Sometime in the autumn of 1907, Pablo Picasso embarked on his monumental and groundbreaking painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (see Fig. 15). At the time, Paris was inundated with exhibitions of the work of Cézanne, which were to have a profound effect on the development of modern art. Soon after Cézanne died, in October 1906, a retrospective of 79 of his last watercolors was exhibited at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery. At the Salon in the autumn of 1907, another retrospective of Cézanne’s late paintings, mostly oils, appeared. In his letters to the painter Emile Bernard, which were published posthumously in the Paris press, Cézanne advised painters to study nature in terms of “the cylinder, the sphere, the cone.”
CUBISM

Picasso was already under the influence of Cézanne when he painted *Les Demoiselles*, and when Georges Braque saw first Picasso’s painting and then Cézanne’s retrospective, he began to paint a series of landscapes based on their formal innovations. His *Houses at l’Estaque* (Fig. 686) takes Cézanne’s manipulation of space even further than the master did. The tree that rises from the foreground seems to meld into the roofs of the distant houses near the top of the painting. At the right, a large, leafy branch projects out across the houses, but its leaves appear identical to the greenery that is growing between the houses behind it. It becomes impossible to tell what is foreground and what is not. The houses descending down the hill before us are themselves spatially confusing. Walls bleed almost seamlessly into other walls, walls bleed into roofs, roofs bleed into walls. Braque presents us with a design of triangles and cubes as much as he does a landscape.

Together, over the course of the next decade, Picasso and Braque created the movement known as Cubism, of which Braque’s *Houses at l’Estaque* is an early example. The name derived from a comment made by the critic Louis Vauxcelles in a small review that appeared directly above a headline announcing the “conquest of the air” by the Wright brothers: “Braque . . . reduces everything, places and figures and houses, to geometric schemes, little cubes.” It was, as the accidental juxtaposition of Cubism and the Wright brothers suggested, a new world.

Other artists soon followed the lead of Picasso and Braque, and the impact of their art can be felt everywhere. For the Cubist, art was primarily about form. Analyzing the object from all sides and acknowledging the flatness of the picture plane, the Cubist painting represented the three-dimensional world in increasingly two-dimensional terms. The curves of the violin in Braque’s *Violin and Palette* (Fig. 687) are flattened and cubed, so much so that in places the instrument seems as flat as the sheets of music above it. The highly realistic, almost trompe-l’oeil nail at the painting’s top introduces another characteristic of Cubist work. Casting its own shadow, it can be seen either as part of the painting, holding up the palette, or as real, holding the painting to the wall. Such play between the reality of painting and the reality of the world.
labeled **Fauves** (“Wild Beasts”). Not long after the exhibition, Matisse painted a portrait of his wife known as *The Green Stripe* (Fig. 688) for the bright green stripe that runs down the middle of her face. The painting is a play between zones of complementary colors, and in its emphasis on blue-violet, red-orange, and green, it relies on the primary colors of light, not pigment. Although some critics ridiculed them, the Fauves were seen by others as promising a fully abstract art. The painter Maurice Denis wrote of them: “One feels completely in the realm of abstraction. Of course, as in the most extreme departures of van Gogh, something still remains of the original feeling of nature. But here one finds, above all in the work of Matisse, the sense of . . . painting in itself, the act of pure painting.”

**GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM**

It was in Germany that Denis’s idea of “pure painting” fully took hold. In Dresden, a group of artists known as *Die Brücke* (“The Bridge”), among them Ernst Kirchner and Emil Nolde (see Fig. 249), advocated a raw and direct style, epitomized by the slashing gouges of the woodblock print. A group of artists known as *Der Blaue Reiter* (“The Blue Rider”) formed in Munich around the Russian Wassily Kandinsky. They believed that through color and line alone works of art could express the feelings and emotions of the artist directly to the viewer—hence the name **Expressionism**.

In the 1890s, Kandinsky had seen an exhibition of Monet’s *Grainstacks*. Noting how the grainstacks themselves seemed to disintegrate in the diffuse light, Kandinsky was convinced that “the importance of an ‘object’ as the necessary element in painting” was suspect. Nothing of the geometry of Cubism can be detected in Kandinsky’s early paintings such as *Sketch I for “Composition VII”* (Fig. 689). Like Whistler before him, Kandinsky considered his painting to be equivalent to music, and his works are alive in nonfigurative movement and color. Each color and each line carried, for Kandinsky, explicit expressive meaning (see Fig. 157). He believed that paintings like his had “the power to create [a] spiritual atmosphere” that would “lead us away from the outer to the inner basis.”

The paintings of the Fauves convinced Kandinsky that through color he could eliminate the object alto-

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soon led both Picasso and Braque to experiment with collage, which we discussed in Chapter 11. Perhaps most important, Cubism freed painting of the necessity to represent the world. Henceforth, painting could be primarily about painting.

**THE FAUVES**

Though the Cubists tended to deemphasize color in order to emphasize form, Henri Matisse favored the expressive possibilities of color. Matisse, in a sense, synthesized the art of Cézanne and Seurat, taking the former’s broad, flat zones of color and the latter’s interest in setting complementary hues beside one another. Under the influence of Van Gogh, whose work had not been seen as a whole until an exhibition at the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery in 1901, Matisse felt free to use color arbitrarily. A number of other young painters joined him, and in the fall of 1905 they exhibited together at the Salon, where they were promptly
“Color,” Kandinsky wrote in his 1911 essay “Concerning the Spiritual in Art,” “is able to attain what is most universal yet at the same time most elusive in nature: its inner force.”

