

Art History I, Year 3 - Modern

Introduction

The images selected for our Art History Memory Work aim to introduce our students to iconic works of art and important artistic styles, but also to reflect and reinforce our studies of history and literature and provide illustrations of life during this period. These notes provide some relevant art historical or historical context, insights into the life of the artist, or observations about the paintings and their history.

Glossary of terms & styles

Renaissance – revival of classical art in Europe in the 14th-16th centuries

Old Master – European painters, 13th-17th century

Dutch Golden Age – period of high cultural achievement in Holland, 1588-1672

Mannerist – elongated, affected style of painting, 1520-1600

Baroque – dramatic, emotional style of painting, 1600-1750

Tenebrism – “darkness” dramatic contrasts of light and dark within a painting

Chiaroscuro – “light and dark”; use of lighter and darker tones to model 3 dimensions

Romantic – passionate, emotional 19th c. style depicting the sublime in nature or history

Paris Salon – the official annual art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris

Royal Academy – London equivalent of the Académie des Beaux-Arts

Pre-Raphaelite – 19th century British artists who preferred earlier, medieval styles

Impressionist – group of French 19th century artists experimenting with new painting styles

Pointillism – experimentation with color, placing tiny dots close together instead of blending

Post-Impressionist – more 19th century artists interested in form rather than light

Expressionist – a style that expresses the artist’s inner perception rather than what is seen

Abstract – art that does not aim to represent material reality

Cubist – depicting perceptions of three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface

Pop Art – “fun” art reflecting popular culture

**1. El Greco, *Adoration of the Shepherds*
c. 1612-1614, oil on canvas, 126” x 71”
Museo del Prado, Madrid**

In the Late Renaissance, a new style of painting developed known as Mannerism. Renaissance artists had emphasized order, calm, and balance (think of Raphael’s *School of Athens*, or Piero della Francesca’s *Baptism of Christ*), but Mannerist artists deliberately distorted or elongated the human body, using bright colors, and dreamlike, surreal compositions to create works that challenged or stimulated the mind rather than soothing it.

El Greco was born on Crete, in Greece. His real name was Domenikos Theotokopoulos, but after he moved to Italy to study painting in Venice, he became commonly known as El Greco (“The Greek”). He studied Byzantine frescos and mosaics and the art of Venice, Florence, and Rome, and then settled in Spain where he painted for the last four decades of his life. Most of his paintings were of religious scenes, although he also painted portraits and one known landscape of Toledo, in Spain. His paintings captured the intense emotional piety of Spanish religious fervor. His style is distinct and recognizable, combining the unrealistic distortions of Mannerism with strong contrasts of light and dark. This was known as tenebrism (from the Latin *tenebrosus*, meaning darkness, like Tenebrae services during Holy Week) and was widely used in Baroque art. The Christ Child’s face is the light source in the painting, and the shadowy, uncertain background adds a sense of mystery.

The Adoration of the Shepherds is El Greco’s last known work, made to hang over his own tomb in the convent of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo. El Greco signed it, in Greek, in the lower left corner. He often painted multiple versions of the same theme; there were eight different versions of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in his studio at his death, including the one now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC.

In contrast to Year 2 Art History, in which most artworks were religiously themed, only 1 of 18 images in both Art History I and II are religious. This was due to several different developments in society. After the Reformation, there was a less of a demand for religious imagery in Protestant parts of Northern Europe. The growth of the increasingly wealthy merchant class created a larger market for luxury goods such as art, in contrast to the Middle Ages when only religious institutions, monarchs and nobles were patrons of the arts. Increasingly, artists painted whatever they wanted to paint, optimistic that they would find a buyer, rather than producing to order for specific commissions as artists in medieval guilds had.

**2. Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*
c. 1665, oil on canvas, 17.7” x 15”
Mauritshuis, The Hague**

This famous painting shows a European girl dressed up in an exotic costume, and oriental turban, and with a large pearl earring. It was not a portrait of an individual, but a type known as a “tronie”, an imaginary study of a type of person. The background originally showed a dark enamel-green curtain, but over the centuries the pigments (indigo and weld) have faded, leaving a seemingly black background. Vermeer is known for his slow and careful work, using expensive pigments, such as ultramarine, made of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, more expensive than gold, and for his multiple layers of paint to add depth and shade, and for his photorealistic attention to light and detail.

Vermeer is known as the greatest painter of the Dutch Golden Age, a time of great financial and cultural expansion in Holland, but in his lifetime, he achieved modest success. He painted fewer than fifty works, of which only 34 have survived. He was more active as an art dealer than a painter, and he also ran an inn. Despite these business interests (or perhaps because of his taste for expensive pigments) he died leaving his wife in debt.

