel Duchamp's Cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* (fig. 76), and Henri Matisse's unconventional *Blue Nude* drew particular condemnation. Both painters were attacked in the press as “inept and un-artistic.” Ask students why they believe Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* was so badly received by the public and the critics? What were the elements that affected the American public's perception, or rather, lack of perception?

Nonetheless, the show, exhibiting more than 1,600 works, receives some praise and was heavily attended. In New York, more than 70,000 people attend during the month-long run. Many art historians now cite the Armory show as the most important American exhibition in the history of modern art because of its effect on the art produced by American artists, the art purchased by American collectors and the art displayed in American museums. Today, New York City remains a center in the international art scene.

6. **Capturing Movement: Muybridge and Marey**

Discuss the photographic experiments undertaken by Muybridge’s (see *Annie G, Cantering, Saddled*, fig. 77) and Marey’s (see *Man in Black Suit with White Stripe Down Side of Chronophotograph Motion Experiment*, fig. 78) pointing out their influence on modern artists such as Marcel Duchamp. Representing time was a desire of many artists, as seen by Monet’s obsession with tracking transitional light and time of day. Knowing about Muybridge and his motion photographs, Leland Stanford, then-Governor of California, hired Muybridge to photograph his famous horse, *Occident*, to settle a bet about whether or not a horse’s legs are ever completely off the ground as they are
Muybridge’s Horse is Motion series revealed that indeed, at one point in time, a horse has all four legs off the ground. Muybridge’s subsequent photographic inventions influenced the conceptual and compositional ideas of artists. A physiologist, Marey was also investigating the external motion and movement using non-photographic recording devices, but quickly moved into making chronophotographs after seeing Muybridge’s accomplishments. Marey's man in black velvet became the inspiration for Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase. Ask students to consider how contemporary media enables artists to represent time and manipulate our understanding of time.

7. Designing a Memorial: The Creative Process of Maya Lin
In 1979, Congress granted a Vietnam War veterans' committee the right to build a memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C. dedicated to American soldiers killed in the Vietnam War. The committee announced the design competition, and solicited proposals that were evaluated by a panel of esteemed architects, sculptors, and landscape architects. More than 1,400 design proposals were submitted. When the winner was announced, no one was more surprised than the student architect herself, Maya Lin, a 20-year-old Yale undergraduate. The selection panel was moved by the simplicity, honesty, and power of Lin's design: a V-shaped, sunken wall of black stone, with the names of those killed in action engraved in chronological order. To search out a loved one, a mourner walks along the monument and finds the name among the 57,661 listed. Lin describes the Memorial thus: "I went to see the site. I had a general idea that I wanted to describe a journey...a journey that would make you experience death and where you'd have to be an observer, where you could never really fully be with the dead. It wasn't going to be something that was going to say, 'It's all right, it's all over,' because it's not." Ask students how Maya Lin's Vietnam War Memorial demonstrates the artist’s role as experiencer, reporter, analyst, and activist? To further this question, present additional quotes by Lin in which she describes additional aspects of creating the Vietnam War Memorial. A resource for quotes by Lin is www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Maya_Lin.html.

8. The Controversy of Maya Lin’s Vietnam War Memorial
Lin’s memorial was shrouded in controversy from the moment her winning design was announced, making it another example of how government intervention often mediates differences between the general publics’ aesthetics and an artist’s creation. Beginning with Lin’s defiance of all stereotypical traditional memorial sculptor, her design lacked the realism of most war memorials. From the moment Lin’s design was publicized, a small group within the Vietnam Veterans' community felt Lin's statement was an affront. One opponent commented, "One needs no artistic education to see this memorial design for what it is: a black scar, in a hole, hidden as if out of shame." The protesters wanted to change the color of the wall to white and to add an eight-foot-high sculpture of wounded soldiers and a flag in a central position at the wall. While Lin and the committee counted the American Legion among their supporters, the protesters secured the attention of then-radio broadcaster Patrick Buchanan and Congressman Henry Hyde. Hyde marshaled Secretary of the Interior James Watt to issue an ultimatum: ‘Lin’s wall must be redesigned to include the suggested changes, or it will never be built.’ The U.S.
Commission of Fine Arts, which has final say over the design, listened to arguments for and against Lin's sculpture. Claiming pragmatism, the commission finds a compromise: ‘the wall will remain black, but it will include the statue and flag -- not at the center, but off to the side.’