Kandinsky’s ideas find remarkable expression in the work of another member of the Blue Rider group, Franz Marc, who adopted Kandinsky’s color symbolism to the depiction of animals. “I try to heighten my feeling for the organic rhythm of all things,” Marc wrote, “to feel myself pantheistically into the trembling and flow of the blood of nature.” More than any other German painter, Marc understood the sensuality of Matisse’s line and employed it in his work. His use of color, which echoes, of course, the name of the movement to which he belonged, is liberated from the world of appearance, but it is highly emotional. He painted horses over and over again (Fig. 690). Sometimes they were blue—Marc associated blue with masculinity, strength, and purity—sometimes red, sometimes yellow, depending on his emotions as he was painting. Marc never fulfilled his promise as a painter. He was killed fighting in World War I in 1916.
FUTURISM

If abstraction was the hallmark of the new century, certain thematic concerns defined it as well. The world had become, quite literally, a new place. In the summer of 1900, with the opening of the World’s Fair, Paris found itself electrified, its nights almost transformed to day. The automobile, a rarity before the new century, dominated the city’s streets by 1906. People were flying airplanes. Albert Einstein proposed a new theory of relativity and Niels Bohr a new model for the atom. Many people felt that there could be no tradition, at least not one worth imitating, in the face of so much change.

In February 1909, an Italian poet named Filippo Marinetti published in the French newspaper Le Figaro a manifesto announcing a new movement in modern art, Futurism. Marinetti called for an art that would champion “aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride . . . the punch and the slap.” He had discovered, he wrote, “a new beauty; the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath . . . is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.” He promised to “destroy the museums, libraries, academies” and “sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals.” There were, at the time, no Futurist painters. Marinetti had to leave Paris, go back to Italy, and recruit them. But as they exhibited their show of Futurist painting around Europe from 1912 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, outraging as many as they pleased, these painters—Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla, and Gino Severini—embodied the spirit of the machine and of rapid change that seemed to define the century itself. Balla’s Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash (Fig. 691) captures the Futurist fascination with movement. It demonstrates, as well, its debt to new technological media—in particular, photography, as in Marey’s and Muybridge’s work (see Figs. 50 and 315), and the new art of film.

Umberto Boccioni’s Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (Fig. 692) gives the sense of a figure striding forward, clothing flapping in the wind. But
Boccioni probably means to represent a nude, its musculature stretched and swollen to reveal its movement through space and time. It could probably best be thought of as an organic response to Marcel Duchamp’s mechanical *Nude Descending a Staircase* (see Fig. 49).

World War I more than dampened this exuberance. The war was catastrophic (see the map of World War I and the Territorial Reconstruction of Europe below). As many as 10 million people were killed and 20 million wounded, most in grueling trench warfare on the Western front, a battle line that remained virtually stationary for three years and ran from Oostend on the Dutch coast, past Rheims and Verdun, to Lunéville in France. World War I represented to many the bankruptcy of Western thought, and it served notice that all that had come before needed to be swept away.
DADA AND SURREALISM

Founded simultaneously in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, and New York during the war, Dada took up Futurism’s call for the annihilation of tradition but, as a result of the war, without its sense of hope for the future. Its name referred, some said, to a child’s first words; others claimed it was a reference to a child’s hobbyhorse; and still others celebrated it as a simple nonsense sound. As a movement, it championed senselessness, noise, and illogic. Dada was, above all, against art, or at least art in the traditional sense of the word. Its chief strategy was insult and outrage. Perhaps Dada’s chief exponent, Marcel Duchamp always challenged tradition in a spirit of fun. His L.H.O.O.Q. (Fig. 693) is an image of Leonardo’s Mona Lisa with a moustache drawn on her upper lip. Saying the letters of the title with French pronunciation reveals it to be a pun, elle a chaud au cul, roughly translated as “she’s hot in the pants.” Such is the irreverence of Dada.

In New York, Duchamp submitted a common urinal to the Independents Exhibition in 1917, titled it Fountain, signed it R. Mutt, and claimed for it the status of sculpture (Fig. 694). At first it was rejected, but when Duchamp let it be known that he and R. Mutt were one and the same, it was accepted. Thus, whether something was art depended on who made it—or found it, in this case. It also depended on where it was seen—in the museum it was one thing, in the plumbing store, quite another. Furthermore, on its pedestal, in the context of the museum, Duchamp’s “fountain” looked to some as if it were indeed sculpture. Duchamp did not so much invalidate art as authorize the art world to consider all manner of things in aesthetic terms. His logic was not without precedent. Cubist collage had brought “real things” like newspaper clippings into the space of painting, and photography, especially, often revealed aesthetic beauty in common
experience. But Duchamp's move, like Dada generally, was particularly challenging and provocative. "I was interested," he explained, "in ideas—not merely in visual products."

