

## Lesson 4

### THE SUBJECTS OF ART AND THE METHODS OF PRESENTING THEM

#### The Subjects of Art

##### 1. What is a subject of art?

The subject of art is the matter to be described or to be portrayed by the artist. This may refer to any person, object, scene or event.

##### 2. Two Kinds of Art as to Subject:

1. **Representational Art or Objective Art** – They are those arts which depict (represent) objects that are commonly recognized by most people. They attempt to copy, even if in a subjective manner, something that's real. It uses “**form**” and is concerned with “**what**” is to be depicted in the artwork.

Examples:

- A. **Still life** is a work of art depicting mostly **inanimate subject matter**, typically commonplace objects which may be either natural (food, flowers, plants, rocks, or shells) or man-made (drinking glasses, books, vases, jewelry, coins, pipes, and so on) in an artificial setting.
  - B. **Portraiture (portrait)** is a painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artistic representation of a person, in which the face and its expression is predominant.
  - C. **Landscapes, Seascapes, Cityscapes**
2. **Non-representational Art or Non-objective Art** – They are those arts without any reference to anything outside itself (without representation). It is non-objective because it has no recognizable objects. It is **abstract** in the sense that it doesn't represent real objects in our world. It uses “content” and is concerned with “how” the artwork is depicted.

#### Methods of Presenting Art Subjects

1. **Realism.** It often refers to the artistic movement, which began in France in the 1850s. The popularity of realism grew with the introduction of **photography** - a new visual source that created a desire for people to produce things that look “**objectively real**”. Undistorted by personal bias, realism believed in the **ideology of objective reality** and revolted against **exaggerated emotionalism**. Simply speaking, it is a method of portraying an art subject according to the objective reality. It depicts what the eyes can see, what the ear can hear, what the sense faculty may receive. Example was the painting of **Zeuxis**, 5<sup>th</sup> century painter. The subject of his painting was a grape. When he unveiled his painting of grapes, they appeared so real, luscious and inviting that the birds flew down from the sky to peck at them.
2. **Abstraction.** Its etymology is derived from Latin “abstractus “drawn away,” or Latin past participle “abstrahere:” from ab(s)- “away” + trahere “draw,” which means “withdrawn or separated from material objects or practical matters.” It is totally the opposite of realism.

In abstract art, the artist does not show the subject at all as an **objectively reality**, but only his idea, or his feeling about it (**exaggerated emotionalism**). It is all about what the artists feel and what mood they might want to portray. Abstract art is all shapes, no real-life images, scenery, or objects



Example is the painting of Constantin Brancusi's "Bird in Space." He was so impressed by the grace of a bird in flight, by the sweep of its body as it flew through the air. His sculptural work does not look like a bird for it is supposed to convey an impression of a bird's grace and speed.

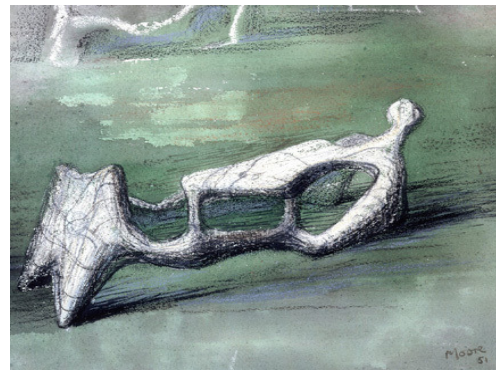
Constantin Brancusi's Bird in Space

### Forms of Abstraction:

A. **Distortion.** This is clearly manifested when the subject is in misshapen condition, or the regular shape is twisted out. It is a form of emphasizing detail to the point that something is no longer "correctly" depicted. Example is Pablo Picasso's The Old Guitarist. See how the left shoulder is hitched up so high and the other shoulder barely exists; how spidery his hands are; and how his head is twisted around unnaturally. Another is Henry Moore's sculptural works and the ancient Egyptian paintings and sculptural works are good examples of this kind.



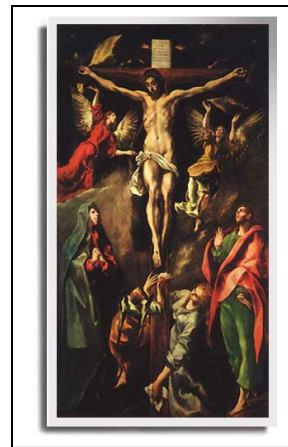
Pablo Picasso's "The Old Guitarist"



Henry Moore's "Distortion"

B. **Elongation.** It refers to that which is being lengthened, a protraction or an extension.

El Greco "Christ Crucified," a sculpture by Giambologna from around 1588, an elegant but somewhat formulaic work in which the elongated body of Christ seems to float almost birdlike off the cross, is an example of this.



