

Pop Art, Op Art and Minimalism: Late 20th Century American Art

American artists of the second half of the 20th Century responded to the many modern art experiments that had emerged during the early part of the century. Artistic inquiries into both the **formal** and **expressionistic** qualities of art were further explored. Many artists worked in totally **non-objective** styles, continuing in the tradition of the early **modernists**. American artists were also heavily influenced by events happening in the world around them, specifically World War II. In the decades following the war, artists searched for a new artistic vocabulary to express feelings of horror and vulnerability elicited by these world events.

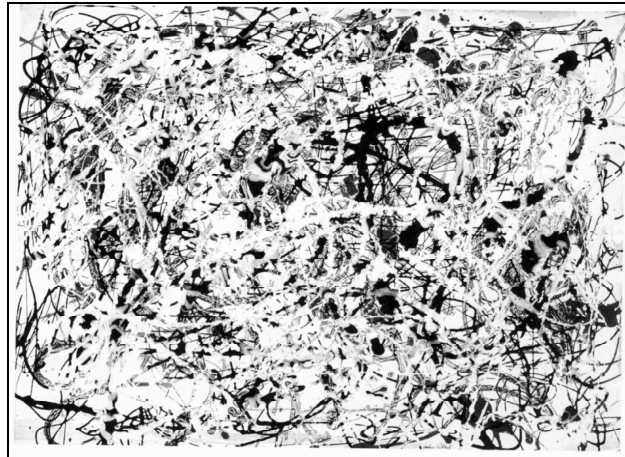
Abstract Expressionism developed during the 1950s and became the driving force in American art of that decade. In the following decades, however, a succession of art movements began to question the supremacy of this abstract style, in which the artist and his/her actions were celebrated. This essay briefly examines three modern art movements from the late 20th century: **Pop Art**, **Op Art** and **Minimalism**. Each of these tendencies of modern art reflect increased artistic diversity during this era of experimentation and change.

The Abstract Expressionists of the early 1950s were comprised of a young group of artists working in New York City. Often referred to as the **New York School**, artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline created works of art in which the natural representation of objects was of less importance than the artist's feelings about them or the aesthetic experience of painting itself.

Pollock is remembered especially for the large scale canvases that he spread on the floor of his studio and on which he dripped and dribbled paint in a rhythmic fashion. Energy, emotion and the idea of the artist at work are as important as the finished product itself. In these paintings, the individuality of the artist is celebrated. New York abstraction became an influential

force on the international art scene, and even came to be associated with the ideals of American nationalism-- democracy, freedom and individualism.

The two decades following the Second World War were very prosperous years in America. During this period of unprecedented economic growth, however, social and cultural issues came to the forefront and became lightning rods for social unrest. The Civil Rights Movement, rock and roll music, and the Vietnam War strained relations between Americans both racially and generationally. Crime and violence escalated; drug abuse rose; leaders were assassinated. Yet during these troubled times, the strength of



Jackson Pollock (American, 1912-1956),
Composition (White, Black, Blue and Red on White), 1948, casein on paper mounted on masonite, 22 5/8 x 30 1/2 in.

popular culture continued to increase so that it became a dominant force in both society and the arts. The music and film industries refined mass entertainment while the development of places like Disneyland (which opened in 1955) and the Las Vegas Strip cemented the idea of the glitzy theme park as the dream vacation destination. The consumer culture and its by-products of advertisements, billboards and product packaging provided artists with a fresh iconography so that by mid-50s, young artists began to challenge long held assumptions concerning the nature of representation. Obliterating the distinctions between the traditional subjects of high art and the products of popular culture, these radical young artists initiated a new style of art that was loosely dubbed Pop Art.

Artists of the late 50s and 60s who enthusiastically embraced popular imagery such as advertisements, comic strips, celebrities and everyday objects as subjects for art created a new ideal for what should be considered art. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were two of the first American artists to realize the tremendous possibilities of their everyday environment in the creation of new subject matter. Rauschenberg's "combine paintings" or **assemblages** often included found objects (like a quilt or a stuffed chicken) or **silk screened** images of older works of art or found advertisements and magazine cut-outs mixed with paint. His work comments on the power and meaning of objects within his society. Johns, on the other hand, worked in the labor intensive **encaustic** process to create images of carefully constructed cultural icons such as the target and the American flag. Both artists initiated a process of adapting popular imagery as the subject of art.

This unification of popular and high culture in art can also be seen in the art of Andy Warhol, Robert Indiana, George Segal, Claes Oldenburg and James Rosenquist. From comic strips to coke bottles, no aspect of American culture was too mundane to become the subject of art. Oldenburg's large scale reproductions of mundane objects, such as *Corridor Pin, Blue*, celebrates the everyday and can be appreciated by anyone. Artists like Warhol challenged the historical notion that championed the handmade over the machine-made by working in modes of mechanical reproduction such as silk screen printing, a method in which ink is forced through a design-bearing screen of silk onto the printing surface. Warhol dubbed his studio "The Factory" and often his assistants pulled prints to his specifications. His reproductions of Brillo boxes, Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles presented staples of American life in heroic scale. Warhol also chose heroes and heroines from the famous of his day. *Mick Jagger* of 1975 was one of several celebrity silk screens produced by Warhol. Other subjects include Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean. In contrast, fellow artist George Segal chose his subjects from the more mundane aspects of society. *Three Figures on Four Park*



Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987), *Mick Jagger*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 40 in.

Benches is a typical scene by Segal in which he represents the isolation and loneliness of contemporary society. Segal's process of wrapping models in plaster before casting the sculpture in bronze allowed him to capture every element of their clothes and expression.