The art of Surrealism was born of Dada's preoccupation with the irrational and the illogical, as well as its interest in ideas. When the French writer André Breton issued the First Surrealist Manifesto in 1924, the nihilist spirit of Dada was clearly about to be replaced by something more positive. Breton explained the direction his movement would take: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality." To these ends, the new art would rely on chance operations, automatism (or random, thoughtless, and unmotivated notation of any kind), and dream images—the expressions of the unconscious mind. Two different sorts of imagery resulted. The first contained recognizable, if fantastic, subject matter. It was typified by the work of René Magritte (see Fig. 23), Giorgio de Chirico, who was acknowledged as an important precursor to the Surrealist movement by the Surrealists themselves, and Salvador Dali. De Chirico claimed not to understand his own paintings. They were simply images that obsessed him, and they conveyed, Breton felt, the "irremediable anxiety" of the day. Thus, in Melancholy and Mystery of a Street (Fig. 695), the little girl rolls her hoop toward the ominous black shadow of a figure lurking behind the wall. Dali called paintings such as The Persistence of Memory (Fig. 696) "hand-painted dream photographs." The limbless figure lying on the ground like a giant slug is actually a self-portrait of the artist, who seems to have moved into a landscape removed from time and mind.
The other type of Surrealist painting was virtually abstract, presenting us with a world of indecipherable visual riddles. The painting of the Spanish artist Joan Miró and many of the early mobiles of Alexander Calder (see Fig. 159) fall into this category. In Miró’s *Painting* (Fig. 697), biomorphic, amoeba-like forms float in a space that suggests a darkened landscape. If we look closely, however, faces, hair, and hands begin to appear. Everything in this composition appears fluid, susceptible to continuing and ongoing mutation, back and forth between representation and abstraction.

**POLITICS AND PAINTING**

The era between World War I and World War II marks the period in Western history when, in Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Soviet Union, totalitarian and nationalistic regimes—fascist dictatorships—rose to power. It was also a time of political upheaval in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, where guerilla groups led by Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa demanded “land, liberty, and justice” for Mexico’s peasant population. Their primary purpose was to give back to the people land that the government had deeded to foreign investors in the hope that they might modernize the country. In light of such events, politics impinged mightily on the arts.

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**Fig. 697** Joan Miró, *Painting*, 1933. Oil on canvas, $51\frac{3}{8} \times 64\frac{3}{8}$ in. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.

The Mexican Revolution fueled a wave of intense nationalism to which artists responded by creating art that from their point of view was true to the aspirations of the people of Mexico. When the government initiated a massive building campaign, a new school of muralists arose to decorate these buildings. It was led by Diego Rivera, David Siquieros, and Jose Clemente Orozco.

Rivera had lived in Europe from 1907 to 1921, mostly in Paris, where he had developed a Picasso-inspired Cubist technique. But responding to the revolution—and the need to address the Mexican people in clear and concise terms—he transformed his style by using a much more realist and accessible imagery focused on Mexican political and social life.

From 1930 to 1934, Rivera received a series of commissions in the United States. They included one from Edsel B. Ford and the Detroit Institute of Arts to create a series of frescoes for the museum’s Garden Court on the subject of Detroit Industry, and another from the Rockefellers to create a lobby fresco entitled Man at the Crossroads Looking with Hope and High Vision to a New and Better Future for the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center in New York. When Rivera included a portrait of Communist leader Lenin in the lobby painting, Nelson A. Rockefeller insisted that he remove it. Rivera refused, and Rockefeller, after paying Rivera his commission, had the painting destroyed.

Rivera reproduced the fresco soon after in Mexico City and called it Man, Controller of the Universe (Fig. 698). At the center, Man stands below a telescope with a microscope in his hand. Two ellipses of light emanate from him, one depicting the cosmos, the other the microscopic world. Beneath him is the earth, with plants growing in abundance, the products of scientific advancements in agriculture. To the right, between healthy microbes and a starry cosmos, is Lenin, holding the hands of workers of different cultures. On the left, between microscopic renderings of syphilis and other diseases and a warring cosmos, is New York society, including Nelson Rockefeller enjoying a cocktail. At the top left, armed figures wearing gas masks and marching in military formation evoke World War I, while at the upper right, workers wearing Communist red scarves raise their voices in solidarity. Man must steer his course between the evils of capitalism and the virtues of communism, Rivera appears to be saying.
One of the greatest political paintings of the era is Pablo Picasso’s Guernica (Fig. 699). It represents an event in the Spanish Civil War that occurred on April 26, 1937. That day, Republican Basque troops, who were fighting the Fascist forces of General Francisco Franco, were retreating toward Bilbao on the northern Spanish coast. A bridge over the Mandaca River, at the edge of a town of 7,000 people called Guernica, was the last escape route for vehicles in the area, and the German air force, which had come to the aid of Franco, was determined to destroy it. The attack was planned by Wolfram von Richthofen, the cousin of the almost-mythical German ace of World War I, Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, and a man eager to create his own legend. The strike force consisted of three squadrons—a total of 33 planes. Each was loaded with 3,000 pounds of bombs, as well as several hundred small incendiary cylinders. The attack, a type of sudden coordinated strike that soon was known as a blitzkrieg, commenced at 4:30 in the afternoon and lasted continuously for three-and-a-quarter hours. The first bombs were dropped near the railroad station—the bridge was ignored—and from that point on, the planes released their bombs indiscriminately into the smoke and dust raised by the first explosions. By the time the fires subsided three days later, the entire central part of the town—15 square blocks—was totally destroyed. Nearly 1,000 people had been killed.