The *Vietnam Veterans' Memorial* was dedicated on Veterans' Day, 1982. At the time it was unveiled, there is general critical acclaim for the clarity of Lin's vision. The statue and flag were installed two years later, and in 1993, a second statue honoring women who served in Vietnam was placed on the site as well. The *Vietnam Veterans' Memorial* is now the most widely visited monument in Washington, D.C. While sometimes thought of as an "anti-monumental" monument (consider the Washington Monument rising in the photo's background), many people consider the *Vietnam Memorial* to be one of the most powerful memorials ever constructed.

Lin continues to work successfully as a sculptor and designer in the United States, creating other powerful public monuments, such as the *Civil Rights Memorial* in Montgomery, Alabama (www.splcenter.org). Present an updated survey of works by Maya Lin and discuss how the artist has developed since the 1980’s.

9. More Art in Public Places
In 1981, artist Richard Serra installed his sculpture *Tilted Arc* (fig. 84), in Federal Plaza in New York City. It had been commissioned by the Arts-in-Architecture program of the U.S. General Services Administration, which earmarks 0.5 percent of a federal building's cost, for public artwork that is displayed near the building. On site, *Tilted Arc* was a curving wall of raw steel, 120 feet long and 12 feet high, which carved the space of the Federal Plaza in half. Those working in surrounding buildings had to circumvent its enormous bulk as they walked through the plaza. According to Serra, the sculpture as obstacle was integral to the conceptual component of the work: "The viewer becomes aware of himself and of his movement through the plaza. As he moves, the sculpture changes. Contraction and expansion of the sculpture resulted from the viewer's movement. Step-by-step the perception not only of the sculpture but of the entire environment changes."

*Tilted Arc* was disliked by employees working in the building as soon as it was erected, and Judge Edward Re began a letter-writing campaign to have the $175,000 work removed. Four years later, William Diamond, regional administrator for the GSA, decided to hold a public hearing to determine whether *Tilted Arc* should be relocated. The estimated cost of dismantling the work was $35,000, with an additional $50,000 estimated to have it erected in another location. Richard Serra testified that the sculpture was site-specific, and that to remove it from its site would be the equivalent of destroying it. He declared that if the sculpture were relocated, he would remove his name from it. At a public hearing held in 1985, 122 people testified in favor of retaining the sculpture, and 58 testified in favor of removing it. The art establishment—artists, museum curators, and art critics—testified that *Tilted Arc* was a great work of art. Those against the sculpture, for the most part people who work at Federal Plaza, said that the sculpture interfered with public use of the plaza. They also accused it of attracting graffiti, rats,
and terrorists who might use it as a blasting wall for bombs. The jury of five voted 4 to 1 in favor of removing the sculpture. Serra's appeal of the ruling failed. On March 15, 1989, during the night, federal workers cut Tilted Arc into three pieces, remove it from Federal Plaza, and carted it off to a scrap-metal yard. Invite students to express their opinion about the removal of Serra’s work from various standpoints: the artist, the employees working in the building, the selection committee that chose the design, and the director of the Arts-in-Architecture program.

10. Michelangelo's David
In 1501, 25-year-old Michelangelo Buonarroti began working on his colossal masterpiece, the 17-foot-tall, marble, David (fig. 85). At this time, sculpture was considered the highest form of art because it mimicked divine creation—the sculptural image within the block of stone is the same as the human soul within the physical body. From a huge block of marble that had been abandoned decades earlier by another sculptor, Michelangelo took on the challenge of living up to Donatello and other artists who had sculpted the same heroic figure. Michelangelo believed that David, portrayed in the Bible as a young shepherd who slew the giant Goliath and went on to become a valiant and just Hebrew king, was a fit symbol of courage and civic duty to guard the city of Florence. David was erected in 1504 in the public plaza of Florence, the Piazza della Signoria, where the genitals and pubic hair on the statue caused immediate consternation. David’s private parts continued to cause controversy when the work was reproduced and displayed at other locations years later. For example, in 1939, a copy of Michelangelo's masterpiece was installed at the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, CA, with one addition: a fig leaf was added to cover the genitals and pubic hair of the statue. The leaf was finally removed thirty years later in 1969, and the statue remained a true replica of Michelangelo’s until an earthquake toppled it in 1987. On the Internet, one company offering marble reproductions of the statue allows purchase of a fig leaf at no extra charge. Today, the image, uncensored or censored, has become iconic in popular reproductions on T-shirts, refrigerator magnets, and in advertising. However, debates about the appropriateness of displaying reproductions or photographs of the David in public places as schools and churches continue today. Ask students if they would be offended if a replica of David was present in this classroom?