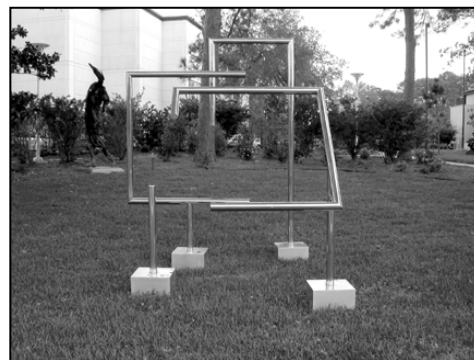
The art style of James Rosenquist developed from his job as a billboard painter. Rosenquist was struck by the change in scale derived from the up-close painting of oversized images as he produced them in relation to the way that they appear from the street. Everything from beautiful women to automobiles to soft drinks were portrayed in these large advertisements and Rosenquist adapted the subject matter and scale of the billboards to his own canvas paintings. Similarly, Robert Indiana was influenced by road signs, and created his own personal style that reflected the lettering and numbers of the American highway. His *LOVE* icon appeared originally as a painting in the early 1960s and became a symbol of the age.

While Pop artists looked to the media and consumer culture for subject matter, other artists of this era chose to focus on developing a non-objective vocabulary. Minimalists sought to rid their work of illusionism. Instead they created paintings and sculptures whose subject was the elements of art. Form, color and line became the topics of these works so that the presence of the artist was eliminated, something that has once been asserted by the Abstract Expressionists. Minimalists focused on repetition, mathematical organization, geometric forms, pristine surfaces, reducing their forms to their ultimate simplicity and eschewing emotionalism or symbolism. Sculptors like Joel Shapiro and Tony Smith create geometrical designs that only hint at any reference to another object. Smith's *Lipizzaner* recalls the famous horses only in name. Its stark white geometric forms do not really reference the forms of a horse except in its most simplified representation. Similarly, Shapiro's *Untitled*, from a series of his mature works which relate to the human figure in various poses, can only be considered to be figurative in the most abstract sense. Shapiro is concerned only with the lines formed by a human in space.

Op Art or Optical Art, like Minimalism, was a style that sought to escape subjectivity in art. Op artists also worked during the 1960s and were interested in forms of art making that involved a wide range of experiments with optics or optical illusions. These experiments often involved the use of bright colors, skewed perspectives and natural or man-made light. Op artist Yaacov Agam created works that relied on the movement of the spectator to create the sensation of optical illusion. His early projection paintings



Robert Indiana (American, born 1928), *LOVE Red Blue*, 1966 - 97, aluminum with acrylic polyurethane enamel, 72 x 72 x 36 in.

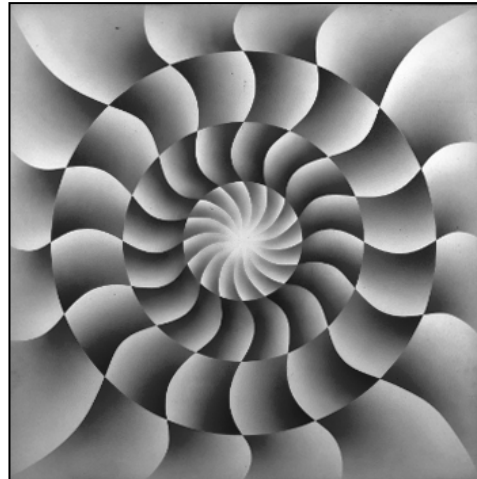


Yaacov Agam (Israeli, b. 1928) *Open Spaces*, 1970, Stainless Steel, 108 x 96 x 96 in.

offered a changing panorama as the viewer moved from one side of the geometric painting to the other. He would later create sculptures with similar effect. *Open Spaces*, located in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden, offers a changing landscape as one moves around the sculpture. Alma Thomas, who was associated with the **Washington Color School** movement, created paintings in which the idea of movement was implicit. Although she never disassociated herself from nature, Thomas created abstract works in bright colors that imitated the effect of light moving through a canopy of leaves.

There were certainly other important art forms that developed during these decades, and many artists who did not fit neatly into one style or whose work changed over the years. Judy Chicago is usually

considered the founder of **feminist art** and from the mid-1970s through the 1980s she often took up feminine subject matter. Even her early works which were inspired by the **hard-edged** and optical art styles seem to have a feminine quality. *Let It All Hang Out* is an abstract piece which is as concerned with color and line as it is any particular subject matter, yet a floral shape can be discerned. The subject matter of Chicago's later works, however, became more and more evident. Her *Dinner Party* was created during the years 1973 and 1979 and involved the collaboration of hundreds of women who created sewn placemats and ceramic plates to adorn the 48 foot triangular installation which celebrates the accomplishments of women throughout history. During the 1970s Americans began to develop a new social consciousness as liberation movements and principles of equality came to the fore. **Pluralism** in art became more evident as artists found new ways to express these social ideals.



Judy Chicago (American, born 1939), *Let It All Hang Out*, 1973, 80 x 80 in.

In conclusion, the artistic trends of the second half of the 20th century reflect societal values as well as the history of modern art. While many of these artists were attempting to separate their art from the emotional concerns of Abstract Expressionism, they also reflect the earlier trends of modern art. The formal concerns of the Optical artists and the Minimalists developed from Cubists experiments with form. **Surrealism** and the tenets of Marcel Duchamp and the **Dada** movement are evident in the Pop artists' focus on everyday objects from popular culture. The art movements that developed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s would continue to influence artists working through the end of the century and into the next as developments in communication, transportation and the understanding of diversity opened new national dialogues that have a profound effect on American art.