Picasso, who was sympathetic to the Republican side and who considered himself exiled in Paris, was outraged at the events. Many elements of the painting refer to surrealist dream symbolism. The horse, at the center left, speared and dying in anguish, represents the fate of the dreamer’s creativity. The entire scene is surveyed by a bull, which represents at once Spain itself, the simultaneous heroism and tragedy of the bullfight, and the Minotaur, the bull-man who for the Surrealists stood for the irrational forces of the human psyche. The significance of the electric light bulb, at the top center of the painting, and the oil lamp, held by the woman reaching out the window, has been much debated, but they represent, at least, old and new ways of seeing.
AMERICAN MODERNISM AND ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

With the outbreak of World War II, Picasso decided that Guernica should stay in the United States. He arranged for it to be kept at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where it was to be held until the death of Franco and the reestablishment of public liberty in Spain. Franco, however, did not die until 1975, two years after Picasso himself. The painting was returned to Spain, finally, in 1981. It hangs today in a special annex of the Prado Museum in Madrid.

The painting profoundly affected American artists. “Picasso’s Guernica floored me,” Lee Krasner reported. “When I saw it first . . . I rushed out, walked about the block three times before coming back to look at it. And then I used to go to the Modern every day to see it.” Krasner’s own Untitled painting (Fig. 700), done soon after Guernica’s arrival in New York in 1939, reflects Guernica’s angular forms and turbulent energy. But it differs in important ways from Guernica. It is totally abstract, and where Guernica is a monochrome gray-brown, like burnt newsprint, Krasner’s painting is vibrant with color. Probably more than any other artist of her day, Krasner understood how to integrate the competing aesthetic directions of European abstraction, fusing the geometric and expressionist tendencies of modern art in a single composition.

Like Krasner, and somewhat earlier, the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian, who had himself emigrated to New York in 1940, purged from his work all reference to the world. In paintings such as Composition II with Red, Blue, and Yellow (Fig. 701), he relied only upon horizontal and vertical lines, the three primary colors, and black and white, which were, he felt, “the expression of pure reality.” Like the Russian Suprematists before him (see Fig. 33), who had sought to create a
new art to match the spirit of the Russian Revolution, Mondrian’s aims were, essentially, ethical—he wanted to purify art in order to purify the spirit. Krasner complicates, as it were, Mondrian’s art, opening it to the color of the German Expressionists, and to the sometimes terrifying whirl of modern life that Picasso had captured in his art.

Until 1940, abstraction such as Krasner’s was not very well accepted in the United States. To be sure, American Modernism had been responsive to trends in European painting since the early years of the century, but instead of pushing toward abstraction, as had happened in Europe, American modernists tended to utilize European painting’s formal innovations in more realist painting. Many artists preferred a realist approach, which was supported, on the one hand, by the growing popularity of photography, and, on the other, by an increasing conviction that art, in the face of the harsh realities of the Great Depression of the 1930s, should deal with the problems of daily life. Still, these artists were willing to learn from the formal discoveries of their more abstraction-oriented contemporaries, and we are often as attracted to the form of their work as to their subject matter. In a painting like Nighthawks (Fig. 702), Edward Hopper depicts the emotional isolation of the average American. But the composition is powerfully supported by the visual simplicity of his design, a geometry inspired by the example of Mondrian. It is as if his figures are isolated from one another in the vast horizontal expanse of the canvas. In her Purple Hills Near Abiquiu (Fig. 703), Georgia O’Keeffe utilizes the sensuous line of the German Expressionist painter Franz Marc (see Fig. 690) to create a landscape that almost seems to be alive, a body capable of moving and breathing like one of Marc’s animals.

The Great Depression and the outbreak of World War II, nevertheless, provided the impetus for the development of abstract painting in the United States. President Roosevelt’s WPA (Works Progress Administration) had initiated, in 1935, a Federal Art Project that supported artists financially and thus allowed them to work as they pleased. Furthermore, many leading European artists emigrated to the United States to escape ever-worsening conditions in Europe. Suddenly, in New York, American painters could not only see Picasso’s Guernica, but also found themselves in the company of Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duchamp, and André Breton. A style of painting referred to as Abstract Expressionism soon developed. It harkened back to Kandinsky’s nonobjective work of 1910 to 1920, but it was not unified in its stylistic approach. Rather, the term grouped together a number of painters dedicated to the expressive capacities of their own individual gestures and styles.
Jackson Pollock was deeply influenced by the Surrealist notion of **automatism**, the direct and unmediated expression of the self. Pouring and flinging paint onto canvas, usually on the floor, he created large “all-over”—completely covered, large-scale—surfaces with no place for the eye to rest (see Figs. 172–174). Because of the energy and movement of such paintings, the Abstract Expressionism of Pollock has been labeled “Action Painting.” Willem de Kooning’s work, with its visible application of paint to the surface, is the definitive example of this approach. Though his paintings of women, including *Woman and Bicycle* (Fig. 704), are often seen as an attack upon women, de Kooning’s hashed-out, scribbled-over, loosely gestural painting is equally a celebration of his own freedom from the conventions of figural representation. “I do not think . . . of art,” he explained, “as a situation of comfort.” What de Kooning liked most in Mondrian’s work, for instance, was the instability, the vibration that occurs where black lines cross (see Fig. 701). This shimmer, he said, made him feel like he was about to fall out of the painting.

The monumental quietness of Mark Rothko’s canvases (Fig. 705) conveys almost the opposite feeling. To call this “Action Painting” would be a misnomer. The painting produces a meditative, not active, space. In place of action, we find a carefully modulated field of color that suggests the luminous space and light of Monet’s *Grainstacks*, only without the realistic image. However, because Rothko emphasizes the horizontal band and the horizon line, his paintings often suggest the point where land meets sky. The bands of color bleed mysteriously into one another or into the background, at once insisting on the space they occupy by the richness of their color and dissolving at the edges like **Bicycle** (Fig. 704).
“I am interested only in expressing the basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on,” Rothko explained, “and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate with those basic human emotions. The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them.”

