

Converging Cultures

Theme 1: Converging Cultures

Introduction

Throughout history, economic needs, material desires, and political ambitions have brought people from different cultures and communities into contact, sometimes across great distances. Whether clashes or cooperative endeavors, these convergences have brought about the exchange of knowledge and ideas. In the visual arts, they have led to creative juxtapositions, hybrid styles, innovative forms, and the reinterpretation of traditional signs and symbols.

Session

Watch the Overview video (18 minutes).

Watch the Converging Cultures video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What works of art featured in the program reflect exchange that results when one culture takes over another? Do such exchanges benefit both the victor and the vanquished?
2. In some instances, a culture's "present" converges with its own "past," resulting in conflicting ideas or practices. How is this phenomenon visualized in the work of Kuroda Seiki? What other works can you cite in which ideas from the past and the present from the same culture have converged or collided?
3. Today, when artists around the world are exposed to global culture through the media, technology, tourism, and foreign trade, what makes an art object "authentic" to a particular culture?
4. What do works featured in the program by Miguel Luciano and Gentile Bellini reflect about the repercussions of trade between cultures? What does the namban screen convey?
5. What are some examples from the program in which one culture has adapted the religious iconography of another?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Converging Cultures in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Dreams and Visions

Theme 2: Dreams and Visions

Introduction

Art, of course, is about seeing. But it is not always about representing the world as it exists, and sometimes it can allow us to see with more than our eyes. From Aboriginal artists who paint the unseen forces of the universe to Surrealists who looked into the recesses of the unconscious mind for inspiration, people have found many ways to record ephemeral feelings, unknowable mysteries, personal fantasies, and inner visions. At the same time, art has been used as a tool to inspire and guide dreams and visions, both secular and spiritual.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Converging Cultures.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Dreams and Visions video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. Dream imagery is found in the art of many cultures and eras. What similarities are there in works shown in the program? For what different purposes were the dream images created?
2. Throughout history, many artists represented people and things in the world around them. The work of other artists is an expression of the inner self. Explain how Sandy Skoglund uses objects from the real world in her work, and what she is trying to convey.
3. Some works of art depicting the dreams and visions of religious figures were made by deeply religious artists to express their personal reverence and belief. Other works were commissioned by the religious establishment to promote their faith. What examples from the program would fit into the former category, and what other might fit into the latter?
4. How did the Surrealist works in the program reflect Sigmund Freud's theories of psychoanalysis and the unconscious or subconscious mind?
5. Aboriginal artists have said that the true value of their work lies in the personal experience of "dreaming," and not in the resultant visual images that are created. How is this view similar or different to non-Aboriginal artists who have represented their dreams in works of art?

Between Sessions:

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1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Dreams and Visions in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

History and Memory

Theme 3: History and Memory

Introduction

Art has been a medium through which people have not only documented, but also shaped history—both past and future. Periodically, individuals, groups, and societies have also drawn on or appropriated artistic forms of the past to make statements in and about the present. Art can commemorate existence, achievements, and failures, and it can be used to record and create communal as well as personal memories.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Dreams and Visions.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the History and Memory video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. How does art have an effect on our ideas about historical events? What are the roles and responsibilities of artists in presenting historical depictions?
2. Societies use art to commemorate certain important individuals in their history or to memorialize significant events. What types of markers of historical memory do you encounter during your normal daily routine? Why do you pay attention or ignore those commemorations? What memorials have you traveled to view personally? Why was this monument meaningful enough for you to visit?
3. Some historical events and figures remain in the forefront of a culture's collective memory, while others, who may have been as influential, fade away. How has art assisted in the keeping events or people in the foreground of the collective memory?
4. Often art presents certain events that will prompt different responses, depending on who views it, and when and where it is viewed. What responsibility does the art viewer have in interpreting the accuracy of its message and legacy?
5. In some instances, objects originally used as mnemonic devices to prompt memories become objects of art. What shifts our perceptions of an object that elevates it in such a way?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about History and Memory in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Ceremony and Society

Theme 4: Ceremony and Society

Introduction

People across the world engage in a wide range of ceremonial rites and spectacles. Some of these are religious, others political or social. Through these practices and the arts that accompany them—costumes, masks, vessels, ancestor figurines, altarpieces, staffs, and other objects and images—people across cultures define identity, build community, express belief, negotiate power, and attend to the physical and spiritual well-being of both individuals and societies.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for History and Memory.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Ceremony and Society video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. In examples featured in the program, how has the transformative power of masks been used?
2. How have cultures used ceremonial objects to promote the well-being or betterment of the community?
3. Compare the political undertones of the Carnival celebration in Haiti with Mardi Gras in New Orleans.
4. In the examples featured in the program, how has ceremonial dress conveyed position or status?
5. What makes a trip to an art museum a kind of ritual?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Ceremony and Society in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Cosmology and Belief