List of Works

Pop Art: The term Pop Art was developed in the 1960s to describe a style of art that explores everyday imagery that is a part of consumer culture. Common sources include advertisements, comic strips, celebrities, consumer product packaging and other objects of popular culture. Many of the artists who work in this style began their careers as commercial artists working as window dressers (such as Andy Warhol), billboard painters (James Rosenquist) or cartoonists (Claes Oldenburg). Popular culture continues to influence artists working in the contemporary art world.

Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987), *Mick Jagger*, 1975, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 40 in.

Andy Warhol is considered to be one of the most influential and most recognizable American artists of the 20th century. He coined the phrase “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.” Not only is he known for his celebrity persona, pale complexion and striking white wig, he is also known as the artist who created multiple silk screen images of America’s popular cultural icons. He was born in 1928 near Pittsburgh to a working class family. His parents were Czech immigrants. He graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon) with a degree in graphic design. Shortly after graduating in 1949, he moved to New York City and gained success as a **commercial artist**. Warhol was fascinated by the concepts of the American dream, and commercialism. But most importantly, he desired fame and wealth and was fascinated by anyone who had it. He said “What’s great about this country is America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke and just think, you can drink Coke, too.”¹



In 1962, Warhol began creating his multiple images of commercial products such as Campbell soup cans, Coca Cola bottles and Brillo boxes. Influenced by his graphic design background, he created images of things that fascinated him, usually mass

¹ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1980), 7.

produced commercial products or celebrity images of movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe. He also created art with multiple images of horrible car crashes, the electric chair and the grieving First Lady, Jackie Kennedy. He painted or silk screened all of his images with the same approach and all were products of the mass consumerism of American culture which he loved. Early in the 1960s, Warhol created what he called “The Factory” where his staff created the multiple silk screened works. Most of the time, Warhol never touched the canvases, but directed his staff to produce the works. Mick Jagger, lead singer of the Rolling Stones, became the subject of many of Warhol’s paintings in the mid-1970s (as well as Jagger’s ex-wives). Warhol was close friends with Mick Jagger, designing the 1971 cover for the Rolling Stones album *Sticky Fingers* along with designing the trademark mouth and lips logo that is almost synonymous with the band. The painting *Mick Jagger* illustrates Warhol’s silk screening technique. He created multiple images of the same portrait, painting or sometimes exaggerating certain facial features, such as the eyes or the lips, all with different colors. Warhol desired a mass-produced, mechanical look with the implication that the artist’s hand had little to do with the creation.

Robert Indiana (American, born 1928), *LOVE, Red Blue*, 1966 - 97, aluminum with acrylic polyurethane enamel, 72 x 72 x 36 in.

Robert Indiana was born Robert Clark in New Castle, Indiana, and later adopted the name of his native state. Between 1945 and 1948 he studied at various art schools in Indianapolis. From 1949 to 1953, he studied at the Chicago Art Institute School and the



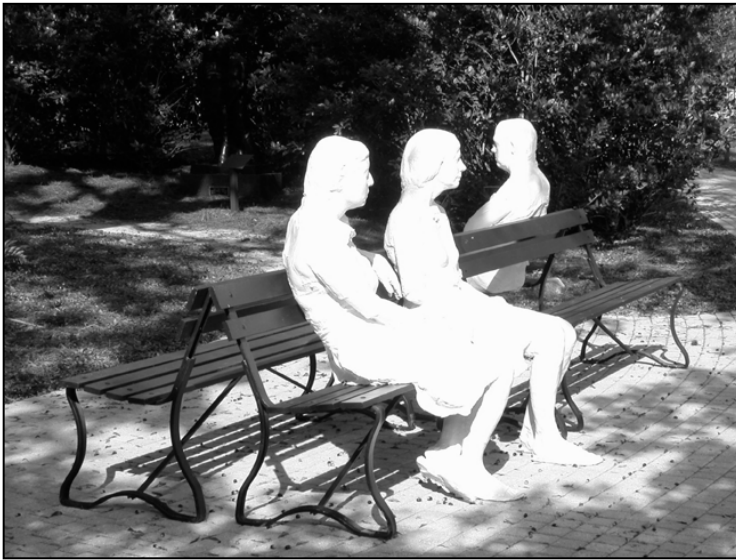
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine with the assistance of the **GI Bill**. In 1953 and 1954 he studied at the Edinburgh College of Art and London University, after which he settled in New York. Indiana was one of a small group of New York artists who, in the mid-'60s, began incorporating advertisements, billboards, and other manifestations of commercialism into their artwork. These artists, including Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and James Rosenquist, developed what became known as American Pop Art. Indiana was particularly interested in bold commercial letters of bright, garish colors often seen on road signs and billboards because of their power to communicate boldly and directly. The artist’s use of strong lines and bold colors connect him both to the Op and

Color Field painters of the 1960s. His paintings and sculptures explored new relationships between words and images as he incorporated graphic representations of words such as “LOVE,” “EAT,” and “DIE.”

Between 1964 and 1966 Indiana developed a motif that is direct and symbolic of emotion. The now famous *LOVE* was conceived first as a painting and later translated into sculpture. In his paintings, Indiana placed the four letter word within a square canvas, dividing the four letters into two sets of two and tilting the “O” slightly to the right. Painted in striking hues of red, blue and green, the word became an icon for a generation. In 1973, the image was made into a stamp that sold for 8¢ and the text was also translated into rings, Christmas cards, and other consumer goods. The image, however, soon became America’s most plagiarized work of art. The large painted aluminum sculpture of *LOVE* in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden stands six feet high and can be read from many vantage points within the garden. It still serves as a symbol of sentimentality and a reminder of an era.

Activity: Create a graphic representation of your name using a text style and color combination that describes your personality.

George Segal (American, 1924-2000), *Three Figures and Four Benches*, 1979, painted bronze, 52 x 144 x 58 in.



