

# NORTON SIMON MUSEUM

## STUDENT PREPARATORY PACKET

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### Introduction to the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known as one of the world's most remarkable private art collections. Seven centuries of European art dating from the Renaissance to the 20th century are on permanent display, including Old Master paintings by Raphael, Rubens, Zurbarán, Rembrandt and Goya. The Museum also features a celebrated Impressionist and Post-Impressionist collection—with paintings by Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh and Cézanne—as well as 20th-century works by Picasso, Matisse and Brancusi. Moreover, the Museum has one of the premier collections of South and Southeast Asian art in the country, spanning a period of 2,000 years.

#### Curriculum Materials

The following curriculum materials are intended to help prepare your students for their tour. These materials include lesson plans and vocabulary guides for a selection of artworks. You may also find it helpful to visit our [website](#), where you can find information about special exhibitions, podcasts and a collections database with information about individual works of art.

#### Lesson Overview

Each lesson provides brief background information about the artwork and artist, followed by questions that promote observation and discussion. Suggested classroom activities offer students the opportunity to explore the collection through writing and art-making projects.

#### Learning Objectives

Students are encouraged to:

- *take time to look closely*
- *describe what they see*
- *connect the visual arts with historical periods and religious traditions*
- *create original artworks focusing on themes and formal elements of art found in works from the Norton Simon Museum*

#### Curriculum Standards

The materials address content standards for California public schools in visual arts, history–social science and Common Core English-language arts for grades 5–12.

*Madonna and Child with Book*, c. 1502–3

Raffaello Sanzio, called Raphael

Italian, 1483–1520

Oil on panel

21¾ x 15¾ in. (55.2 x 40 cm)

## Raphael: Renaissance Master

Raffaello Sanzio, known as Raphael, was an Italian **Renaissance** painter, draftsman and architect whose contemporaries included Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. His beautiful depictions of the Madonna emphasized her humanity by means of naturalism and personal interactions.

## Key Concepts

Raphael's *Madonna and Child with Book* exemplifies the beginning of High **Renaissance** expression.



Using geometry and **atmospheric perspective**, Raphael provided order to the visual information presented in the painting. Note how the tight, triangular format imposed over both figures anchors them in the illusionistic window, and how light and dark areas divide the upper and lower halves of the composition and distinguish the **foreground** from the distant **background**.

Raphael enlivened and made intimate one of the most conventional subjects in Christian art by linking the Madonna and Child through gaze and gesture with naturalism and grace.

## A Closer Look at *Madonna and Child with Book*

- The inscription in the book introduces the ninth hour, a prayer recited daily by monastic communities. It commemorates Christ's crucifixion and death, and thus refers to the Madonna and Child's future sacrifice.
- In paintings, Mary nearly always wears a red dress with a blue robe. The blue is partly a reference to her title as the Queen of Heaven (the heavens are associated with the blue of the sky), but it also communicates her significance in **Renaissance** Italy. The blue pigment was made from the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli, which had to be imported from Afghanistan and was very expensive. The fact that this pigment was so precious and was reserved for her depiction reflects Mary's importance to the **patrons** who commissioned these paintings.
- The positioning of the Madonna and Child in the **foreground** with a distant landscape behind them makes them appear very close to the viewer and, together with the tenderness between mother and child, gives the scene a sense of intimacy.

## Discussion Questions

- This painting foreshadows Christ's death, and yet Mary and Jesus don't seem particularly sad. How would you describe their mood and expressions?
- Do you think the figures appear lifelike or unrealistic? What about the figures is **naturalistic**, and what about them is not **naturalistic**?

## Activity

- Compare this painting of the Madonna and Child with Giovanni di Paolo's [Branchini Madonna](#). What elements did both Paolo and Raphael use to identify the Madonna and Child in their paintings? How do their portrayals of the Madonna and Child differ? What effect do these changes have on the paintings?