**POP ART AND MINIMALISM**

By the middle of the 1950s, as Abstract Expressionism established itself as the most important style of the day, a number of young painters began to react against it. Robert Rauschenberg parodied the high seriousness of the Action Painters by using their gestures—supposed markers of the artists’ sincerity—to paint over literal junk. Like the Cubists before him, he cut out materials from newspapers and magazines and silkscreened media images onto his prints (see Fig. 275). Rauschenberg went further, however, incorporating stuffed animals, tires (see Fig. 311), and all manner of things into the space of art. In *Odalisk* (Fig. 706), Rauschenberg parodies the nineteenth-century tradition of painting the nude (see Figs. 661 and 662). A stuffed rooster struts atop the construction, a pin-up nude decorates its side, and the whole rests, ironically, on a pillow—all a wry commentary on contemporary sexuality.

In the 1960s, inspired by Rauschenberg’s example, a group of even younger artists, led by Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and Roy Lichtenstein, invented a new American realism, Pop Art. Pop represented life as America lived it, a world of Campbell’s soup cans, Coca-Cola bottles, and comic strips. Based on an actual Sunday cartoon strip, Lichtenstein’s giant painting *Whaam!* (Fig. 707) indicates, by its very size, the powerful role of popular culture in our emotional lives. This is an image of power, one that most American boys of the 1950s were raised to believe in wholly. One of the chief tactics of the Pop artists, in fact, was to transform the everyday into the monumental, as Oldenburg turned objects such as spoons and maraschino cherries into giant sculptural objects (see Fig. 200). Most important, perhaps, Pop Art left behind traditional artistic media like painting. Artists turned instead to slick renderings made by mechanical reproduction tech-
niques, such as photolithography, that evoked commercial illustration more than fine art.

Another reaction against Action Painting led, in the same period, to a style of art known as **Minimalism**. In contrast to Pop works, Minimalist pieces were, in their way, elegant. They addressed notions of space—how objects take up space and how the viewer relates to them spatially—as well as questions of their dogmatic material presence. For Frank Stella, the shape of the painting determined its content, which might consist of a series of parallel lines that could have been drawn with a compass or protractor. “I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting,” Stella muses. “My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It is really an object... All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without confusion. What you see is what you see.” Thus, despite its title, *Empress of India* (Fig. 708) is contentless painting. It has no spiritual aspirations. It does not contain the emotions of the painter. It is simply there, four interlocked V’s, before the viewer, a fact in and of itself. Stella has deliberately set out to make a work of art that has no narrative to it, that cannot, at least not very easily, be written about.

**POSTMODERN DIRECTIONS**

From the time of Gauguin’s retreat to the South Pacific and Picasso’s fascination with African masks, Western artists have turned to non-Western cultures for inspiration, seeking “authentic” new ways to express their emotions in art. The African features of the two figures on the right in Picasso’s *Les
Demoiselles d'Avignon (see Fig. 15) are a prime example of this. At the same time, other cultures have been dramatically affected by Western traditions. Although we normally think of the Western world’s impact on these other cultures in negative terms—in the process of Westernization, ancient customs are lost, and cultural artifacts are looted and carried off for display in Western museums—many non-Western artists have incorporated the art of the West into their own art in positive ways. As Native American artist Jimmie Durham has put it, “We took glass beads, horses, wool blankets, wheat flour for frybread, etc., very early, and immediately made them identifiably ‘Indian’ things. We are able to do that because of our cultural integrity and because our societies are dynamic and able to take in new ideas.” Similarly, the aboriginal painters of Australia have adopted the use of acrylic paint, integrating the medium into their own cultural traditions (see Fig. 32). Durham himself makes what he calls “fake Indian artifacts.” Categorically non-Indian materials, such as the bright chrome automobile fender depicted here (Fig. 709), are transformed into something that looks completely Indian. But the cultural forces at work are highly complex. As much as Indian culture has the ability to absorb Western materials and make them its own, anything an Indian makes, Durham knows, is always seen by the dominant Anglo-American culture as an “artifact,” a surviving fragment of a “lost” people that does not quite qualify as “art” proper. His “fake” artifacts expose this assumption.

Native American painter Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, who studied at the University of New Mexico, puts it this way: “With a university training, you’re exposed to classic art and traditions from around the world. You wouldn’t be true to yourself if you didn’t incorporate what you were familiar with.” In her Petroglyph Park (Fig. 710), Quick-to-See Smith makes direct allusion to the Blue Rider of Kandinsky and Marc, drawing an analogy between the fate of the wild horse and the fate of Native Americans. Everything in this painting refers to lost peoples—from the makers of the petroglyphs to Marc’s early death in World War I—and the presence of those peoples in our memory. The simultaneous presence of diverse traditions in a
single work is indicative of what we have come to call **Postmodernism**.