Activity: You and two friends can recreate the park bench scene while you are in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. Try to imagine what the artist intended by trying to stay in that position while carrying on a conversation.

Regarded as one of the greatest American Pop Artists, George Segal’s figures are unmistakable. Segal grew up in New York City, the son of a kosher butcher, and attended New York University and the Pratt Institute. The artist began his artistic career as a painter and a student of Hans Hofmann, an abstract painter and highly regarded teacher. He gradually turned to sculpture because it enabled him to create three-dimensional objects. Like his fellow Pop artists, Segal attempted to demystify art by making it accessible. Segal often said that his goal was to capture the paradox of individual solitude in the midst of populous places. His figures are placed in

mundane situations, such as a lunch counter, movie ticket booth, bus interior, or, as in this case, a park bench. His works are usually created in plaster cast from an actual human figure and sometimes recast in bronze. Segal's work expresses the loneliness and tensions of modern life. His sculptures have often been compared to the paintings of Edward Hopper, a fellow American whose work suggested a sense of mystery and loneliness. Both men captured specific moments of modern life.

Three Figures and Four Benches is an excellent example of Segal's work as three figures are posed in an ordinary situation as if frozen in time. The three figures, intentionally rough and unfinished but still highly detailed, sit near each other but do not communicate. All three figures stare off into space, involved in their own thoughts. The viewer is forced to contemplate their relationship to each other and with their environment.

Claes Oldenburg (American, born Sweden 1929) and Coosje van Bruggen (American, born Netherlands 1942), *Corridor Pin, Blue 1999, Stainless Steel, 21 x 21 ft.*

Of all the artists who turned to popular culture and mass marketing for inspiration, Claes Oldenburg is certainly one of the most well-known. He is sometimes referred to as the "Pope of Pop" and is famous for monumentalizing ordinary objects such as clothespins, typewriter erasers, safety pins and shuttlecocks. Oldenburg was born in Stockholm, Sweden and brought to Chicago in 1937. He studied literature at Yale University and took art courses only in his senior year. He continued his art studies during night classes at the Art Institute of Chicago while working during the day as art editor and cartoonist for *Chicago Magazine*. By 1956 Oldenburg moved to New York City and became particularly fascinated with the window displays he saw in neighborhood shop windows. In 1960 he established *The Store*, an environment piece in which Oldenburg filled a vacant shop with sculpted parodies of consumer goods including pastries, ice cream sundaes and articles of clothing made from painted, plaster-dipped burlap. After the exhibit closed in 1961, the



Did you know: The safety pin was invented in 1849 by Walter Hunt who coiled an 8" wire with a twist in the middle to create a spring and added a clasp to catch the pointed end. His invention was an improvement upon the straight pin, originally used by the Romans.

shop became his studio and was renamed the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company. It became the site of several theatrical happenings. From small-scale painted plaster objects, the artist moved on to create large-scale soft, or collapsible, sculptures of common objects made from vinyl and canvas. These works were often collaborations with his wife, Coosje van Bruggen, who sewed many of the pieces. Eventually, the two artists translated these giant works into more solid forms using fiberglass and bronze.

While the pop aesthetic is easily discernible in the work of Oldenburg, there is also a hint of surrealist influence. The choice of objects-- hamburgers, water faucets, electrical plugs, lipstick-- speak to the consumption of the masses, whereas their colossal size and distorted scale seem to emerge from a surrealist's dream. Oldenburg's work can be found in many cities and sculpture gardens including *Giant Lipstick* at Yale University, *Clothes-pin* in Philadelphia, *Geometric Mouse* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC, *Spoonbridge and Cherry* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and *Corridor Pin, Blue* at the New Orleans Museum of Art. *Corridor Pin, Blue* extends 21 feet above the garden path as visitors to the Besthoff Sculpture Garden walk underneath the outstretched arm of the pin. Oldenburg and van Bruggen's work intrigues viewers who recognize the familiar form, yet become awe-struck by its excessive size.

James Rosenquist (American, born 1933), *Hybiscus and Woman*, 1987, 62 x 54½



James Rosenquist's paintings of **juxtaposed** images are considered Pop art, but because of his choice of subject matter, he has been called the "dark horse of Pop art." Rosenquist was born in North Dakota, but in his youth, he and his family moved to various places in the mid-West. At an early age, with his mother's encouragement, Rosenquist expressed a talent and interest in art. He arrived in New York City to study at the Art Students League in 1955. To support himself he worked as a sign and billboard painter. He was successful at this job and would produce numerous

billboards above the city streets and signs along major roads depicting catchy advertisement displays. Rosenquist was fascinated by the scale of the ads on the billboards that seemed **abstract** in their monumentality when seen up close, but normal when seen at a distance. He was greatly influenced by the advertisements that he painted as well as images from his childhood memories of his father's jobs at gas stations and as an airplane mechanic. When he began painting in the early 1960s he included images of American popular culture that were fragmented, rotated, and superimposed on top of each other. He made political statements with his art as a celebration and commentary on the advertising world.

Activity: Create your own layered collage by choosing two or three magazine images and cutting them in strips. Alternate images as you glue the strips to a piece of paper.

In 1965 Rosenquist created one of his best known and largest works called *F-111*. It was an 86 foot long painting that wrapped around the gallery walls. Images of spaghetti noodles, light bulbs, a young girl under a hairdryer (taken directly from a mixture of magazine ads), as well as an atomic bomb were superimposed with varying scales in size on top of a full size image of an F-111 fighter bomber. This painting, created in the midst of the Vietnam War, helped create a name for Rosenquist as an artist. He experimented with numerous designs throughout his career but his advertising beginnings never seemed to escape his art. In the 1980s he started a cross hatch or slashing technique by layering images on top of each other where the "slashes" reveal each image. Many of Rosenquist's cross hatch paintings included images of flowers that can be found around his Florida home mixed with advertising images, such as the faces of women as seen in *Hybiscus and Woman*. At first glance the painting looks abstract, but the images seem to reveal themselves like a puzzle as the viewer's eye discerns the flowers and the female faces.