Almost all of Vermeer’s paintings are indoor scenes set in the same two small rooms in a house in Delft. These scenes feature a leaded window to the left, and often a black and white tiled floor on the diagonal. It has been suggested that Vermeer used camera obscura (literally, dark room) to help capture his works. Light passing through a tiny hole into a dark room produces a reversed image on a screen, which could be traced or copied. Experiments using lenses to assist in drawing or painting were recorded in the 17th century. No *camera obscura* was listed in the inventory of his belongings on his death; however, the executor of his estate was Antoine van Leeuwenhoek, the pioneer lens maker known as the father of microbiology, strongly suggesting that Vermeer had an interest in and a familiarity with experiments in lenses.

**3. Jean Honore Fragonard, *The Swing*
1767, oil on canvas, 32” x 25”
Wallace Museum, London**

Young art-lovers may recognize this painting from its cameo appearance in the movie *Frozen*, when Anna sings “For the First Time in Forever” in an art gallery. The image is also echoed in the swing scene in the live-action *Cinderella* movie. The picture itself is quite small and would be easy to miss on the wall at the Wallace Museum in London.

The picture depicts a young woman on a lavish red velvet and gilt swing, propelled by ropes pulled by an older man seated on a stone wall behind her. In front of her, a younger man is hidden in the overgrown garden, and gazes up at her as her shoe flies off her extended leg. Two statues of cupids underscore the atmosphere of secrecy and romance. The *putto* (cupid) statue behind the woman seems to look fearfully up at her, while the statue above the younger, hidden man has his finger to his lips as if warning of a secret. At the foot of the older man is a small white dog, traditionally a symbol of marital fidelity (remember the dog in the Arnolfini portrait?). The dog is yapping anxiously, as though to warn of the hidden intruder. A wooden rake lies abandoned in the foreground, as if to emphasize the choice of pleasure over more serious activities. The central figure of the woman is luminescent in her light, warm colors, and she is framed by the cool blues, greens and shades of the lush garden around her. The setting is both cultivated garden and wild forest, hinting at both civilization and untamed nature. The arm of the younger man, the woman, and the ropes of the swing continuing behind her form a strong diagonal across the canvas while the light source, entering the scene at the top left and continuing to illuminate the mossy ground at the lower right balances this. The composition is carefully balanced, with a male figure and marble statue on each side, without being stiff or formal.

This painting is the epitome of the French Rococo style, a late Baroque development characterized by an interest in love and courtship, playfulness and frivolity, often featuring flowers, pastel colors, and cupids. The word Rococo comes from *rocaille*, a technique of decorating using pebbles and seashells set in cement, seen on grottoes and fountains. Seashell forms were often used in the architecture and decorative styles of the period. The style was associated with the aristocracy, with decadence and frivolity, and was condemned by Enlightenment thinkers who preferred art that emphasized virtue and the nobility of mankind.

**4. John Singleton Copley, *Portrait of Paul Revere*
1768, oil on canvas, 35" x 28"
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**

Our first American work of art! This oil on canvas portrait of Paul Revere was by John Singleton Copley, the most sought-after portrait painter in the colonies. His work was praised by Sir Joshua Reynolds, President of the Royal Academy, when a picture was sent to London for display in 1766, and he painted all the wealthy and important figures of Boston, from both sides of the political divide.

Revere was not a member of the elite, a public figure, or even very involved in Revolutionary politics. He is known for riding to warn of the British coming, although his contribution was largely forgotten until it was made famous by Longfellow's poem in 1861 (and subsequent children's books). Revere was a skilled and successful silversmith and engraver. He is portrayed in his work clothes, an unusually informal choice for a portrait. He is wearing an undone linen shirt, with no cravat, jacket, coat, or wig. The tools of his trade, engraver's burins, lie on the table in front of him, but the table is too smooth and polished to be an actual work bench. He holds a silver teapot; notice how skillfully Copley depicts the reflection of Revere's fingers in the teapot as he holds it, as well as the reflection of his white shirt off the table. The choice of a teapot might be deliberately political. Revere had signed an objection to the tax on tea in 1767, and Copley's father-in-law owned one of the ships that was boarded in the Boston Tea Party five years after the portrait was painted.

It has been suggested that Revere might have paid for this portrait in goods or services for Copley rather than in cash; Revere is known to have made silver frames for miniatures Copley painted. Their professional relationship may have ended after 1770; Copley's brother-in-law, Henry Pelham, made an engraving of the Boston Massacre and lent it to Revere to look at. Revere who directly copied the composition (with remarkable accuracy!) and then advertised his own engravings for sale before Pelham's were available, undercutting Pelham's market with plagiarized work.

The portrait was kept by descendants of the Revere family and did not go on public view until 1928.

5. **Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*
1829-1833, woodcut print from the series, *Thirty Six Views of Mount Fuji*, 10” x 15”**

This iconic image is the most famous of a set of 36 prints, all featuring Mount Fuji, a large snow-capped volcano in Japan. The volcano sometimes dominates the compositions, but in others, such as this, it is reduced to a detail in the background. Most of the prints illustrate activities from daily life; in this instance, the three fishing boats, each with a tiny crew of huddled, blue-coated fisherman hanging on for dear life, dwarfed by the wave which is about to crash on them.