## Vocabulary

- **Atmospheric perspective:** as space recedes into the distance in a painting, the intensity of the color fades, and there is less contrast between the lights and darks. The farther into the background, the lighter and cooler the color.
- **Background:** the part of a scene or picture that is farthest from the viewer.
- **Foreground:** the part of a scene or picture that is nearest to the viewer.
- **Patrons:** the people who commission or buy a work of art; supporters of the arts.
- **Naturalistic:** closely imitating nature in appearance.
- **Renaissance:** a cultural and artistic movement that revived classical art and literature. It spanned from the 14th through the 17th centuries, beginning in Italy and then spreading to the rest of Europe. The High Renaissance refers to the artistic style of the early decades of the 16th century. It was in these years that the achievements of the 15th century were brought to their highest expression and some of the greatest masters of Western painting rose to prominence—Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Titian.



ABOVE:

*Branchini Madonna*, 1427

Giovanni di Paolo

Italian, 1403–1482

Tempera and gold leaf on panel

72 x 39 in. (182.9 x 99.1 cm)

*Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose*, 1633

Francisco de Zurbarán

Spanish, 1598–1664

Oil on canvas

24½ x 43⅞ in. (62.2 x 109.5 cm)

## Zurbarán: A Rare Still Life by the Spanish Master

Influenced by the realism of [Caravaggio](#) and the religious fervor of Catholic Spain, Francisco de Zurbarán was one of the leading Spanish painters of the 17th century. The artist was primarily known for his paintings of saints and other religious subjects, and this is his only signed and dated **still life**.



### Key Concepts

Here Zurbarán depicted a classical **still life** that features inanimate, commonplace items. He carefully staged the motifs in an enclosed space and adopted an austere **chiaroscuro** to illuminate them, making them appear more dramatic and significant.

As a 17th-century Baroque artist, Zurbarán embraced various subjects and created highly naturalistic **compositions** that appealed to the senses and reduced the gap between the painting and the living world of the viewer.

In the devoutly Catholic Spain of Zurbarán's time, these objects, highlighted and isolated on a simple table, carried **symbolic** importance and allowed the artist to use motifs from the sensory world in the service of the spiritual realm.

### A Closer Look at *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose*

- The three groupings of objects are an allusion to the Christian Trinity (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit).
- The oranges with their blossoms, the cup of water and the thornless rose all represent the Virgin Mary's purity.
- Zurbarán created a masterful representation of a variety of textures, including the smooth, reflective surface of the plates, the rough skin of the citrons and oranges and the tactile weave of the basket.



### Discussion Questions

- How did Zurbarán direct our attention to the objects in the **still life**?
- How did Zurbarán create a unified composition despite the separation of objects?

### Activity

- Create your own **still life** with objects that are meaningful to you. Then try to mimic the look of different textures with different drawing and/or painting techniques.

## Vocabulary

- **Chiaroscuro** (pronounced *kee-ar-oh-skoo-ro*): the use of boldly contrasting darks and lights.
- **Composition**: the overall arrangement of the different parts and elements of an artwork.
- **Still life**: the depiction of primarily inanimate objects, such as flowers or fruit, by an artist.
- **Symbolism**: the use of an object or image to represent an idea or belief.

*David Slaying Goliath*, c. 1616

Peter Paul Rubens

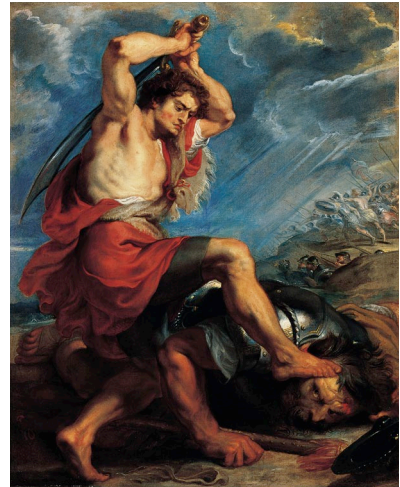
Flemish, 1577–1640

Oil on canvas

48⅜ x 39 in. (122.9 x 99.1 cm)

## Rubens: A Flair for Drama

Known for his exuberant colors and expressive **brushwork**, Peter Paul Rubens is considered the greatest Flemish **Baroque** painter of his age. The artist's passion for classical and Renaissance art, which he studied in Italy before painting this subject, informed his approach.