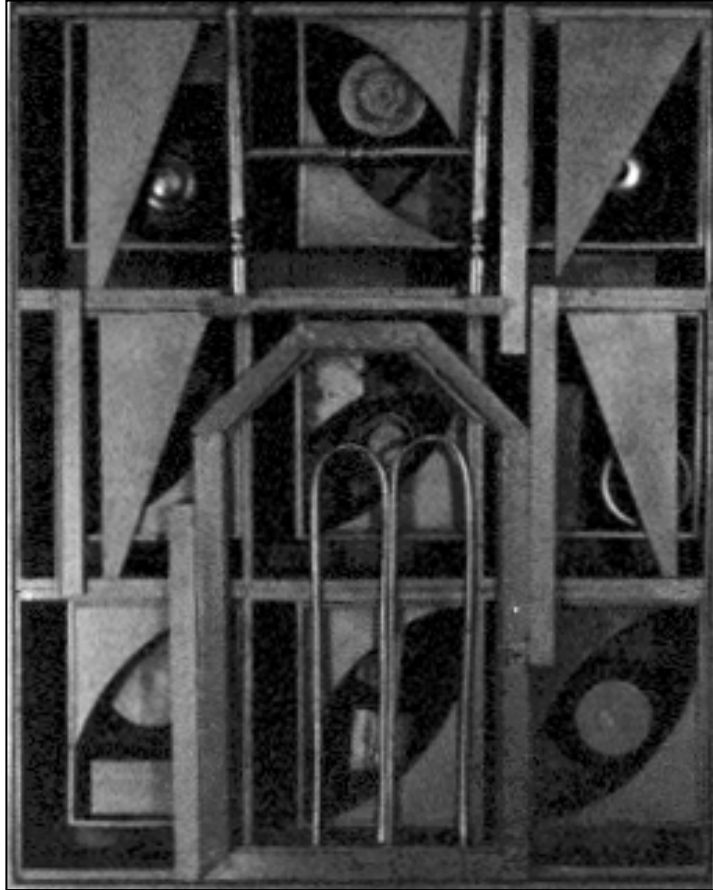
Louise Nevelson (born Russia, American, 1900-1987), *Cascades: Perpendiculars, XVIII*, 1980-1982, wood, black paint, 55 x 44x 8 ½ in.

Louise Nevelson was born Leah Berliawsky in Russia and moved with her family to Rockport, Maine as a child. Her father and grandfather were both lumberjacks, and as a young child of six she often played with the scraps from her father's lumberyard. She claims to have known at an early age that she wanted to be an artist, yet it was not immediately clear which path she would take. In 1920 she married a wealthy ship owner and moved to New York, where she spent the next decade studying painting at the Art Students League. She also studied operatic voice, acting, modern dance and poetry during the 1920s. During the 30s, Nevelson traveled abroad and studied with Hans Hofmann in Munich, Germany. It was not until the 1940s that she turned to sculpture and developed her signature style.

Louise Nevelson's three-dimensional assemblages of found objects follow the tradition of the Cubists and the Dadaists who, earlier in the twentieth century, turned everyday objects into works of art. Her most characteristic works were large wooden walls assembled from stacking wooden wine crates or vegetable boxes to establish vertical and horizontal unity. Within each box she placed other found wooden objects such as balusters, furniture parts or shelf moldings that the artist found in junk shops and demolition sites. The entire assemblage was then painted with a solid black paint, or, in her later works, white or gold. The result is an all-over bas relief of patterns which has an abstract feel, yet does not conceal its relationship to objects in the real world.

Cascades: Perpendicular XVIII is typical of Nevelson's work. Found wooden objects have been

placed inside and attached to wooden boxes, and the entire piece is painted matte black. The wooden objects are easily recognizable, yet form a decorative blend of positive and negative space.



Did you know: Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque were the first artists to use found objects in a work of art. Synthetic Cubism combined drawing and painting with collage of newspapers and other materials in the 1910s.

Activity: Create your own found object construction. Before throwing away recyclable items, use it to create a multi-layered colorful collage.

Robert Gordy (American, 1933-1986), *Rimbaud's Dream #2*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 82 x 64 in.



Robert Gordy was born in Louisiana's "Bayou Country" and became a nationally recognized artist by the 1970s. He was greatly influenced by the works of the French Modern artists such as Cezanne, Gauguin, Matisse, and the American Abstract Expressionists. He was a student of Hans Hofmann. Gordy fills his canvases by incorporating figures and symbolic elements into a rich, visual fabric where content and form combine and support each other. Many of Gordy's paintings are dominated by the female figure in a decorative landscape.

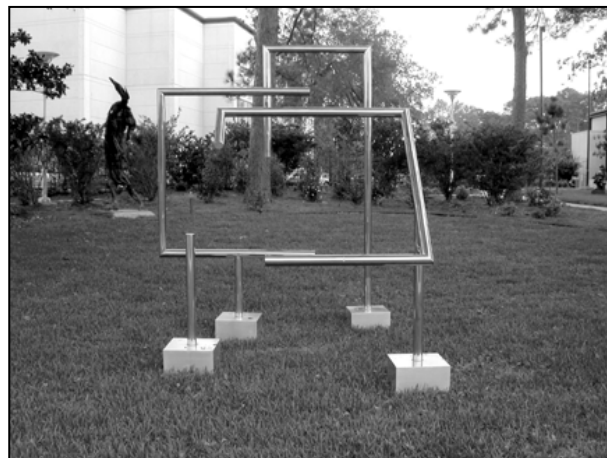
Rimbaud's Dream #2 is one of two paintings inspired by French poet Arthur Rimbaud's attempt to seek fortune in Africa. In flat, bright colors, Gordy's anonymous figures are packed into a shallow space

where they seem to hover on the surface of his painting. His sharp-edged modeling of form and graphic approach gives the flattened figures an unexpected sense of weight. This approach is related to graphic design and advertising.