Hokusai's prints were often collected as souvenirs by tourists in Japan, or pilgrims visiting Mount Fuji, which was considered sacred by many. The set was so popular that Hokusai added another ten images, to make a total of 46 in the series. Unlike the European woodcut of the rhinoceros by Durer which we looked at last year, this is a polychrome (many-color) print, meaning that it was printed in multiple layers, using a separate block of wood for each color, and finishing with black lines to add detail and break up the flat unblended areas of colors.

From 1640 until the 1850s, Japan was largely closed off from European trade, with only limited interaction with China and Holland allowed. It is interesting to note that Hokusai uses Prussian Blue, a synthetic pigment which was invented in Europe and brought to Japan via this limited trade, as well as the traditional plant-derived indigo blue. After 1850, when trade was forced open by American naval commodore Matthew C. Perry, there was a fascination with all things Japanese in Europe, and European artists began to show Japanese influence in their works. The Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera, *The Mikado*, was part of this fashion for Japonisme.

6. John James Audubon, *American Flamingo* 1829-38, hand-colored engraving, 39" x 26"

In 1820, aged 35, John James Audubon, having tried his hand without much success at farming, mill-owning, and taxidermy, decided to create the greatest book of birds ever, by cataloguing every species of bird in North America. He hired a 12-year-old apprentice, Joseph Mason, and they journeyed on a flatboat down the Mississippi to begin the endeavor. Mason was responsible for accurately painting the plants of each bird's habitat.

Audubon spent the next 18 years roaming the states, observing birds in their natural habitat and acquiring specimens which were taxidermized (preserved) to be drawn in dynamic, naturalistic positions, held in place by wires and strings. His works are known for their attention to detail, and observation of the behavior, characteristics, and habitat of each species.

Audubon catalogued 489 species, five of which have since become extinct, three of which are possibly extinct, and five are mystery species which have not been observed or recorded by anyone else. Audubon was also known to be a prankster; he described several imaginary species to a rival French naturalist, Constantine Rafinesque, including 11 fish (one with "bulletproof scales"), two birds, a 'tri-valved' brachiopod, three snails, two plants, and nine wild rats. Rafinesque accepted Audubon's accounts and these species remained published in scientific journals for over 50 years before the truth was discovered. It is not impossible that the mystery species in *Birds of America* are another prank.

Audubon worked in watercolors, pastel crayons, and occasionally pencil, chalk, gouache, charcoal, or pen and ink. His drawings were engraved onto large copper plates and printed, then hand-colored by a team of fifty watercolorists working in assembly lines, each applying a single color. A total of 435 engravings were published in groups of five (one large, one medium, and three small illustrations) between 1827 and 1838, in Edinburgh and London. The prints were huge, each printed on single sheets of paper measuring 39.5 x 28.5 inches, a size known as "Double Elephant folio", to allow the artist to illustrate the birds at life-size. The prints were usually bound by the owners into four volume sets. There was no text with the illustrations; if there had been text, Audubon would have been required by law to donate copies to England's copyright libraries, and he wanted to avoid this cost. An accompanying volume of text, called *Ornithological Biography, or, An account of the habits of the birds of the United States*, was published in 1839.

In 1844, Audubon published a more affordable "octavo" edition. Hand-pressed books are usually described as folio, quarto, or octavo, depending on how many times the original sheet of paper has been folded. A folio (a single sheet of paper) folded once is called a folio. A book made by sheets of paper folded twice is called quarto size, and folded three times, an octavo. It is estimated that 180-200 complete or partial sets were produced, of which around 120 are still complete today. Others have been lost or separated for framing as individual prints. The original watercolors, from which the plates were engraved, are at the New York Historical Society, and they maintain a rotating exhibition of one plate at a time. On March 10, 2000, Christie's sold a complete set of *Birds of America* for \$8.8 million.

**7. Emmanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*
1851, oil on canvas, 149” x 255”
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

This famous painting shows an incident in the Revolutionary War when Washington led his army across the icy Delaware river on the night of December 25, 1776, to launch a surprise attack on the Hessian mercenaries fighting for the British and camped in New Jersey. The attack came at a time when colonials were losing confidence in the war. Many of the Continental soldiers’ enlistments were due to expire at the end of the year, and large numbers intended to leave the army, discouraged by recent losses. On December 19, Thomas Paine had published a pamphlet entitled “The American Crisis”, encouraging Americans to persevere against these difficulties, declaring that “these are the times that try men’s souls”. Washington had ordered all his troops to read Paine’s stirring words to inspire them for the attack ahead.

The crossing took most of the night, starting after dark at six in the evening, with all troops, horses, and artillery finally on the other side of the river by three in the morning. It was completed, in the words of one soldier, “with almost infinite difficulty.” The password for the dangerous mission were the stirring words, “Victory or death.” The British troops were taken by surprise and quickly defeated, and Washington’s troops returned across the river. This time they were encumbered by prisoners, supplies they had taken, and several barrels of rum which were opened against strict orders, and which may explain why several soldiers fell overboard on the return crossing. The success of the attack had a great effect on the morale of the troops and on general enthusiasm for the war. Washington then led a third crossing on December 29, to finish off the retreating British troops in Princeton.