## Key Concepts

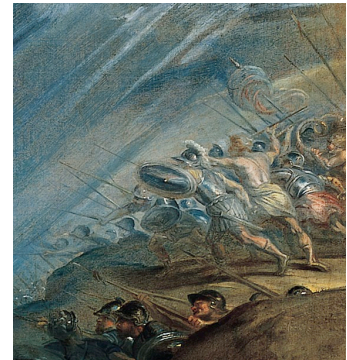
*David Slaying Goliath* epitomizes the physicality of Rubens's energetic style, which fully expresses the **Baroque** spirit. Color is given more significance than line. Every element seems to be active and in motion, from the protagonists in the foreground to the rush of the armies in the distance.

Rubens's rich, luminous color and glowing light appeal to our senses and emotions. His genius as a **Counter-Reformation** artist is linked to his strong visual and emotional appeal.

Rubens chose not to portray David, the young shepherd who slayed the opposing army's giant, Goliath, as an adolescent. Instead, he broke with convention to depict the future king of Israel as an athletic warrior.

## A Closer Look at *David Slaying Goliath*

- Distant armies in the background provide context for the main event.
- Notice how David and Goliath nearly fill the canvas and how the clouds frame David, highlighting his silhouette against the blue sky. There is no doubt that this is a momentous event, and Rubens has placed the viewer in the center of the action.
- If you look closely, you can see the tension of David's muscles as he prepares to swing his sword down upon Goliath's neck. The expressions of the figures and their arrangement also suggest impending motion.



## Discussion Questions

- How did Rubens heighten the drama of the scene? (Answers might include strong diagonals, vibrant colors, expressive faces, etc.)
- Why do you think he chose to paint this particular scene as opposed to one earlier or later in the story?

## Activity

- Choose an especially dramatic scene from your favorite adventure story, and draw or paint it with as many dramatic flourishes and elements of the story as you can.

## Vocabulary

- **Baroque:** a dramatic and exuberant style of art prevalent in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- **Brushwork:** the manner in which a painter applies paint with a brush.
- **Counter-Reformation:** a period of Catholic revival in response to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th and 17th century; art from the Counter-Reformation is typically very dramatic and emotional.



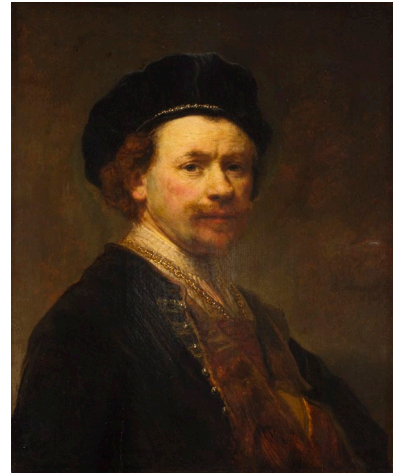
*Self-Portrait*, c. 1636–38

Rembrandt van Rijn

Dutch, 1606–1669

Oil on panel

24<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 19<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (63.2 x 50.5 cm)



## Rembrandt: The Dutch Master

Rembrandt van Rijn was the premier portraitist in Amsterdam during the 1630s and 1640s, and he also created a variety of **self-portraits**.

His patrons appreciated his ability to capture their likenesses as well as their characters.

## Key Concepts

Rembrandt made many **self-portraits** throughout his life as a means of self-analysis and personal reflection. **Self-portraits** also allowed him to meet the demand for his work among avid collectors throughout Europe.

In this **self-portrait**, done at the peak of his personal and professional success, Rembrandt wears the characteristic beret associated with the artistic milieu. As the only Dutch artist who referred to himself by his first name, he emulated the Italian masters [Raphael](#) and Titian.

As inventive as he was a brilliant technician, Rembrandt distinguished himself from his contemporaries by developing a “rough” style of painting called **impasto**, in which areas of the surface are built up in layers.