Op Art: The term Op Art relates to several tendencies in art-making developed during the 1960s that involved a wide range of experiments with optics or optical illusions. These experiments often involved the use of bright colors, skewed perspectives and natural or man-made light. Whereas Pop Art was primarily concerned with the subject of art, Op Art is more concerned with its formal qualities.

Yaacov Agam (Israeli, b. 1928) *Open Spaces*, 1970, Stainless Steel, 108 x 96 x 96 in.

Yaacov Agam was born in Rishon Le Zion in Israel in 1928. He started painting in 1940 and studied art in Jerusalem, Zurich and Paris. Agam has always been a pioneer in art. He is considered one of the founders of the Op (optical) art movement and is particularly associated with a form of art in which the illusion is created by the movement of the spectator. His relief paintings of the 1960s include works of large, regular geometric shapes painted over grid-like projections. Seen straight on, the color



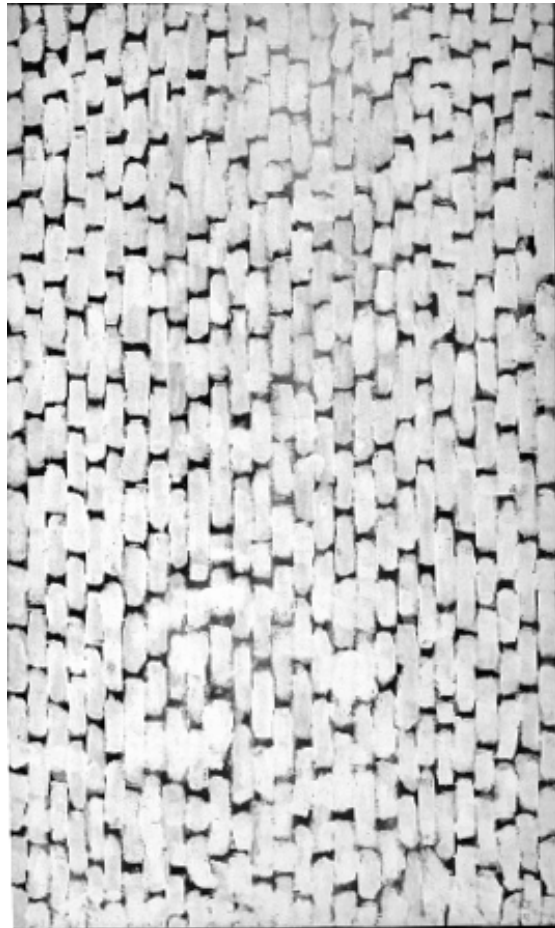
shapes appear head on, but as one walks from one end to another, they shift into tilted, perspective shapes. In the 1950s and '60s, Agam was also one of the very first artists to use computers and electronics to create art.

The three open rectangles of *Open Spaces* frame the natural environment of the Sculpture Garden. The setting and the viewer are integral to the sculpture. The round, stainless steel bars of Agam's artwork segment the garden into small landscape views which vary depending on the location of the viewer. In this way, the sculpture is interactive by relying on the viewer to create new scenes by moving around the sculpture.

Activity: Create your own "view box" to change your perspective on your neighborhood. Cut a square from a piece of cardboard and use it to create a window on your world. Make two drawings of the different perspectives you see.

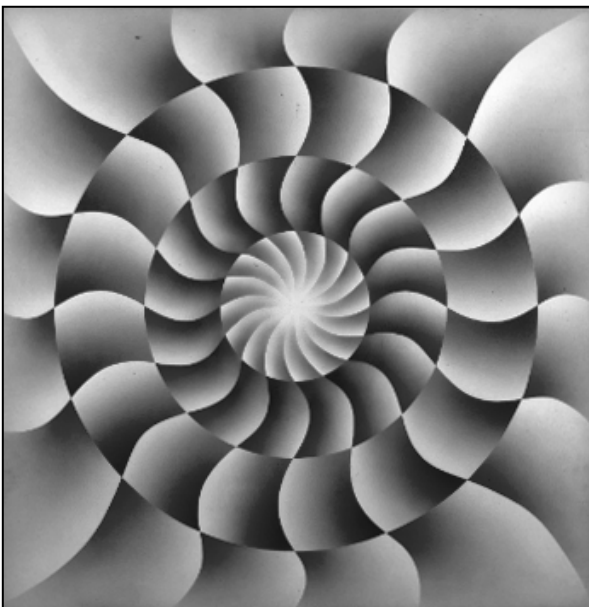
Alma Thomas (American, 1891-1978), *Dogwood Display II*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 45 ½ x 27 in.

Alma Thomas was affiliated with the Washington Color School art movement. She painted with an affection for the natural surroundings from a childhood in the rural south to her adult life in Washington D.C. Thomas was born in Columbus, Georgia in 1891. In 1907, during the early movement of the **Great Migration**, her family left the racially tense Georgia for Washington D.C. which promised better education and economic opportunities for African Americans. At the age of thirty, after working as a teacher for a few years, she enrolled in Howard University where she was the first student and first woman to graduate with a degree in fine arts. She received a Master of Arts from Columbia University and continually took classes at American University while teaching art to junior high school students. In 1960 at the age of 70, Thomas retired from teaching to dedicate herself full-time to her painting career. It was at this point that she worked with the Washington Color School with artists such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. This group was concerned with the primacy of color, optical effects and



geometric structure. Thomas was also loosely associated with this group, but she never fully disassociated her work from nature.