The expedition was painted by a German artist, over 60 years later, during the revolutions of 1848, a widespread series of uprisings across Europe against various monarchies and governments. Leutze hoped to inspire these movements by illustrating American success against the British. He painted three versions; the large canvas in the Metropolitan Museum, a much smaller canvas, which was in the White House until 2022, when it was sold, and a version kept in Germany, where it was destroyed by bombing in World War II. The large canvas in the Met has a companion piece, *Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth*, in a library at the University of California at Berkeley. Why do you think *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is so much more well-known than *Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth*?

The painting is in the Romantic style, a style which sought to move and impress the viewer, to express the extreme and the sublime in both history and nature. The painting depicts the events dramatically, rather than strictly accurately. The crossing would have been in the dark, but that would not make such a good picture. No general would stand in Washington’s heroic stance in such a small rowboat as he would risk falling in the icy river or capsizing the boat. In fact, the boats used were those used for ferrying coaches across the river – 40-60 feet long, with flat bottoms and high sides – but again, that would not have made such a stirring image! The artist included a flag design that was not created until a year later, and he carefully included a variety of types of soldiers, to illustrate the solidarity of the people against tyranny. There is a soldier in a Scottish bonnet, a man of African descent who has been identified as Prince Whipple, a freed

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man; there is a western rifleman in a fur hat at the stern, a farmer in a broad brimmed hat, and a man in native American clothing (a bandolier bag and moccasins) at the stern.

**8. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Proserpina*
1874, oil on canvas, 49” x 24”
Tate, London**

This painting depicts Proserpina, daughter of Jupiter and Ceres, the goddess of harvest, who according to Greek myth was snatched by Pluto, the god of the underworld, to live as his wife. Ceres begged Jupiter to persuade Pluto to release her, and he agreed on the condition that Proserpina had not eaten any fruit while in the underworld. Unfortunately, Proserpina had eaten six pomegranate seeds and was thus allowed to spend six months of the year with her mother on earth, during which six months Ceres was happy and the plants and fruit grew (summer), and six months in the underworld, during which Ceres mourned and nothing grew (winter).

The scroll at the top right is a sonnet about Proserpina, by the artist, and he has signed the canvas on another scroll at lower left. The ivy suggests clinging memory and is evocative of graveyards and death; the incense burner at lower left indicates Proserpina’s status as an immortal, and the rising smoke is the only movement in the contemplative composition. The original subject of the painting was to be Eve holding an apple; it is not certain why the subject was changed from Biblical to Classical, but look at Proserpina’s hands; With her left, she holds the tempting fruit up towards her mouth, and has already taken a fateful bite, but her right hand wraps around the left wrist, as though she is locked in a struggle with herself.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, brother of Christina Rossetti, was both a poet and a painter, and he included one of his sonnets in this painting. Rossetti was a member of a group known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They believed that art had reached a high point in the late medieval period and had then declined; they preferred the simple lines and large flat areas of color over the dramatic light (tenebrism) and shading of the Mannerist and Baroque artists that followed Raphael. The Pre-Raphaelites wanted to rediscover to this earlier style. They painted religious scenes and scenes from history and literature, in contrast to many contemporary painters who preferred to experiment with new ways of depicting the real world around them – either in mundane scenes, such as realists, or in the effects of light, like Impressionists.

**9. Edgar Degas, *The Dance Class*
1873, oil on canvas, 32” x 30”
Musee d’Orsay, Paris**

Edgar Degas was a classically educated and trained artist, who studied Renaissance paintings at the Louvre, and travelled extensively in Italy, drawing and sketching. His earlier works are of traditional “academic” subjects, drawn from history or mythology. In 1874 he exhibited with a group named “The Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Printmakers”, a group of artists of various novel and experimental styles whose work had been rejected from the Salon, the annual exhibition of work selected by the official Académie des Beaux Arts. These “rejected” artists organized their own alternative exhibition. One of the works included was Claude Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise*. Critics argue that it was only an impression, a sketch or study, and not a carefully finished work of art, and from this came the name by which the group would be known, “Impressionists.”

Degas, although he had been a founding member of the group and an organizer of the exhibition, was never entirely comfortable with the name “Impressionist,” preferring to be called a Realist or Independent. He had relatively little interest in the “plein air” nature scenes, which many of the impressionists preferred to paint. He painted indoors, in the dimmer light of cafes, theaters, bars, and dance studios, depicting the inhabitants of Paris – dancers, laundresses, and milliners (hat makers). He had been very influenced by the Japanese prints imported to Paris, and incorporated not just the themes of working-class people, but also inventive compositions, unusual viewing angles, and surprising cropping and asymmetry.