C. **Mangling.** This may not be a commonly used way of presenting an abstract subject, but there are few artists who show subject or objects which are cut, lacerated, mutilated, torn, hacked or disfigured.

D. **Cubism.** It began in the early 1900s when artists such as Georges Braque (French) and Pablo Picasso (Spanish) began painting in such a way that was far removed from traditional art styles. The Cubists tried to create a new way of seeing things in art. Many of their subjects, be they people or landscapes, were represented as combinations of basic **geometric shapes** - sometimes showing multiple viewpoints of a particular image. Cubist pictures are therefore often described as looking like pieces of fractured glass.



Violin and Candlestick by Braque



Three Musicians by Picasso

- E. **Abstract Expressionism.** Abstract Expressionism is a modern art movement that flowered in America after the Second World War and held sway until the dawn of Pop Art in the 1960's. With this movement New York replaced Paris as the center of the art world.

In a painting, the artists applied paint rapidly, and with force to their huge canvases in an effort to show **feelings and emotions**, painting gesturally, non-geometrically, sometimes applying paint with large brushes, sometimes dripping or even throwing it into the canvas.

Abstract Expressionism was influenced by the **Existentialist philosophy**, which emphasized the **importance of the act of creating, not of the finished object**. What matters for the artist are the **qualities of the paint itself** and the **act of painting itself**.



Jackson Pollock "Convergence"



Jackson Pollock "Autumn Rhythm"

3. **SYMBOLISM.** A symbol is a visible sign of something invisible such as an idea or quality. Symbolism systematically uses symbols to concentrate or intensify meaning, making the work of art more **subjective** (rather than objective) and **conventional**. For example, a flag is a symbol of a country and it depicts the value of nationalism; a lion to represent courage and a lamb to represent meekness. The logos and emblems of business firms and the coat of arms of bishops are also examples of symbolism.

Lucerne's Lion Monument, a famous masterpiece of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is dedicated to the memory of the heroic fight and final defeat of the Swiss Guards in Paris in 1792. In the Philippines, we have the "Spolarium" of Juan Luna. The painting shows fallen gladiators being dragged to an unseen pile of corpses in a chamber beneath the Roman arena. It expresses his anger over the abuses and cruelties of the colonial rule of the Spanish authorities over the people of his native country. The



sculpture in the EDSA Shrine depicts the brave-ness and courage of the Filipinos against the tyrant dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.



Lucerne's Lion Monument



Juan Luna "Spolarium"

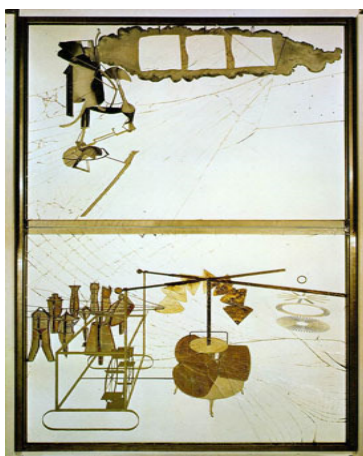
4. **FAUVISM.** It is derived from the French "les fauves," which means "the wild beasts." It is an artistic movement of the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which emphasized spontaneity and use of extremely **bright colors**. To a fauvist, for example, a tree trunk need not be brown. It could be bright red, purple or any other color.

**Henri Matisse**, French artist, was known for his use of colour and his fluid, brilliant and original draughtsmanship. As a draughtsman, printmaker, and sculptor, but principally as a painter, Matisse is one of the best-known artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was initially labeled as a Fauve (wild beast).



5. **DADAISM.** The term "dada" is a French word, which means a "hobby-horse." A hobby-horse is a child's toy consisting of a wooden horse mounted on a stick. With this etymology, we could say that Dadaism is system of art which is per se "**non-sensical.**" Some would say it is **not an art** because it strives to have **no meaning at all.**

It started as a Post World War cultural movement against the barbarism of the war. It is a reaction to what they believed were outworn traditions in art, and the evils they saw in society. It tried to shock and provoke the public with outrageous pieces of writing, poetry recitals and art exhibitions.