## A Closer Look at Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait*

- The gold chain around his neck, a symbol of prestige awarded to a distinguished artist by a noble patron, which can be seen in [Titian’s Self-Portrait](#), elevates Rembrandt by association to the status of a fine artist.
- The combination of this chain and his elegant clothing lends Rembrandt stature at a time when artists were often viewed as simple craftsmen rather than members of the creative elite.
- Rembrandt took care to eliminate distractions by spotlighting his face against a dark background. However, he shrouded part of his face in shadow, perhaps to maintain an aura of mystery.

## Discussion Questions

- How would you describe Rembrandt’s clothing in this portrait? Does this look like the kind of attire you would wear when painting? Do you see anything that identifies him with the act of painting?
- How would you describe the setting of the painting? Together with the lighting, how does it affect the impression Rembrandt makes on the viewer?

## Activity

- Look at **self-portraits** by other artists in the Museum such as [Maurice-Quentin de La Tour](#) and [Marie-Geneviève Bouliar](#). How do they differ from Rembrandt’s self-portrait? What do you think they are saying about themselves, and how does that differ from Rembrandt’s message? Keeping these examples in mind, draw or paint your own self-portrait.





## Vocabulary

- **Impasto:** paint that is thickly applied to a painting's surface so that it stands out from the canvas or panel and seems almost like a relief.
- **Self-portrait:** a representation of an artist painted, drawn or sculpted by that artist.

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*Self-Portrait*, 1792

Marie-Geneviève Bouliar

French, 1763–1825

Oil on canvas

21 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 18 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (55.5 x 46 cm)

*The Ragpicker*, c. 1865–70

Édouard Manet

French, 1832–1883

Oil on canvas

76¾ x 51½ in. (194.9 x 130.8 cm)

## Manet: The Painter of Modern Life

Often referred to as “the painter of modern life,” Édouard Manet bridged the transition from **traditional studio practice** to Modern painting. While his subjects and style were considered innovative and even rebellious, he retained an interest in the Old Masters and a desire to gain the approval of the Academy.

### Key Concepts

Manet’s *Ragpicker* exemplifies the beginning of Modern painting; it represents a shift from traditional subject matter (biblical or historical themes) to that of everyday, contemporary life.



Manet’s visible **brushwork** and honest subject matter caused the first significant break from **traditional studio practice**, a precedent that was soon followed by his friends Monet, Degas, Renoir and others who came to be known as the **Impressionists**.

Depicting a figure beyond the confines of middle-class values and responsibilities, Manet’s *Ragpicker* suggests the freedom to live outside traditional societal expectations and cultural norms, a reflection of the spirit of liberal urban Paris at the time.

### A Closer Look at *The Ragpicker*

- The subject and title of the painting refer to a ragpicker, someone who collected rags to sell to paper manufacturers in the 19th century.
- The painting is one of Manet’s “Four Philosophers” series, which consists of portraits of **beggar-philosophers** inspired by a similar series painted by the 17th-century Spanish master [Diego Velázquez](#). Manet’s depiction of the **beggar-philosopher** does not romanticize the figure but instead shows him hunched over and dirty, with torn clothing and a hardened expression.
- The painting’s near-life-size format made it controversial, as portraits of this scale were normally reserved for subjects of much higher social status.



### Discussion Questions

- Describe the man in this painting. How does Manet convey his social status?
- How would you describe Manet’s painting style and the color **palette** he used? What impact do these stylistic choices have on the overall effect of the painting?

## Activity

- Compare this painting to a painting of a similar size, [\*Portrait of Theresa, Countess Kinsky\*](#), by Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. Discuss how these two works are similar, and identify some differences. (Topics to consider include dress, background, level of realism and tone.) Then write a short story about Countess Kinsky and the Ragpicker. How might their lives be different? How do you think they would interact?