The postmodern condition is imaged with particular power in Native American artist David Bradley’s *Indian Country Today* (Fig. 711). Bradley depicts a traditional Kachina dance taking place in the square of the pueblo. Performed by male dancers who impersonate Kachinas, the spirits who inhabit the clouds, rain, crops, animals, and even ideas such as growth and fertility, the dances are sacred and, although tourists are allowed to view them, photography is strictly prohibited. The actual masks worn in ceremonies are not considered art objects by the Pueblo people. Rather, they are thought of as active agents in the transfer of power and knowledge between the gods and the men who wear them in dance. Kachina figurines are made for sale to tourists, but they are considered empty of any ritual power or significance. This commercialization of native tradition is further imaged by the train passing behind the pueblo—the Santa Fe Railroad’s “Chief.” Behind the train, at the right, is the Four Corners Power Plant, in northwestern New Mexico, one of the largest coal-fired generating stations in the United States and one of the greatest polluters, spewing smoke into the air. Behind the power plant is an open pit strip mine. The city of Santa Fe—a major tourist attraction—and an Indian-run casino, its parking lot full of buses, occupy the left side of the image. But overlooking all is a giant


mesa, with Kachina-like eyes and mouth, suggesting that even in the contemporary world, where tradition and progress appear to be in a state of constant tension, the spirits still oversee and protect their peoples.

The return to tradition has, in fact, become a central theme of Native American art. This is especially true in the Pacific Northwest, where for generations cultural traditions were systematically suppressed by both the United States and Canadian governments. In 1884, for instance, the Canadian government banned the potlatch ceremonies long practiced by Northwest tribes. These ceremonies, hosted by a chief, revolved around major life events such as marriage, assumption of leadership, or death. The presen-
The visual record and consumption of food was an important part of the ceremony, and so was the display of art—carved bowls and spoons for the food, masks, garments, and headdresses for performances—all designed to underscore the chief’s wealth, the principle symbol of which was the copper. A copper is a shield-shaped plaque made of beaten metal (originally from the Copper River, across the Gulf of Alaska from Anchorage, but after contact acquired through trade). A pictograph representation of a 1927 Kwakwaka’wakw potlatch, conducted in defiance of Canadian law in Kingcome Inlet, off Queen Charlotte Strait across from the north end of Vancouver Island, contains a series of coppers, as well as another symbol of wealth, cows purchased from white settlers that were cooked at the feast (Fig. 712). In 1998, Kwakwaka’wakw artist Marianne Nicholson received permission from the Kingcome community to stencil a giant copper on the face of a cliff that falls into the Inlet near her ancestral village of Gwayi (Fig. 713). The images on the copper include an image of Wolf with a treasure chest, based on a Kwakwaka’wakw story of the origin the village of Gwayi itself in which two wolves, transformed into humans, journey up Wakeman and Kingcome Inlets where they build houses, make canoes, and receive treasures of supernatural power. The first pictograph painted in the Inlet for over 60 years, it celebrates the continuing tradition of the potlatch by directly referencing the small 1927 coppers nearby. As Aldona Jonaitis, director of the University of Alaska Museum of the North, has put it in her book, Art of the Northwest Coast, “This enormous representation of an image imbued with such cultural meaning makes a clear statement: this land is ours.”

As the world of art has become increasingly diverse and plural in character, new voices have continually entered into the arena, particularly African-American voices. Artists such as Jacob Lawrence (see Fig. 302) and Romare Bearden (see Fig. 306) have enjoyed major retrospective exhibitions. Martin Puryear...
(see Figs. 448 and 449) has established himself as one of America’s leading sculptors. And succeeding generations of African-American artists have followed the lead of their forebears. Bettye Saar and her two daughters are a case in point. Bettye Saar’s *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (Fig. 714) has become an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, putting a rifle and hand grenade into the hands of the familiar 1950s and 1960s symbol used to market syrup and pancakes. In the late 1960s, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Saar had begun collecting derogatory images of African Americans—this piece is actually a notepad holder, the notepad fitting into the space where Saar has painted a raised fist, symbol of Black Power. Her intention was to transform the negative image of black servitude into an image of revolutionary heroism.

This sensitivity to the social and political realities of African-American experience has found expression in the work of two of Saar’s three daughters, Lezley and Alison, both of whom joined their mother in an exhibition entitled *Family Legacies* that toured the country in 2006–07. Included in that show was Alison Saar’s *Inheritance* (Fig. 715). An image of an adoles-
cent girl balancing a giant ball of wrapped white cotton sheets on her head, the piece evokes both personal history and the broader history of African Americans in the United States. Richard Saar, Bettye's husband until their divorce in 1968 and her daughters' father, with whom they remain close, is a white painter and art conservator, and, at least in part, the white ball represents the burden of the daughters' white heritage and the questions of identity that it creates. But it also reaches back to the ubiquitous role of the black housemaid, forever changing sheets, to the cotton fields of the South, where slaves picked the cotton used in the manufacture of these same sheets, and even to Africa, where women routinely carry enormous parcels on their heads.

Kerry James Marshall's Many Mansions (Fig. 716), one of a series of paintings inspired by Marshall's observation that so many public housing projects in the United States have “garden” in their names, is another meditation on African-American experience. This painting depicts Chicago's Stateway Gardens (officially known as IL2-22, as inscribed at the top right of Marshall's work), an immense complex of eight high-rise apartment buildings on Chicago's South Side. Three young men in white shirts and ties are working in the garden in what is at once an ironic commentary on the virtual impossibility of transforming the concrete urban environment into a garden and a sincere attempt on Marshall's part to contradict the false, negative image of the African-American male. At the left, two bluebirds support a banner that reads “Bless Our Happy Home.” Floating above the entire scene is a red ribbon that reads “In My Mother's House There Are Many Mansions.” An adaptation of a Biblical passage from the Gospel of John that begins “In my father's house . . .”, it is a reference to the
The ironies of modern political life are also the subject of Chéri Samba, whose narrative paintings of the despotic Mobutu regime in his native Zaire were treated earlier (see Fig. 69). In *Problème d’eau. Où trouver l’eau?* (The Water Problem. Where to find water?) (Fig. 717), a text block at the top of the painting reads: “Life is priceless. Concerned for his people suffering from dehydration, Chéri Samba goes looking for water on Planet Mars, as if there wasn’t any water left on Earth. Yes . . . it is necessary to spend millions of dollars to better serve his people in 100 years.” Samba’s self-appointed superhero status, emphasized by the phallic missile that he straddles, is blatantly absurd in light of the thousands of refugees who died of dehydration on the Rwanda/Zaire border during the Rwanda civil war in the mid-1990s, and subsequent war between Ugandan and Rwandan forces in Zaire itself. He assumes the attitude, that is, of the United States, spending millions upon millions of dollars for space exploration—to discover only trace particles of water on Mars—while millions die for lack of water in Africa.