The Dance Class is just one of over 1500 depictions of dancers that Degas created. He was fascinated by the human body in motion, and he emphasized the hard work and fatigue that went into dance as much as the beauty of the performance. This painting shows a dance class led by the famous Parisian ballet master Jules Perrot. He is the center of the composition, holding the cane he used to beat time on the floor; the diagonal lines of the floorboards lead the eye to him. A green watering can stands next to the piano leg; this was used to dampen the floor to avoid slipping.

**10. Vincent van Gogh, *Sunflowers*
1888, oil on canvas, 36" x 29"
National Gallery, London**

Van Gogh was the quintessential eccentric, troubled, penniless artist. He sold only one painting in his lifetime. He never married but was involved in a series of troubled potential engagements and relationships. He lived for a while in Paris, where he was friends with artists such as Gauguin and Bonnard who were experimenting with artistic styles that went beyond Impressionism. Impressionists had sought to capture the impression of the light or landscape, rather than recording photographic accuracy, but Post-Impressionists moved toward more individualistic, abstracted, and expressionist styles.

Van Gogh moved to Arles in the south of France and was supported financially by his younger brother Theo, an art dealer. Van Gogh cut off his own ear during an episode of mental ill health and high emotions, possibly after an argument with the artist Paul Gauguin. He spent a year self-confined in a mental asylum, during which he painted what he could see around him, and copied works by artists he admired. His paintings were beginning to attract critical praise when he died aged 37 from an infection following a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

His early works included depictions of peasants, and still-lives, and he worked in a gloomy palette of browns and greys. He moved to the south of France where he painted more landscapes and studies of nature, and incorporated vivid blues and yellows inspired by the sun-drenched skies and fields around him. His works are remarkable for their innovative expressive brushstrokes and unblended, vivid colors, often experimenting with new chemically formulated pigments. He incorporated Pointillism, a technique pioneered by the artist Georges Seurat (see Art History II, Unit 9), of applying dabs of unblended color next to each other and allowing the eye of the viewer to blend the colors into vivid tonal effects.

He painted seven different versions of a vase of sunflowers; this version is in the National Gallery in London, and other versions can be seen in Tokyo, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, and Munich. One is in a private collection, and one was destroyed by bombing in World War II. The arrangements show sunflowers in all stages of bloom, from bud to withering and were notable for their use of the yellow spectrum. Van Gogh wrote, "It's a type of painting that changes its aspect a little, which grows in richness the more you look at it."

**11. Winslow Homer, *Snap the Whip*
1872, oil on canvas, 12” x 20”
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

Winslow Homer is one of the greatest American painters of the 19th Century. He was born in Boston, started work as a commercial printmaker, and studied oil painting briefly. In 1861 he was sent to Virginia as the artist correspondent for the newly launched *Harper's Weekly*, to illustrate scenes from the Civil War. After the war, he lived mostly in New York, painting scenes from the surrounding areas – New Jersey, the Adirondacks, and New Hampshire. In 1866 he spent ten months in Paris, where the Impressionists were making an impact. His paintings shared the Impressionists' interest in subject matter – nature, and scenes of people and activities from daily life, as well as their interest in outdoor light.

This scene of schoolboys playing outside a traditional red schoolhouse was a typical wholesome genre scene of innocence and nostalgia, a style popular with Americans seeking healing after the tragedy of the Civil War. It was also an image of a developing American identity – the carefree, barefoot boys at play embody energy and exuberance, evoking a hopeful future for the country. This scene evokes so many of the books we read this year, from *Tom Sawyer* to *Farmer Boy*, and all the other classics of 19th century American childhood.

Homer painted two versions of this scene; the larger version, now in Ohio has a hilly background. This is the smaller version which hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, in which he has replaced the hills with a wide-open sky. The original setting is thought to be based on the Hurley schoolhouse in the Catskills, NY. He depicted the same schoolhouse in another of his paintings, *School Time*. In a print for *Harper's Weekly* magazine, a teacher sits inside a school room supervising a child who has lost break time as a punishment. Through the window, other children can be seen playing Snap the Whip – clearly a popular game!

**12. Pierre August Renoir, *Les Parapluies (The Umbrellas)*
1886, oil on canvas, 71” x 45”
National Gallery, London**

Renoir was an apprentice in a porcelain factory who used to spend his free time studying the art in the Louvre Museum in Paris. He began to take painting and drawing art lessons himself, and studied alongside other innovative artists in Paris at the time, such as Claude Monet, Edouard Manet, and Pissarro. He first exhibited in the Paris Salon in 1864, but after a series of rejections there, he showed six paintings at the First Impressionist Exhibition in 1874. The following year he exhibited six portraits, hoping to make his name and generate a living as a commercial portrait painter.

He was one of the first artists to experiment with Impressionism, exhibiting in the first Impressionist exhibition after his works were rejected by the Paris Salon, the annual exhibition of the Academy. Renoir was a prolific and successful artist, completing over 1200 paintings in his lifetime. However, in 1885, after a trip to Italy to study the Old Masters, he wrote of his realization that, “I had gone as far as I could with Impressionism, and I realized I could neither paint nor draw”. He returned to a more classical style of painting and developed a more formal and disciplined technique.