## Vocabulary

- **Beggar-philosopher:** a poor person who lives a seminomadic life free from middle-class concerns and thus is able to focus on less worldly and loftier philosophical thoughts; the beggar-philosopher was a popular concept in literature and art.
- **Brushwork:** the manner in which a painter applies paint with a brush.
- **Impressionism:** a movement or style of painting that originated in the 1860s in France, characterized by the use of unmixed colors and small brushstrokes to capture the effects of light and create an “impression” of the subject matter at a given moment.
- **Palette:** the range of colors used in a particular painting.
- **Traditional studio practice:** paintings in the style of the *Academie des Beaux-Arts*, a fine arts institution in France that determined the acceptable art styles in the 19th century.

ABOVE:

*Portrait of Theresa, Countess Kinsky*, 1793

Marie-Louise-Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun

French, 1755–1842

Oil on canvas

54 1/8 x 39 3/8 in. (137.5 x 100.0 cm)

*Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, 1878–81

Edgar Degas

French, 1834–1917

Bronze

37<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (95.6 x 33.5 x 25.2 cm)

## Degas: Documenting Dancers

The Impressionist Edgar Degas is famous for his paintings of modern life, focusing on the ballet, horse races and the workforce; however, his sculptures are less known. With the exception of his original version of [Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen](#), which is now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., these sculptures were never exhibited during his lifetime, and instead served primarily as studies of movement in preparation for his painted or drawn works.

## Key Concepts

The original *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen* was made of beeswax and dressed with real silk ballet shoes, a cotton bodice, a tulle tutu and a silk ribbon tied around a wig made from real hair.

The sculpture caused an uproar at the Sixth Impressionist Exhibition in 1881, as it expressed Degas's brilliant ability to capture the contrasting nature of the dancer: lifelike and caricaturish, confident and haughty, pretty and ugly, real and ironic. Nothing was **idealized**.

Degas made **wax sculptures** throughout his lifetime to create figure studies for his paintings and drawings, but none were **cast in bronze**, like the sculpture in the Norton Simon Museum, until after his death.

## A Closer Look at *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*

- Notice the detail of the hair, bodice and tutu, and the way the dancer's tights slightly bunch at her knees. Realistic texture, especially that of the tutu, was very important to Degas, and the bronze preserves this attention to surface.
- Degas's model, Marie von Goethem, was a student of the Ballet de l'Opera, where Degas often sketched classes and rehearsals.
- Rather than portraying her in the act of dancing, Degas depicted her in a pose that dance students assume during a moment of rest in class or between movements in a ballet. Her eyes are half closed, and yet she seems at attention, ready to begin dancing again when called upon.

## Discussion Questions

- Are you surprised to learn that this sculpture upset many of Degas's contemporaries? Why or why not?
- Compare this sculpture with another [picture](#) or [sculpture](#) of dancers by Degas at the Museum. How do the similarities and differences between the works inform the way you look at *Little Dancer, Aged Fourteen*?



## Activity

- Degas was among the first of a long line of painters to explore sculpture, and Pablo Picasso followed in his footsteps with [sculptures](#) made from unconventional materials. Looking closely at the variety of textures Degas achieved in this sculpture, create your own sculpture with unconventional materials that add textural interest.

## Vocabulary

- **Bronze casting:** a process in which a ceramic cast is made from a wax model. The mold is baked, the wax melts out of the mold, and heated liquid bronze is poured into it. When the bronze cools and hardens, the mold is broken away and the bronze is filed down and polished.
- **Idealized:** something that is depicted as perfect or better than reality.
- **Wax model:** an original model sculpted from soft wax.

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*Dancers in the Wings*, c. 1876–1878

Edgar Degas

French, 1834–1917

Pastel, gouache, distemper, and “essence” on paper, mounted on board

27¼ x 19¾ in. (69.2 x 50.2 cm)

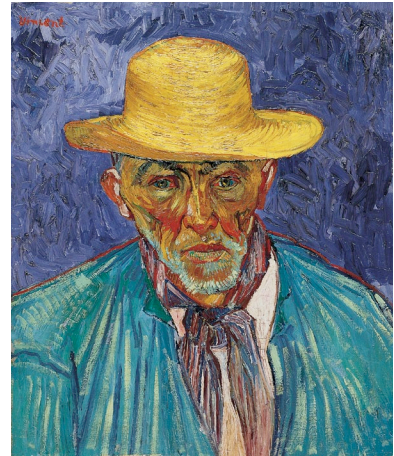
***Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*, 1888**