One of the most important of the political voices to emerge in the last half of the twentieth century has been that of feminism. Since the early 1970s, when the feminist movement began to take hold in
In this country, women have played an increasingly vital role in defining the issues and directions of contemporary art. One important consequence is that women have retrieved for art history artists previously relegated to the sidelines or ignored altogether, among them Frida Kahlo. Kahlo was married to a successful painter, the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (see Fig. 698), and her Las Dos Fridas (The Two Fridas) (Fig. 718) represents Rivera’s rejection of her. According to Kahlo, the Frida on the right, in native Tehuana costume, is the Frida whom Rivera had loved. The Frida on the left is the rejected Frida. A vein runs between them both, originating in a small photo of Rivera as a child on the once-loved Frida’s lap, through both hearts, and terminating in the unloved Frida’s lap, cut off by a pair of surgical scissors. But the flow of blood cannot be stopped, and it continues to drip, joining the embroidered flowers on her dress.

An important aspect of feminist art has been its critique of traditional ways of seeing, ways of seeing prescribed and institutionalized by men. As our assumptions and expectations have become increasingly challenged, the art world has become increasingly unbound by any rules or by any ruling “isms.” Artists can draw on personal experiences or stylistic trends and address their work to a wide audience or a relatively narrow one. But one overriding characteristic of contemporary art is its struggle with the question of identity. Cindy Sherman’s untitled photographs, for instance, are self-portraits (Fig. 719), sometimes presented at the scale of the film still and other times at the scale of a large poster. They are actually performances that address the ways in which our culture “views” women. In this case, we are wit-
ness to a highly ironic, if empathetic, display of female passivity.

The implication is that Sherman’s life, and by extension our own, is a series of performances; that, chameleon-like, we change identities as readily as we change our clothes, picking and choosing who we are from media images. The mass media—from television and video to electronic signboards and commercial photography—are increasingly not only the means of contemporary art but its subject. Barbara Kruger’s word-and-photograph pieces relate to billboard imagery, but they continue the feminist imperative of contemporary art, addressing issues of gender. In Untitled (We won’t play nature to your culture) (Fig. 720), Kruger exposes the traditional nature/culture dichotomy for what it is—a strategy that authorizes the cultural and intellectual domination of the male over a passive and yielding female nature.

Increasingly, the styles of the past—from the Renaissance to the Rococo, from Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop—have been raided and appropriated to the context of the present. Yasumasa Morimura’s Portrait (Twins) (Fig. 721) is a case in point. Morimura has posed himself here as both Manet’s Olympia (see Fig. 672) and her maid, manipulating the photograph with a computer in his studio. On the one hand, like Japanese culture as a whole, he is copying the icons of Western culture, but he undermines them even as he does so. For one thing, he draws attention to the fact that the courtesan and her maid share the same identity—they are “twins”—both essentially slaves to the dominant (male) forces of Western society. He places Japanese culture—and in particular the Japanese male—in the same position, prostitute and slave to the West.

As Morimura’s work suggests, the cultural specificity of artists’ work is becoming, in the postmodern world, increasingly irrelevant. Today, artists tend to see themselves as “international” rather than Asian, Middle Eastern, European, or American. Again and again, their work is instilled with a distinct multicultural flavor. For instance, British

**Fig. 721** Yasumasa Morimura, Portrait (Twins), 1988.
Color photograph, clear medium, 6 ft. 13½ in. × 9 ft. 10 in. NW House, Tokyo.
Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York.
artist Fiona Rae incorporates images of the kind of transfer decals popular especially among Japanese schoolgirls into her paintings—in the case of *I’m Learning to Fly!!* (Fig. 722), 11 multicolored Bambi-like deer and 18 black hearts. These pop culture images climb over and around an array of brushmarks in almost every idiom—Abstract Expressionist drips, Baroque ribbons, feathery gestures, heavily layered impasto, cartoonish outlines, a grid of narrow vertical and horizontal lines, and an area of apparent airbrushing. In the end, her painting reflects an all-inclusiveness and heterogeneity, admitting into the surface anything and everything.

Shahzia Sikander addresses the heterogeneity of her background in works such as *Pleasure Pillars* (Fig. 723), combining her training as a miniature artist in her native Pakistan with her graduate studies at the Rhode Island School of Design. In the center of the composition is a self-portrait with spiraling horns. Below it are two bodies, one a Western Venus, the other the Hindu goddess of fertility, rain, health, and nature, Devi, who is said to hold the entire universe in her womb. Between them two hearts pump blood—perhaps a reference to Frida Kahlo’s *Dos Fridas* (see Fig. 718), her Western inspiration, just as the dancers surrounding her self-portrait are her Eastern inspiration. Western and Eastern images of power also inform the image—the fighter jet at the top of the image and the image of a lion killing a deer at the bottom left, copied from an Iranian miniature of the Safavid dynasty (1499–1736).