In the mid-1960s, Alma Thomas began painting bright geometric shapes and designs on a stark white background. She explained that her influences were the flowers and trees moving in the wind. She continued to play with colors, patterning surface shapes as well as the backgrounds. In *Dogwood Display II* she applied a repetitious application of white blocks on top of a multi-colored background. The repeated shapes seem to float on the canvas. The distances between the white shapes vary, offering a sense of movement and vibration. Thomas felt that her paintings were abstracted views of nature reminiscent of a blurred aerial view of trees and flowers.



**Judy Chicago (American, born 1939),
Let It All Hang Out, 1973, 80 x 80 in.**

Judy Chicago is most associated with feminist theory and its application to art. The Women's Movement of the 1970s arose against stifling situations forced upon women by society. Chicago highlighted this theme in her artwork and sought to assert the role of women as artists represented in art history. Her seminal piece, *The Dinner Party*, was created between 1973 and 1979 and was a collaboration between the artist and hundreds of volunteers who helped her create the triangular shaped dinner table with 39 places set for important women throughout history. Chicago has

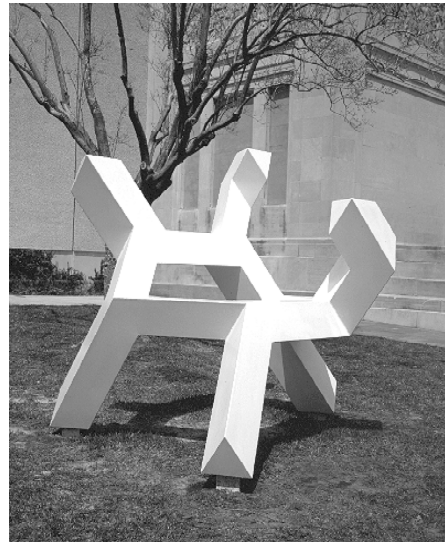
continued to explore other gender related issues throughout her career, often creating series that confront issues such as birth (*The Birth Project*, 1980 - 85) and power (*Powerplay*, 1980s). Chicago has also been active as an art instructor and writer.

Chicago was born Judy Cohen in Chicago, Illinois in 1939. She attended art classes at the Art Institute of Chicago and went on to study art at the University of California, Los Angeles. At UCLA, Chicago was influenced by the many movements that were popular in California at the time. It was also at UCLA that she first felt discrimination because of her gender. After completing graduate school in the sculpture department of UCLA, Chicago began taking night courses in auto body painting along with a class in boat-building to learn how to mold fiberglass. The geometrical style of *Let it All Hang Out* was influenced by her early training at UCLA, though the piece is also informed by her feminist beliefs. Although the work is essentially geometrical, it also seems to have a feminine presence. The colors radiate outward like the petals on a flower, creating the illusion of pulsating movement.

Minimalism: Minimalism in art originated in the 1960s when a group of younger artists including Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland rebelled against what they perceived to be the emotionalism and sensualism of the Abstract Expressionists. They sought an art that was depersonalized, in which the hand of the artist is nowhere present. Minimalist forms in painting and in sculpture are reduced to their ultimate simplicity.

Tony Smith (American, b. 1912), *Lipizzaner*, ca. 1976, painted steel, 9 x 7 ft.

Tony Smith was one of the leading Minimalist sculptors of this 1960s movement. Smith studied at the Art Students League in the mid-1930s, supporting himself by working as a toolmaker. He was trained as an architect at the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937. He continued his architectural studies under Frank Lloyd Wright from 1938 to 1940. Although a working architect, he associated himself with the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s and was influenced by artists like Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still. Smith turned to producing sculpture in the 1960s and practically overnight became well known for his black, large-scale, Minimalist works. He was particularly interested in the problem of reductive form and artistic anonymity, features which dominated Minimalist theory.

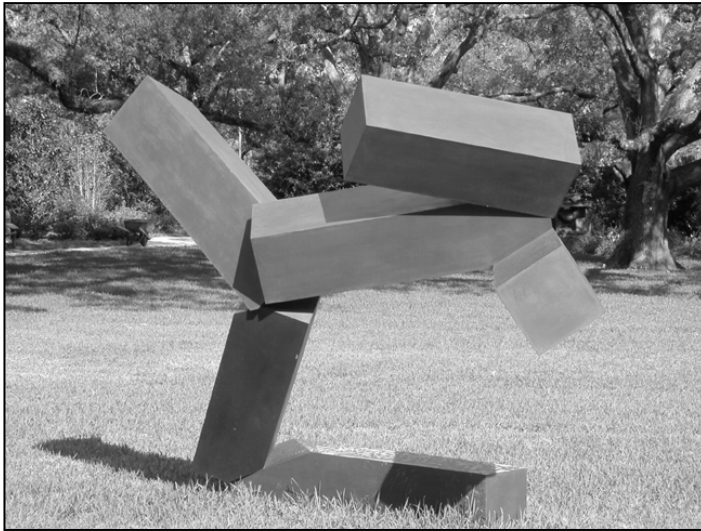


Did you know: Archduke Maximilian of Austria began breeding Spanish horses in 1562. He named the Lipizzaner horses after Lipizza, an especially rugged area of Austria.