Vincent van Gogh

Dutch, 1853–1890

Oil on canvas

25¼ x 21½ in. (64.1 x 54.6 cm)



**Van Gogh: Expressive Color**

Vincent van Gogh was a **Post-Impressionist** painter known for his thick, colorful, and expressive style. In 1888 he moved to the South of France and was inspired by the strong light and colors there.

**Key Concepts**

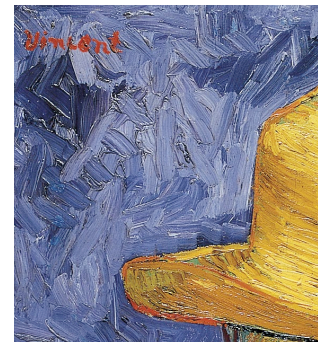
Van Gogh described his vibrant palette “as a means of arriving at the expression and the intensification of character;” this approach liberated him from the use of color for purely representational reasons.

This portrait represents a return to the depiction of peasants, whom Van Gogh had painted years earlier in his native Netherlands. He felt they expressed authenticity and honesty in contrast to the decadence and corruption exhibited by Parisians.

The **expressionist** use of color (which emphasizes feeling over actual appearance) was his most significant legacy. It influenced Henri Matisse and the [Fauves](#), the [German Expressionists](#) and even [Jackson Pollock](#) and the American **Abstract Expressionists**.

**A Closer Look at *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)***

- The subject is a peasant named Patience Escalier, an old gardener and former goatherd who reminded Van Gogh of his father. Van Gogh painted him two times using different color palettes.
- Notice how Van Gogh changed his brushstrokes to create the pulsating background and the rough **texture** of the straw hat. In some places the painting is more like a **relief** than a flat painting.
- Van Gogh used **complementary colors** such as yellow-orange and blue-violet to create visual interest and a timeless, spiritual quality.



**Discussion Questions**

- What colors do you see in the painting, and where do you see them? Is there anything about the use of color in this portrait that surprises you?
- What can you learn about Patience Escalier from this painting?

**Activity**

- Paint a self-portrait in which you use color to express something about yourself, such as your tastes, mood or personality. Then write a short description of why you chose those colors.



## Vocabulary

- **Abstract Expressionism:** a movement or style of painting that originated in the United States in the 1950s and used gestural abstraction to express the artist's innermost feelings.
- **Complementary colors:** any two colors that are directly opposite each other on the color spectrum, such as red and green or purple and yellow. These opposing colors create maximum contrast and, when combined in the right proportions, produce a neutral color.
- **Expressionist:** art filtered through the subjective feelings of an artist towards his subject.
- **German Expressionism:** an art movement that originated in Germany before World War I and reached its peak in the 1920s; it presented the world from a subjective perspective, distorting it for emotional effect.
- **Post-Impressionism:** an art movement that originated in France in the late 19th-century in reaction against the naturalism of impressionism. Post-Impressionist artists emphasized symbolic content, formal order and structure.
- **Relief:** a sculpture in which objects project outward from a flat supporting background.
- **Texture:** the surface quality of a painting created by the artist's choice and handling of materials. It can be smooth, rough, polished, matte, etc.

*Woman with a Book*, 1932

Pablo Picasso

Spanish, 1881–1973

Oil on canvas

51 3⁄8 x 38 1⁄2 in. (130.5 x 97.8 cm)

## Picasso: The Most Influential Artist of the 20th Century

Pablo Picasso was a master of experimentation, and he embraced many styles over his long career. Although he is primarily known for his more abstract and **Cubist** works, he was classically trained and was able to create faithful **representational** art as well.

### Key Concepts

In his early career, Picasso tackled the **formal qualities** of painting in his **Cubist** works. He later moved on to a more simplified reduction of subject matter, as in *Woman with a Book*.