Renoir began “Umbrellas” in 1880, using the loose, painterly brushwork typical of Impressionist style, and very dark and bright tones. In 1886 he returned to the unfinished work and reworked it in a more classical style. Notice the difference in styles between the women; the figure on the left is more solid and detailed, and the mother and two young girls on the right are painted in a more Impressionistic style, with lighter, more feathery brushstrokes. He also reworked the clothes of the central female to the left; x-ray examination of the canvas has shown that she was previously wearing a more ornately decorated dress, more typical of the middle classes, with horizontal rows of frills, and white lace at the cuffs and collar. She was previously wearing a hat; now, bareheaded, in a plain dress and carrying a hatbox, she appears to be a working-class milliner’s assistant. The composition is unusual, with empty space at the center of the canvas. The milliner’s assistant looks directly out at the viewer, making eye contact with us, as does the little girl behind her, whose hoop echoes the circular basket. The other characters – mainly women and children, often the subjects of Renoir’s paintings - are caught up in the bustle of a crowded city street. Although the young woman is bare-headed and carries no umbrella, the arching shapes of the crowd’s umbrellas seem to shelter her, and the vibrant blues used throughout the scene give cohesion and energy to the painting. The model for the female figure, Suzanne Valadon, was a model for several artists before becoming a celebrated painter in her own right.

**13. Claude Monet, *Waterlilies*
1899, oil on canvas, 90” x 90”
Princeton University Museum of Art.**

This famous painting by the French Impressionist artist Claude Monet is in the Princeton University Museum of Art – although there is another version in the Met, one in the National Gallery in DC, one in the Boston Museum of Fine Art, one in Tokyo, one in London, one in Moscow Monet painted at least twelve different versions of this bridge over the waterlilies, and a total of 250 paintings of the waterlilies at his house in Giverny, France, during the last thirty years of his life.

Monet was the driving force behind the Impressionists, a group of artists who were in different styles rebelling against the conformity of the academic style taught in art schools at the time. Every year, the Académie des Beaux Artes held an exhibition, the Salon. Aspiring artists submitted their paintings for inclusion, and critical or popular acclaim at the exhibition could make the reputation and fortune of a painter. However, the Académie only approved of traditional, academic paintings – neo-classical or romantic styles – and routinely rejected anything too experimental. In 1874 a group of artists whose works had been repeatedly rejected held their own exhibition, calling themselves the “Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers”. Their name deliberately excluded any mention of style, as the group were all experimenting with different ideas. They came to be known collectively as “Impressionists”, a term coined by a disdainful critic on seeing Monet’s painting, “Impression, Sunrise”. Monet was a key member of the group and is considered the epitome of the Impressionist style. He was interested in the way that light altered the perceived color of objects, and in the effects of the juxtaposition of different colors next to each other. He painted urban landscapes, seascapes, buildings, nature, and people engaged in leisure activities. He did not paint the subjects long considered most important by the Academy – religious and historical scenes, and only rarely did he paint portraits.

Painting in nature was a common theme for Impressionists. As a result of new technologies, paints were available ready to use and easily portable in tubes; previously, pigments had to be prepared and mixed in the studio. Painting outdoors, or “En Plein Aire” opened up new opportunities for artists.

Towards the end of his life, his style became even more avant-garde, verging on abstract; he was interested in colors and shapes rather than specific objects and the details of scenes. His sight was deteriorating during this time. In 1908, after a cataracts operation, he visited Venice with his wife, who wrote to their daughter, “happy to see Monet so impassioned, doing such beautiful things and – between you and me – something other than those same old waterlilies”!

14. Frederic Remington, *The Old Stagecoach*

1901, oil on canvas, 27” x 40”

The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas

Frederic Sackride Remington was the quintessential artist of the American West. He specialized in paintings of Native Americans, cowboys, and the US Cavalry. He was born in New York but moved west after buying a share in a sheep ranch in Kansas. After travelling through the west, he set up a studio in Brooklyn and sold his illustrations to magazines such as *Harper's Weekly*. He worked as a war correspondent during the Spanish-American War and made frequent sketching trips to the west. By 1890 he moved his studio to New Rochelle (just a mile from St Catherine's, Pelham!) He furnished this studio with his collected objects from out west: "All four walls of the studio were covered, above doors and windows and in their dead spaces, with military and Indian and Mexican trappings of all descriptions from spurs to war-bonnets; there were guns of every kind every carried by an American soldier; all kinds of swords and bridles, saddles, belts, canteens, cartridge-boxes, powder-horns, bayonets, and knives... In short, everything he might need for any Western picture."

In 1895 he experimented with clay modelling and bronze casting and began to produce the lively and energetic bronze statuettes of horses and cowboys for which he is most famous.