Lipizzaner differs from most of Smith's sculptures in that it is completely pristine white, instead of his usual black pieces. But like many of his sculptures, the piece is derived from a simplified idea of an existing object. The sculpture is based on the idea of a prancing horse, yet the sculpture is actually a construction of **polyhedron** models. The design of the forms reminded the artist of a prancing horse, so he named the piece after the famed horses from the Spanish Riding School. The artwork reflects the ballet-like steps that the Lipizzaner horses are trained to perform at formal occasions. The models only give the slightest reference to the horse form, stripping the idea of a horse to its most minimal expression. The subject of the sculpture comes across only in the name of the piece, otherwise it appears to be a study in geometry and form.

Joel Shapiro (American, b. 1941), *Untitled*, 1991, Bronze, 102½ x 43 x 78 in.

Joel Shapiro is one of America's best-known modernist sculptors. He was first associated with the Minimalists of the 1970s, but he went on to develop a less rigid, more personal style in his mature works. Shapiro was born in New York in 1941 and grew up in Queens. After receiving a bachelor's degree from New York University in 1965, he spent two years in southern India as a Peace Corps volunteer. He returned to New York in 1967 at the height of the Minimalist movement and enrolled at NYU as a graduate student in art. Because his early work was exhibited almost immediately, his discovery



of new methods and materials took place in the public eye.

While he absorbed the Minimalists' essentially geometric vocabulary, Shapiro soon developed his own style using an economy of forms to suggest the human figure.

Achieving a balance between abstraction and representation, the geometric forms of *Untitled* can be said to resemble the torso and appendages of a human figure striking a precarious pose. This impression changes as we move around the object,

encountering a multiplicity of animated compositions. Most of Shapiro's works are untitled so that the viewer is reliant upon the form to gain meaning from the object.

His usual method of making these metal sculptures is to create a small wooden model by joining rectangular pieces of wood with hot glue and a pin gun. After adjusting this small-scale model, the artist constructs a model at full scale from pieces of sawn wood. These wooden lengths are then sand-cast in bronze at the foundry, and care is taken to retain the wood grain and saw marks of the original wood. The separate bronze bits are then reinforced with steel and welded together, leaving a hollow center. Because the artist has not named the piece, the viewer is free to interpret the work in whatever manner he may wish. Shapiro has received a number of commissions for permanent installations in public spaces. His works can be found in unexpected places such as an 18th century plantation and the Piazza Barberini in Rome.

Did you know: Steel is an alloy of iron, carbon, and small proportions of other elements. Iron contains impurities in the form of silicon, phosphorus, sulfur, and manganese; steelmaking involves the removal of these impurities, known as slag, and the addition of desirable alloying elements.

George Rickey (American, 1907-2002), *Four Lines Oblique*, 1973, stainless steel, 20 ft. high

George Rickey was born in South Bend, Indiana, the son of an engineer and the grandson of a clock maker. His family moved to Scotland when he was a young boy. Rickey studied at Oxford University, where he participated in drawing classes but ultimately finished his degree in history. After Oxford he settled on becoming an artist and during the 1930s he spent time in Paris, New York, and various universities in Illinois and Michigan. In 1941, he was drafted into the Army Air Corps and worked maintaining the computing instruments for B-29 bombers. It was during this time that Rickey discovered his genius for mechanics and interest in sculpture. He began his career in sculpture by making mobiles, and eventually started to make kinetic sculptures. Rickey once said, "...I never considered making any sculpture that didn't move."

Rickey typically used simple geometric shapes and lines made of stainless steel, and then balanced them in such a way that the elements of the piece would move only by the forces of nature, gravity and wind. Rickey did not incorporate mechanical devices to provide motion. His search for the essence of movement led to the evolution of a new spatial vocabulary in visual art and influenced sculptors such as Lin Emery and John Scott. Rickey himself best described the delicate dance of *Four Lines Oblique* when he said, "I wanted whatever eloquence there was to come out of the performance of the piece--never out of the shape itself."



Jesús Bautista Moroles (American, 1950 - 2015), *Las Mesas Bench*, 1989, Granite, 156 x 66 x 56 in.

Jesús Moroles, was born and raised in Texas. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of North Texas in 1978. In 1980, he received a grant to live and work in Pietrasanta, Italy. Upon his return from Italy, Moroles commenced to make the body of work for which he is widely known. Moroles works predominantly in stone, especially granite. He uses a diamond saw because it is incredibly strong and sturdy and allows Moroles to easily cut through hard stones like granite. After purchasing his first diamond



saw in 1981, he established his own studio in Rockport, Texas. The studio is a family effort and he is largely assisted by his parents, brother, sister and brother-in-law. The Moroles Studio turns out large-scale sculptures and site specific commissions.

Moroles works predominately in granite and creates universal forms and geometric shapes. He works the stone to create an interplay of rough and smooth surfaces, creating deep pockets and whimsical weaves. Moroles uses this technique to great effect in *Las Mesas Bench*, located in the Besthoff Sculpture Garden. The mixture of textures, the geometric surfaces, the

layers of carving and the color of the stone are reminiscent of the **mesas** found in the American Southwest. His technique of deep carving and a combination of cool polished surfaces with rough hewn rock reminds the viewer of the team of man and nature that produced this piece. Although Moroles has strayed from the Minimalist ideal of eschewing the hand of the artists, his use of basic forms is related to the 60s movement.

In the summer of 1996, Jesús Moroles opened the Cerrillos Cultural Center, an exhibition, performance and studio space located in the town of Cerrillos, New Mexico, about 30 miles south of Santa Fe. Because of the assistance and opportunities he was given as a young artist, Moroles wanted to offer similar opportunities to emerging artists. The space was used as art studios and housing for artists in residence from other countries.

Did you know: “Mesa” is Spanish for “table” and describes a flat-topped tableland with one or more steep sides, common in the Southwest region of the United States