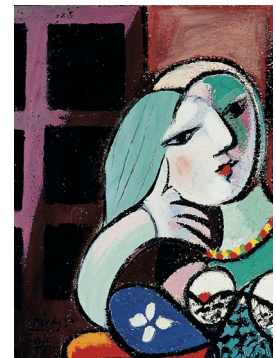


He developed into one of the greatest colorists of his time. Drawing on lessons from past artists like Vincent van Gogh as well as his contemporary [Henri Matisse](#), he used color for expressionist and **decorative** purposes.

This portrait refers to Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's portrait [Madame Moitessier](#), now in the National Gallery, London. The graceful, sensuous lines of the pose and the reflected image in the mirror behind the sitter demonstrate Picasso's awareness of art history.

### A Closer Look at *Woman with a Book*

- Although this painting is not strictly **Cubist**, you can see the influence of **Cubism** in the breaking up of the woman's form into shapes joined by thick black lines and the inclusion of multiple points of view.
- While the central figure is all curves, the space around her consists of straight lines and the sharp angles of the window and mirror.
- We can see through the window that it is night, but the woman seems to radiate light, and she nearly fills the canvas with her form.



### Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the mood of this painting? (For example, joyful, contemplative, dark, etc.) How does Picasso express this mood?
- How did Picasso use complementary colors in this painting? How does his use of color differ from Van Gogh's in *Portrait of a Peasant*?

### Activity

- Look at the way Picasso used line to create **unity** in the painting. There are many shapes and colors in the composition, and yet somehow he tied them all together with his web of black lines, creating a **rhythm** throughout the painting. Draw a portrait of the person next to you using only a single line (a **contour drawing**) without looking down at your paper.

## Vocabulary

- **Contour drawing:** a drawing in which the artist, looking closely at the outline of an object or person, transfers it in one continuous line to paper without looking down to see the outcome of his or her work.
- **Cubism:** a style of art in which subjects are reduced and fractured into geometric forms and then realigned within a shallow, relief-like space. Cubists also often used multiple or contrasting viewpoints so that several sides of an object can be seen simultaneously.
- **Decorative:** elements used to make an artwork more attractive; ornamental.
- **Formal qualities:** design elements such as balance, color, composition, line, scale, shading, texture and volume.
- **Representational:** art that depicts subject matter in a realistic manner without simplification, distortion or exaggeration.
- **Rhythm:** the repetition of certain elements of design (such as curved black lines) to create a feeling of organized movement. Rhythm in art creates a pattern of line, color, shape and/or texture similar to a pattern of sound in music.
- **Unity:** harmony among all parts of a work of art that creates a sense of a unified whole, as opposed to a collection of separate parts.

*Bird in Space*, 1931  
Constantin Brancusi  
Romanian, 1876–1957  
Polished bronze  
73 in. (185.4 cm)

## Brancusi: Sculpting Abstraction

Constantin Brancusi was a Romanian-born sculptor and a member of the **School of Paris** who experimented with the extreme simplification of forms. He believed that “what is real is not the external form, but the essence of things,” and his mission was to strip his subjects to their core and sculpt them in their essential form.

## Key Concepts

Brancusi was one of the 20th century’s most influential sculptors, and he dealt with the **abstraction** of three-dimensional objects.

The fully simplified forms created in the mature phase of Brancusi’s career evoke the essence of things rather than the things themselves—here the soaring, polished form of *Bird in Space* suggests flight.

Brancusi introduced the idea of utilizing a sculpture’s surroundings (whether room, gallery or landscape) as part of the actual work of art.

## A Closer Look at *Bird in Space*

- *Bird in Space* is **sculpture in the round**. It has neither a front nor a back; it is meant to be seen from all angles, and thus invites viewers to move around it.
- The sculpture is so highly polished that it reflects everything around it, and thus viewers’ changing reflections become part of the work itself.
- *Bird in Space* is very narrow at its base and slightly off center, making it less grounded than a piece with a wider or heavier base and giving it a sense of instability that implies the potential for motion.