11. Activist and Performance Art
Suzanne Lacy describes her role as an activist artist on page 72 of this chapter as she discusses her collaborative project with Leslie Labowitz, In Mourning and in Rage (fig. 91). Read the statement by the artist: “The art is in making it compelling; the politics is in making it clear. In Mourning and in Rage took this culture’s trivialized images of mourners as old, powerless women and transformed them into commanding seven-foot-tall figures angrily demanding an end to violence against women.” What did Lacy mean by this statement? What makes performance art such as In Mourning and in Rage an effective means of communicating to the public?

Another collaborative group of activist and performance artists who address women’s issues is the Guerilla Girls. Their effective tactics of showing-up at museum openings and theatre performances to protest the inequities of race and gender representation in
guerilla masks make an impression. Their mass-produced stickers and posters sarcastically describing their concerns reach a wide audience as does their Internet site. Encourage students to visit the Guerilla Girls on the web.

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 CDROM.

1. Works in Progress: Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s Temple of Confessions

In his performances and manifestos, "border artist" Guillermo Gómez-Peña draws attention to the cultural fissure dividing the two worlds that he and other Latinos inhabit; as he says in Border Brujo he is "floating on the ether that is the present tense of California and the past tense of Mexico." Born and raised in Mexico City, Gomez-Pena came to the United States in 1978 and has been exploring cross-cultural issues and North/South relations using performance, radio art, book arts, bilingual poetry, journalism, video, and installations. A founding member of the Border Arts Workshop, Gomez-Pena is a noted member of Post-Arte, a network of Latin American conceptual artists and visual poets. Using his body, language, and wit as primary tools, his work challenges conventions of race, culture and class. Discuss the installation Temple of Confessions (figs. 88 - 90) as a ground breaking artwork, which includes a mass-market multi-functional book and CD, mail-in confessional card, rub-on tattoo and web link. Encourage students to participate in "Confess Your Intercultural Cyber-Sins" located at www.echonyc.com/~confess/. Temple of Confessions is a complex seduction of the senses-rich colors in subdued candlelight, intoxicating scents of burning incense, ambient music and voices in sound overlays, and haunting, mesmerizing movement. Creating a new ethnographic "diorama" based on religious reenactments displayed in Colonial Mexican churches, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes exhibit themselves for three-day periods in Plexiglas boxes as cultural specimens and living saints from an endangered Religion. From inside their display cases El Mexterminator and El Cybervato challenge us to re-evaluate our beliefs and confess our prejudices.


2. Thinking about The Names Project

Chapter 4 ends with The Critical Process, a comparative analysis of Group Material’s, AIDS Timeline (fig. 92) and The Names Project’s AIDS Memorial Quilt (fig. 93). The AIDS crisis is a global epidemic that has affected all Americans. Have students visit A World of Art Companion Website link to The Names Project to see images of the quilt as it was last displayed on the Mall in Washington, DC. Here, the Mall area becomes a memorial, consisting of over 41,000 3' x 6' quilt panels (the same size as a human grave) with each panel commemorating an individual's life that was lost to AIDS. As they read through the site, have them consider the quilt makers and those who they have
commemorated. Consider, too, the history of the pandemic, and the controversy surrounding the disease. Pose these questions for class discussion:

- What makes a memorial a "monument" to the people for whom it speaks?
- How do you think a government's perception of a crisis empowers or negates a public response?
- Have these works, in your opinion, succeeded in bringing awareness of the disease to the public and politicians?
- Have these works succeeded where other media would have fallen short?

In addition to visiting the Names Project site, be sure to refer to the detailed analysis of this work in the Critical Process summary found in the back of the textbook which answers many of the questions posed in the chapter reading,

**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 Student Study Guide as they are here.*

1. **Value Throughout History**
   Have students select an artwork from the final section of the textbook, Part V: The Visual Record, and write an analysis of the value of that work within the society that produced it, have them consider all definitions of value discussed in the reading, from monetary to cultural to historical.

2. **NEA/NEH Funding for Artists**
   Have students write an essay that describes their opinion of whether the National Endowment for the Arts should or should not exist as a function of our government. Many people feel that the government should have position that supports the creation of art in our society, in order to foster cultural experiences and document our society. Others do not support, stating that government involvement restricts the artist’s degree of freedom. Ask students if they feel that the benefits of such an institution outweigh the current concerns of censorship? Have them consider the concept that art is an historical record of a culture, yet recent censorship concerns question the stability of an artist’s freedom of expression. What is their opinion of NEA/NEH funding for artists? For more information, have them visit www.nea.gov.