The Old Stagecoach was the painting for the lithograph cover of *The Century* magazine in January 1902, featuring an article on "The Great West", also by the artist. Stagecoaches were by then almost completely outdated; their decline had begun in 1869 with the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. They were still used in more remote areas until the coming of the automobile in the early 1900s made them obsolete. They carried mail, money, goods and passengers from the Missouri River to the West coast. Both Wells Fargo (now a bank) and American Express (a credit card company) had their beginnings in the stagecoach business or "express industry" (hence American Express's name). The most prized contracts were for the US Mail, which required them to cover 2,800 miles in 25 days or less. Journeys were broken up by stops at stations; "swing stations" for brief breaks to change horses and allow passengers to stretch their legs, and "home stations" for a meagre meal and an overnight bed for passengers – which might simply be a dirt floor. Drivers would sound a bugle to alert the station that they were arriving. The coaches seated nine passengers inside, on three benches, and more on the top. An armed guard would ride next to the driver (hence, "riding shotgun". The coaches were suspended from the frame on wide leather straps, to absorb some of the jolting.

The Old Stagecoach of the Plains is an ingenious composition; the artist has made an essentially horizontal subject – a coach and team of six horses – fit into and fill the vertical format of a magazine cover. It is typical of Remington's attention to dramatic narrative and anecdotal detail; the coach is on the verge of headlong descent towards the viewer, the horses seem ready to run out of the canvas toward the viewer. No danger is visible, but the scene is full of an energy and foreboding that makes the viewer want to know more, Notice the vivid pinpricks of the stars in the sky, two shadowy figures on the box silhouetted against the dusky sky, and two more in the shadows, and the lantern-lit interior of the coach.

**15. Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*
1904, bronze, 72” tall
Rodin Museum, Paris**

This monumental bronze statue, famous from the movie *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian*, was originally named “The Poet”, and was designed as part of an elaborate bronze doorframe, named “The Gates of Hell”: and depicting scenes from *Dante’s Inferno*, a 13th C. Italian poem. It was to be the entryway for a museum of the decorative arts in Paris, France. The doorway was never finished, and the museum was never built, but several of the figures in Rodin’s design were cast as individual, monumentally sized works, and are some of his best-known works today.

The Thinker was larger than all the other figures in the design. One theory is that he represented Dante, the writer and protagonist of the story, but that would not explain why he is nude. It might be that Rodin was using nudity to represent man at his most elemental, universal, and heroic. Other theories are that the figure suggests the biblical figure Adam, the mythical figure Prometheus, or was even a self-portrait of Rodin himself. The figure is muscular and tensed, as though for action, yet lost in contemplative thought, evoking both power of body and mind simultaneously. In the original context of the “Gates of Hell”, the implication is that “The Poet” was contemplating the fate of the damned. As a free-standing work, it is used as an image to represent philosophy more generally.

It was apparently workers in the foundry where the first casting was made who named it “The Thinker”, seeing in it a resemblance to Michelangelo’s statue of Lorenzo de Medici, Duke of Urbino, known as *il Pensiero* (the thinker). The original casting was 28” high, but it was recast in a larger than life-size bronze. At least 28 of these full-size statues were cast, both during the artist’s lifetime and after his death. A full-size casting can be seen at Columbia University in New York City, and a smaller casting at the Metropolitan Museum.

Auguste Rodin is known as the “founder of modern sculpture”. He experimented with a naturalistic and individualistic style. He visited Italy in 1875 and was fascinated by the works of Donatello and Michelangelo – he declared that “It was Michelangelo who freed me from academic sculpture”.

Rodin had a cast of “The Thinker” placed at his tomb in Meudon, France, as both headstone and epitaph.

**16. Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Dora Maar*
1937, oil on canvas, 36” x 26”
Musee Picasso, Paris**

The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. He was a founder of Cubism, of collage as a recognized art form, and of constructed sculpture – sculpture put together from existing objects rather than cast from bronze or carved from stone. Picasso’s father was a traditional academic artist who recognized his son’s talent at a young age and enrolled him in art school. Pablo disliked formal instruction and rarely attended classes, instead spending hours at the Prado Museum where he studied works by Velasquez, Goya, and Van Eyck, among others. His first works were in traditional academic style (see his *The First Communion* of 1896). He moved to Paris, the art capital of Europe, and was influenced by the avant-garde artists exploring new trends and breaking old rules. His works went through distinct phases – the Blue Period, the Rose Period, an interest in African art and primitivism, and the exploration of cubism, Neoclassicism and Surrealism. He was a prolific artist; on his death, his estate contained over 45,000 unsold works of art in every medium imaginable – paintings, drawings, prints, collage, sculpture, and ceramics.