Marcel Duchamp's "The Large Glass"



Marcel Duchamp's 'Fake Urinal Turned into Fountain'

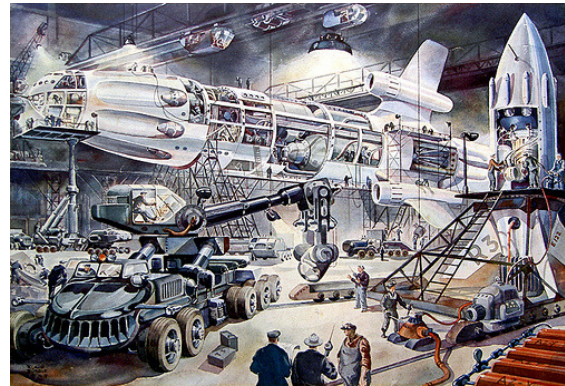
6. **FUTURISM.** Futurism came into being with the appearance of a manifesto published by the poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti on the front page of the February 20, 1909, issue of Le Figaro. It was the very first manifesto of this kind.

Marinetti summed up the major principles of the Futurists. He and others espoused a love of speed, technology and violence. Futurism was presented as a modernist movement celebrating the technological, future era. The car, the plane, the industrial town were representing the motion in modern life and the technological triumph of man over nature.



ARTIST: DONALD DAVIS  
TITLE: TOROIDAL SHAPED SPACE COLONY

Donald Davis "Shaped Space Colony"



Klaus Burgle "Retro Futurismus"

7. **SURREALISM.** It is an offshoot or a child of dada. It is also known as "super realism," which revolves on the method of **making ordinary things look extraordinary.** It focuses on real things found in the imagination or fantasy or it has realistic subjects that are found in the unconscious mind; depicting dreamlike images of the inner mind.

### Two Types of Surrealism

1. **Veristic Surrealism.** It allowed the images of the subconscious to be undisturbed so that the meaning could be understood through analysis. They follow images of the subconscious until consciousness could understand the meaning. Examples: **Rene Magritte** would show a **nighttime sky**, then a daytime foreground, or **Salvador Dali** would **melt clocks** to show how unreal how time and space were; **slice of a cheese with a face on it.**
2. **Automatism or Abstract Surrealism.** Images of the subconscious should not be burdened by meaning, so they are represented in an abstract form. It is focused more on feelings and less analytical. Proponents: Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud.



Salvador Dali



Andre Breton



## Surrealistic Techniques:

1. **Scale** – changing an object’s scale, or relative size. Example: ordinary small size of glass to a big extraordinary size.
  2. **Levitation** – Floating objects that don’t normally float. Example: Stone Floating
  3. **Juxtaposition** – Joining two images together in impossible combinations. Example: Car running and on top of it is a horse running with a man riding.
  4. **Dislocation** – Taking an object from its usual environment and placing it in an unfamiliar one. Example: a face wrapped by a piece of cloth; an electric burner inside the car.
  5. **Transparency** – Making objects transparent that are not transparent.
  6. **Transformation** – Changing objects in unusual way.
8. **IMPRESSIONISM.** It is also sometimes referred to as **optical realism** due to its interest in the actual viewing experience, including such things as the effect of **color, light and movement** on the appearance of the objects depicted in the artworks. Impressionism focused on directly describing the visual sensations derived from nature. Devotees of Impressionism were not concerned with the actual depiction of the objects they painted. Instead they were concerned with the visual impressions aroused by those objects.

The **Impressionists** created one of the most important artistic movements of the nineteenth century and it got its start in France. The theme of the **Impressionism movement** teaches, “the human eye is a marvelous instrument”. The worldwide impact of **Impressionism** was large and lasting.



**Claude Monet** is widely recognized as the father of the **Impressionist movement**, and his work **Impression: Sunrise** is widely recognized as the first work of this new movement. Fascination with color, light and movement formed the core of the **Impressionism movement**.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Get a copy of the logo or emblem of your school, MSU-IIT, and the City of Iligan, and explain the symbolisms depicted in them. Computerized – short bond paper.
2. Make a half bond paper size “Christmas Card” with a painting in the front page. In depicting your painting, you can use any medium or material and choose any of the methods in presenting the subject of art. The method you’re going to employ must be reflective of the character or personality of the recipient of your card. Explanation of your artwork should be written at the outside back portion of the card. Use linen cartolina. Cut into short bond paper size, and fold it. Write Christmas message at the inner portion of the card.

Due during the Prelim Exam Dates:

WS Classes – Prelim Exam – December 17, 2008 (Wednesday)

Saturday Class – Prelim Exam – December 13, 2008 (Saturday) 1:30-3:00 PM

This fact sheet is for the exclusive use of Mr. Hinacay’s Humanities Classes, MSU-IIT.

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