In the introduction to a catalogue for the exhibition *Without Boundary* at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 2006, Fereshteh Daftari notes that inevitably in Sikander’s work “post-9/11 politics seep...
in.” The events of September 11, 2001 have, in fact, had an enormous impact on contemporary art. Troy Brauntuch’s image of shirts stacked in a men’s clothing store (Fig. 724) at first seems entirely banal. But the ghost-like image turns out to be based on newspaper photographs of shirts covered in dust after the fall of the World Trade Center towers. The rich sensuality of Brauntuch’s surface—he uses no actual blacks or whites, only a range of grays, from blue-gray to white-gray—stands in stark contrast to the pathos of the image itself.

But since the 9/11 tragedy, the art world has also responded with humor and hope. For the 2005 Venice Biennale, Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, who live and work in Puerto Rico, created Hope Hippo (Fig. 725), a life-size sculpture of a hippopotamus (literally a “river horse,” a nod to Venice’s military equestrian statuary) out of mud dredged from the Venetian lagoon. Each day throughout the five-month exhibition, “whistle-blowers” mounted the hippo and read from the daily newspaper, blowing on a referee’s whistle every time they came across a report of perceived injustice, from sports to world events. The “sleeping” hippo is a symbol of how deeply embedded we are in the “mud” of injustice and lies. We need only pay attention, blow the whistle, Allora and Calzadilla argue, see the “hippo” for what it is, expose injustice, and bring it out of the murky waters that it perpetually inhabits.

Fig. 724 Troy Brauntuch, Untitled (Shirts 2), 2005.
Conté crayon on cotton, 63 × 51 in. Collection of Alberto and Maria de la Cruz.
Courtesy Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York.

Fig. 725 Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, Hope Hippo, 2005.
Courtesy of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla and Lisson Gallery, London.
Photo: Giorgio Boato.

Even works that were conceived without the events of 9/11 in mind have been affected by the tragedy. For her video project *Africa Rifting: Lines of Fire: Namibia/Brazil* (Fig. 726), South African artist Georgia Papageorge invoked the Gondwanaland split, which began 155 million years ago when what would become the continents of Africa and South America began to separate, by stretching long runs of red banners on the beaches of both the Skeleton Coast of Namibia and the coastal city of Torres, Brazil, with its ancient basalt volcanic towers. This continental rift was, for her, a metaphor for the social and personal schism and upheaval that defined first the Portuguese slave trade to Brazil in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and later life in her native South Africa, a country, she says, “torn apart by rift, by apartheid.” “I have Africa in my blood,” she says. “And my work is very much about things of the blood, things of the heart. My use of long red banners, which are symbolic lines of fire and blood, are so much a part of what has come out of my African birth, my African experience.”

One of the principal days of filming in Brazil turned out to be September 11, 2001, and the long red banner that fell down the basalt cliffs at Torres and then ran along the beach came to signify the rifts separating humanity on a global scale. As the wind blew across the sand, “a long line,” in Papageorge’s words, “designed to be divisive in its other manifestations, became a healed rift.” The red banner was like an open wound. But driven by the wind and tide, sand washed over it, like skin suturing itself (Fig. 727)—the banner a symbol of both rupture and reconciliation, a scar mirroring a world in which both terror and hope define us.
THE CRITICAL PROCESS

Thinking about Art Today

What is the role of art today? What does the museum offer us? Is it merely a repository of cultural artifacts? Or can it help us to understand not only our past, but our present and our future? These are questions that museum professionals are asking themselves, and questions that students of art, coming to the end of a book such as this one, might well ask themselves as well.

Consider Olafur Eliasson’s installation The Weather Project (Fig. 728). When it was installed in the mammoth Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, London, in the winter of 2003, it was roundly criticized as “mere” entertainment, in no small part because it attracted over 2 million visitors. At the end of the 500-foot hall hung a giant yellow orb, 90 feet above the floor. The ceiling itself was covered with mirrors, thus doubling the size of the space. The “sun” was actually a semi-circle of some 200 yellow sodium streetlights, which, when reflected in the ceiling mirrors, formed a circle. Artificial mist machines filled the hall with a dull, wintry fog. What was the attraction?

In no small part, it seemed to reside in the very artificiality of the environment. Visitors to the top floor of the gallery could easily see the trussing support the mirrored ceiling as well as the construction of the sun shape. The extraordinary visual effects of Eliasson’s installation were, in the end, created by rather ordinary means. But this ordinariness, in turn, suggested profound and somewhat disturbing truths about our world and our environment. If Eliasson could create this almost post-apocalyptic environment—with its dead, heatless sun, perpetual fog, and cold stone ground—with such minimal means, what might we, as a world, create with the advanced technologies so readily at our disposal? In other words, as viewers laid on the floor of the museum and saw themselves reflected on the ceiling above, were they viewing themselves in the present, or seeing themselves in the future? What hath humanity wrought?

The Weather Project was, then, something of a chilling experience, both literally and figuratively. “I regard . . . museums,” Eliasson has said, “as spaces where one steps even deeper into society, from where one can scrutinize society.” It is perhaps relevant for you to consider this book as such a space. To conclude, what is it about your world that you have come to understand and appreciate more deeply and fully?