The *Portrait of Dora Maar* belongs to his cubist stage. Cubists rejected the limitations of reproducing a single perspective on a canvas. Instead of simply recreating what the human eye can see of an object at one time, they expanded the challenge to attempting to convey the totality of the object. Instead of creating the illusion of three dimensions on a one-dimensional canvas, using techniques such as shading and linear perspective, they instead depicted all the different facets dissolved and reconfigured in whatever arrangement they found artistically pleasing. In the *Portrait of Dora Maar*, the viewer sees both profile and frontal face at once. The art no longer imitates what we see, but conveys what we know is there, in a reconfigured form. At the time of painting, the 29-year-old Maar was in a “tense and tempestuous” relationship with Picasso. The vivid, unblended colors, the heavy use of black, and strong, harsh lines, may suggest tensions present between the two, and possibly also anxiety about the civil war in Spain that had begun the previous year. The subject appears to look toward the viewer, but also, simultaneously, inward towards herself. This portrait, considered one of the artist’s masterpieces, can be seen in the Picasso Museum in Paris.

17. Norman Rockwell, *Freedom of Speech*

1943, oil on canvas, 46" x 35"

Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, Massachusetts

This painting was one of a series of four, known as The Four Freedoms, painted after President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union speech. The Four Freedoms are: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Religion, Freedom from Fear, Freedom from Want. The first two of these freedoms are enshrined in the US Constitution; coincidentally, the artist considered these to be the most successful paintings of the set of four.

The scene depicted is based on an actual event, a town meeting in Arlington, Vermont, in 1942. The town was planning to build a new school, to replace a building that had burnt down. Only one attendee at the meeting, a farmer named Jim Edgerton, objected. He was concerned about the increased tax burden, as his farm had suffered recently from disease among the livestock, and he could not afford higher taxes. Edgerton stands out from the other figures; in a room of white shorts, ties, and jackets, he alone is wearing a plaid shirt, a suede jacket, and has dirty hands, implying a contrast between manual and professional labor. Yet he is depicted as noble – some suggest there is a deliberate likeness to Abraham Lincoln in his features. He speaks his mind freely, as the rest of the room listen politely, respectfully, attentively. The scene is a model of civic order and courtesy. The empty space on the front bench invites the viewer to enter the scene and take part in the meeting himself.

The painting was illustrated in *The Saturday Evening Post* alongside an essay by the artist describing a fictitious conversation between Hitler and Mussolini, who explain their plans to become dictators and agree with each other that the very first step was to outlaw free speech. The painting itself was taken on a tour around the nation for exhibition and raised over \$132 million in war bonds to assist in fighting World War II.

Norman Rockwell worked for over five decades as a painter and illustrator for magazines and newspapers, producing over 4000 original works. He is particularly known for his covers for *The Saturday Evening Post*. As he began his career as an artist, his secret ambition was to have his work published on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*. He achieved his ambition and more, creating a total of 323 covers for *The Post* over the course of 47 years. His work was not treated seriously by art critics in his lifetime; unlike the experimental and abstract styles popular in the art world, his work was representative and even idealized, sentimental, patriotic, and often humorous. He captured the essence of small-town East Coast life, just as Remington had captured and recorded the scenes of the frontier West. Both artists spent time living in New Rochelle – Rockwell had a house just a mile from Lake Isle!

All Four Freedoms are at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and are well worth a visit.

**18. Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Tomato Soup*
1961-1962, acrylic with metallic enamel paint on canvas, 20" x 16"
Museum of Modern Art, New York**

A new school of art that developed in the 1950s and 1960s was Pop Art, short for Popular (or, more specifically, Pop Culture) Art. Other artists were experimenting with the idea that images that were widely popular and attractive were also worthy of the admiration and respect of “the Art World” – the critics, museums, galleries, and collectors who could make the fame and fortune of an artist. Roy Lichtenstein was working with cartoon strips, and Claes Oldenburg was making giant sculptures out of everyday objects. Warhol hit on the idea of depicting a simple can of soup, with its instantly recognizable label. He produced 32 different canvases, one for each flavor of Campbell’s soup available. The paintings were made by projecting an image of the soup can onto the canvas and then filling the image by hand, with acrylic and metal enamel paint. After his first success, Warhol returned to the theme of Campbell’s soup over the course of his career, later producing silkscreen prints of the same images, and other versions with alternate color schemes. The original series of paintings was exhibited at a gallery in Los Angeles in 1962. Viewers were initially unsure what to make of the paintings. Rival galleries displayed pyramids of real soup cans, suggesting that art lovers should buy the originals at a far cheaper price. The display succeeded in sparking a debate; could this depiction of a mundane object be considered “art”? Campbell’s Soup Company considered legal action for the unauthorized use of its brand name, but wisely decided to wait and see what the public reaction to the paintings would be.

The outrageously banal subject matter generated debate, publicity, and fame for the artist. The Museum of Modern Art in New York bought the whole series. Warhol had not specified which order they should be displayed in, so the museum hung them in chronological order of each flavor being introduced sold by Campbells. Warhol said of the series, “I just paint things I always thought were beautiful, things you use every day and never think about ... I’m working on soup ... I just do it because I like it”.

Warhol was infamous for his self-promotion and outrageous attention-seeking behavior. He allegedly declared once that, “In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes”. He had a more serious side too, though, and frequently attended mass at St. Vincent Ferrer church in Manhattan.