Theme 5: Cosmology and Belief

Introduction

In all cultures, people strive to understand their reason for being and their place in the universe. Art can be an instrument for not only recording spiritual beliefs, but also for creating myths, defining the realms of mortal and immortal, communing with ancestors, channeling forces of good, and repelling those of evil.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Ceremony and Society.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Cosmology and Belief video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What purpose do creation myths play in the development of societies and cultural values?
2. Even when societies are distant from each other, their creation stories often have similar underlying themes and comparable characters. What themes or character types are similar in different stories or art depicting divine creation? What do these narratives' similarities say about humankind in general?
3. Many cultures have organized their universe in some type of cosmological order. How has this helped people discover their own roles in life? How do these organizational conceptions of the universe influence how societies govern their social structures and systems? In examples from the program, how have different cultures reconciled their spiritual notions with the scientific theories available to them?
4. How does art help deliver the ideas and beliefs of a divinity? How does viewing works of spiritual or religious art help people understand a belief system and, perhaps, increase their devotion to it?
5. What differences can you identify between objects meant for personal worship or devotion and those meant for public view?
6. How does the scale or form of a religious site of worship change the follower's relationship to it and the faith it represents? How do the materials with which religious structures or objects are made affect their meaning? What architectural similarities or differences can be seen in the places of worship of different religions?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Cosmology and Belief in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Death

Theme 6: Death

Introduction

Death is one of the few experiences common to all people and all societies. But how different people have conceived of death and how those conceptions have shaped their behaviors and practices has varied over time and across cultures. Through art, people have expressed attitudes toward death that are in some respects universal, while in others personally and culturally specific. They have, moreover, used a wide range of objects, images, and structures to negotiate the processes of aging and dying, grieving and commemorating.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Cosmology and Belief.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Death video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What does the concern for naturalism indicate about a culture's beliefs concerning death and the afterlife?
2. Of the examples featured in the program, which of the death-related rituals, ceremonies, and funerary art were created for the living, and which were created for the deceased?
3. While tombs, coffins, cemeteries, grave markers, monuments, and other ceremonial objects were intended to commemorate the dead, how have they also served political or social purposes?
4. A *memento mori* is an image that serves as a reminder of the inevitability of death and the transience of human life. While different types of images have served this purpose, skulls and skeletal figures are seen in the art of different cultures. In viewing the featured art images in the program, how do the skulls or skeletons in these works reflect different cultural views of life and death?
5. Certain objects were buried along with the deceased, such as the Book of the Dead in ancient Egypt, or the terracotta warriors buried with the Qin Emperor of China. What were the intended purposes of these objects?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Death in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Domestic Life

Theme 7: Domestic Life

Introduction

From furniture and tapestries to bowls and baskets, art has figured prominently in domestic life for thousands of years. Within the space of the home—be it a palace or a hut—aesthetically and culturally significant objects have fulfilled purposes both mundane (e.g., storage and service) and transcendent (e.g., the facilitation of prayer). Moreover, the activities and events taking place within these domestic spaces have been the inspiration for countless artists. Their depictions of everyday life are best understood as complex documents melding real-world observations with ideal social expectations.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Death.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Domestic Life video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. How does the art featured in the program convey a sense of pride in domestic life?
2. Many art objects exhibited in museums were once used as domestic objects in people's homes or as tools for their work. What makes a functional object of everyday life, such as a quilt, a chair, or a porcelain vase, an art object?
3. Fine art is usually associated with mediums such as painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography, etc. Crafts are usually associated with techniques such as weaving, ceramics, or metalwork. Should there be a distinction between art and craft?
4. How was everyday domestic life documented in ancient civilizations?
5. The Industrial Revolution in nineteenth-century Europe, and subsequent technological developments, changed the way many functional objects, such as clothing, fabric, furniture, tools, and household items were made or manufactured. What are the positive and negative repercussions of mass production?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Domestic Life in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Writing

Theme 8: Writing

Introduction

Images and words are symbols that both denote actual things, like people, objects, and places, and connote more abstract ideas, feelings, concepts, and theories. Given this shared function, it makes sense that the boundaries between words and images often overlap and that the two are so frequently juxtaposed. Since the dawn of civilization the relationship between written words and pictures has been manipulated to communicate ideas. It has also inspired countless artists around the globe, whose works demonstrate how text and image can enhance, supplement, complicate, or even undermine each other's meanings.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Domestic Life.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the video **Writing video (30 minutes)**.

Consider/discuss the following:

1. Many faiths convey ideas through sacred texts such as the Torah, the Qur'an, or the Bible. How does the experience of reading a sacred text differ from viewing a site of worship or hearing a sermon?
2. Using examples from the program, discuss the impact of incorporating text with visual imagery.
3. In ancient cultures, writing was considered a gift of the gods. Since few people could read or write, having the ability to write was associated with exclusivity and power. What do works featured in the program convey to those who can't read or understand what is written?
4. How does Xu Bing's approach to calligraphy make the old new?
5. What makes a logo effective?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Writing in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Portraits