## Discussion Questions

- How did Brancusi communicate a sense of flight in his sculpture?
- Brancusi created many versions of this sculpture in different sizes and materials, always paying meticulous attention to **finish**. In this case, the bronze was deliberately polished to produce its gleaming, reflective surface. Compare *Bird in Space* to Giacometti’s [Tall Figure IV](#), which is also made of bronze. What differences do you notice in terms of color and texture? How does the sculpture’s **finish** contribute to the overall effect of a bird in flight?

## Activity

- Represent one of your favorite activities in a drawing or sculpture, giving just enough information to communicate the feeling of that activity in your artwork.



## Vocabulary

- **Abstraction:** the process of diminishing an artwork's resemblance to subjects taken from the natural world.
- **Finish:** the characteristics of a surface; the exterior texture of a sculpture.
- **School of Paris:** a loosely affiliated group of foreign-born artists working together in the Montparnasse area of Paris, including Picasso, Miró, de Chirico, Modigliani, Chagall and Brancusi.
- **Sculpture in the round:** a freestanding sculpture, not attached to any surface other than its base, that one can move around and view from all angles.

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*Tall Figure IV*, 1960

Alberto Giacometti

Swiss, 1901–1966

Bronze, Edition of 6, Cast No. 1

106½ x 12 x 22 in. (270.5 x 30.5 x 55.9 cm)

***The Flower Vendor (Girl with Lilies)*, 1941**

Diego Rivera

Mexican, 1886–1957

Oil on Masonite

48 x 48 in. (121.9 x 121.9 cm)

**Rivera: A Monumental Artist**

Diego Rivera was one of the most prolific and renowned artists of the 20th century. Along with José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, he produced murals that helped redefine national identity in post-revolutionary Mexico. Rivera was an oversize figure, artistically, personally and politically. In the 1920s he was considered one of the three great living artists along with Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.



**Key Concepts**

Rivera used Cubist spatial strategies, Italian Renaissance **fresco** techniques and Mexican cultural history to create a distinctive Modern style.

Rivera painted a number of large murals in the United States and had a major influence on American art, as the federal government began to fund the painting of large murals in public spaces in the 1930s.

Throughout his lifetime, Rivera used Mexican culture and history in conjunction with the relationships among nature, industry and technology to explore the theme of social inequality in his work.

**A Closer Look at *The Flower Vendor***

- Diego Rivera is well known for his paintings that depict vendors of arum (calla) lilies and other flowers. In this scene the young woman is on her knees in a reverent attitude, just as her ancestors would have assumed in the **pre-Conquest era**.
- Perhaps because Rivera made so many works depicting calla lilies, the flowers are often associated with Mexico. Originally from Africa, calla lilies arrived in Mexico with the arrival of Africans, who according to historical documents were brought to Mexico as slaves from 1519 until 1810. Aware of the flower's origin, Rivera referenced the country's Afro-Mexican population in his work.
- This bright and colorful homage to the traditional Mexican flower seller elevates the status of Mexico's indigenous peasant culture.

**Discussion Questions**

- Look closely at *The Flower Vendor*. Compare the relationship between the figure and the flowers as they fill the picture plane. How did Rivera use **scale** and **size**?
- Compare the treatment of the flowers and the figure. Discuss how the artist stylized or abstracted the two images.



### Activity

- The elevation of the status of the common worker, as seen in *The Flower Vendor*, has been depicted in art since the mid-19th century. Create a visual or written image that elevates the common laborer, incorporating a symbol representing the position as well as the person who does the job.
- Investigate other works in the Norton Simon Museum by artists who were concerned with the role of labor, such as *The Ragpicker* by Édouard Manet and *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)* by Vincent van Gogh.

### Vocabulary

- **Fresco:** a method of painting in which powdered pigments mixed in water are applied to wet plaster freshly laid on a wall.
- **Pre-Conquest era:** the period preceding the appearance of Europeans in the Americas.
- **Scale:** the relative size or proportion of an object in relationship to its model or representation,