3. **Art at Auction**
   Have students visit Sotheby’s or Christie’s auction houses to investigate market prices for artworks by master and contemporary artists. Using their research data, have students write an essay describing their experience at the web auction, and their thoughts regarding the prices artworks demand at auction. Have students contemplate why collectors will go so high to own a work by a certain artist. Have them begin their research at these sites: www.sothebys.com and www.christies.com.

4. **Realistic and Abstract Monuments**
Have students research Frederick Hart’s figurative *Vietnam Memorial Sculpture* and write a comparative analysis between Hart’s and Maya Lin’s monuments. Have them discuss their physical differences, interpretative challenges, and differences in public reactions. Assign to students to research other monuments honoring those in the military and find one that is both abstract and realistic at the same time. Direct students to these links to assist them in their research: www.awildorchid.com/monuments2.htm (general site presenting the monuments of Washington, DC), www.awildorchid.com/vietnam.htm (image of Hart’s memorial) www.awildorchid.com/vietnam2.htm (Vietnam Women’s Memorial).

**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. **Public Art Detective**

   Have students see if they can discover when and how a given example of public art was commissioned in their community or on their school’s campus. Have them go to their local library and see if it was the subject of any controversy by checking old newspaper articles and other resources that their reference librarian might lead them to. (They might find it useful, in fact, to begin by asking people in the community who might know something about the piece – the artist, city leaders, even the local historical society.)

   Have students station themselves near the piece and ask passersby what they think of the artwork. Have them try to get an informal cross-section of the community. Have them survey their friends. See if there is any consensus. Do people think the piece is “worth” having in the community? What is its monetary value?

2. **Public Sculpture Design**

   Have students respond to the following design competition: Design a public monument that honors those who lost their lives in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The nature of your design may reflect a concept that no artist has had to contemplate to this date—how to represent the loss of life due to a terrorist attack. Complete your design on copy paper using, pencil, ruler, markers, or colored pencils.

**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: Richard Serra created *Tilted Arc*, one of the most controversial works of the 1980s, which many see as the beginning of a series of attacks against government funded works of art. Although he is usually thought of as a Minimalist sculptor, Serra was also a pioneer in Process Art, and this site shows a recreation of an earlier work *Casting* from 1969.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS: The Museum of Bad Art or MOBA is a very interesting museum that exists in Boston. The curator refuses to pay more than $6.95 for any work of art in the museum, and in fact many are found in the trash! Visit this infamous site (featured in *USA Today*) and see some of the permanent collection yourself. You decide if it's bad, or if it's really bad, but remember—Socrates considered himself an intellectual only on the basis that he knew full well the limits of his knowledge! Perhaps these works, having peaked at their single-figure price tags, can now be prized for their true aesthetic value.

Other Suggested Websites:

Robert Mapplethorpe at www.mapplethorpe.org provides additional photographs as well as biographical information.

The Names Project provides a creative means for remembrance and healing. For recent news, or to view the quilt visit www.aidsquilt.org. This site provides information about the enormity of the AIDS epidemic, opportunities to increase public awareness of AIDS, assistance with HIV prevention education, and how to raise funds for community-based AIDS service organizations.

Group Material creates ambitious exhibitions that combined artifacts such as magazine ads, and other found objects from popular culture with recognized art objects. For more information about this group and to view other works see www.franklinfurnace.org/flow/gpmat/gpmattf.html.

The NEA, The National Endowment for the Arts at www.arts.endow.gov features art, news, interviews and information about grants and funding for the arts.

Guerilla Girls at www.guerrillagirls.com surveys the history of women in the arts and, their participatory site www.ggbb.org allows students to present you’re their own ideas.

Writings of Guillermo Gómez-Peña are made available at www.telefonica.es/fat/egomez.html. His *Temple of Confessions* website provides extensive information about the work and an interactive component at www.echonyc.com/~confess/
For a discussion of **The Sensation Show** read Rightgrrl Co-Founder, Carolyn Gargaro’s *The Brooklyn Museum and the Funding of Art* at www.rightgrrl.com/carolyn/art.html

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

Works in Progress: Mierle Ukeles,
Works in Progress: Guillermo Gómez-Peña
Mobile by Alexander Calder, 1980
The Secret of Marcel Duchamp, 1997
Edouard Manet: Painter of Modern Life, 1983