Theme 9: Portraits

Introduction

Throughout history and across cultures, people have shown a fascination with faces, and in turn, with portrait representation. The depiction of an individual likeness is about identification, but more than that, it is a record of an interaction between an artist and a sitter, both of whom contribute to the portrait's form and content. Far from being mirror reflections, portraits are complex constructions of identity that serve a range of functions from expressing power and declaring status to making larger statements about society at a given point in history.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Writing.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Portraits video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. Of the portraits featured in the program, which show concern for naturalism and which are concerned with other ideas?
2. How did the nineteenth-century invention of photography, and subsequent technological developments such as moving images in film and video, or digitized images, affect the way artists created portraits?
3. How do artists use iconic symbols to convey images of power and/or status in their portraits? Which symbols are universal, and which are specific to a particular culture?
4. What do portraits of Gertrude Stein, JFK, and Ronald Fischer, Beekeeper featured in the program reveal about the relationship between the subject and the artist?
5. In Kehinde Wiley's portraits, contemporary males are depicted in poses from paintings created in an earlier era. What is he trying to convey?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Portraits in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

The Natural World

Theme 10: The Natural World

Introduction

From the earliest times, people have found sustenance and solace, challenge and mystery in the natural world. From representations of animal and vegetable life to landscapes and earthworks, art has been a means by which humans have expressed their awe of, communion with, dependence on, and isolation from nature. Of course, art is never a mere transcription of reality. Every rendering of the natural world is, ultimately, a construction, in which nature is translated through the filter of our own interests, values, and desires.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Portraits.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch The Natural World video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. How have representations of nature in art been associated with spiritual beliefs? What do artistic renderings of the natural world tell us about a culture or society and its geographic locale?
2. How has the relationship between humans and the natural world traditionally been portrayed in the art of Asia? How does this type of art reflect Asian philosophies? To what extent is it similar to or different from the depiction of this relationship in Western art and the art from Oceania?
3. How have artists incorporated plant and animal motifs into their works? What materials from the natural world have they used?
4. How do paintings of nature express pride and a sense of nationalism?
5. How do artistic changes to the physical environment alter the way the viewer sees the natural landscape? How does architecture relate to the natural environment?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about The Natural World in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

The Urban Experience

Theme 11: The Urban Experience

Introduction

For thousands of years cities have been hubs of activity, centers of industry, and places from which new aesthetic trends originate, evolve, and spread. The creative visions of planners, painters, architects, and sculptors have shaped the development of cities around the world. In turn, the urban experience has inspired the creation of artwork depicting aspects of city life.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for The Natural World.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch The Urban Experience video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. How has the organization of a city (its plan or organic layout) represented the values and beliefs of the citizens within it or their leaders?
2. If taxes are used to support architecture or public art, who should have the right to decide what public art or architecture will be built or presented? What criteria should be set to make these aesthetic choices?
3. How have artists' representations of cities informed viewers about the nature and zeitgeist of a particular urban place and time? How do we identify the idealism or the realism of city life in the artistic style of artwork?
4. What role do artists have in cities?
5. How have artists addressed urban problems in their work? How has art had an effect on metropolitan difficulties?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about The Urban Experience in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

Conflict and Resistance

Theme 12: Conflict and Resistance

Introduction

Throughout history, groups and individuals have sought not only to maintain control over their own lives, but also to assert their power over the lives of others. Visual art has played an important role in documenting such conflict and resistance. It also has served as a means for expressing personal views on politics, war, social inequities, and the human condition.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for The Urban Experience.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Conflict and Resistance video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What makes art an effective form of social or political protest?
2. What are the similarities and differences between a glorified battle scene and one that shows the horrors of war?
3. Invading armies have destroyed the art of the people they vanquished, or new regimes have destroyed art associated with their predecessors. What makes art images so powerful? Who ascribes the power to them?
4. How do such images of conflict and resistance speak to a universal audience?
5. At different points in history, and in different cultures or societies, governments have banned certain works of art because they were deemed unpatriotic or subversive. What role, if any, should the government play in defining what art is, how art can be made, who can make it, or the places and manner in which it is displayed?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Conflict and Resistance in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.

The Body

Theme 13: The Body

Introduction

From painting to sculpture, body art to performance art, the body has figured prominently in the creative expression of nearly all cultures from the beginning of civilization. Through art, the body becomes a site for defining individual identity, constructing sex and gender ideals, negotiating power, and experimenting with the nature of representation itself.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Conflict and Resistance.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch The Body video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. While artworks depicting nude images have appeared throughout much of history, issues regarding their appropriateness have often been linked to predominant religious or spiritual beliefs, or the prevailing social mores of a society. Who should determine whether a work of art is obscene or immoral? Should an individual have the right to view art that others may find indecent or obscene?
2. How do idealized images of the body vary in the artworks of different cultures and in different time periods?
3. What do images of the female figure featured in the program convey about the role of women in their respective cultures?
4. How are such stylizations in prehistoric figurines and African figurative sculpture similar/different to Takashi Murakami's sculpture of Miss ko2 ?
5. What is the significance of body art—tattoos and scarification—and the pain individuals endure to acquire it?

Following Session:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about The Body in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed.