3. HISTORY AND MEMORY

Introduction

History usually refers to the written study of the past. Historians analyze the sequence and interrelationships of events, individuals, and groups to understand the ongoing evolution of societies. The study of historical patterns can thwart the repetition of failures and promote the repetition of achievement. The ways in which historical events and their consequences are preserved shape our view of the past and allow us to envision other possibilities.

In addition to written text, art and artifacts created through time serve as historical records. As John Hanhardt from the Smithsonian American Museum stated, "From that bison on a cave to the great history of Renaissance painting, photography, the cinema—art is about shaping memories of history and the past."[1] The arts enable us to speculate and imagine the lives of our predecessors. The images on an 8th-century Greek grave-marking urn, or *krater*, can inform our understanding of ancient funeral rites and beliefs regarding death. The history painting of an event, such as a battle or a procession, was created to influence how we understand it. Over time, objects created to be used as devices to help people remember the past have gained recognition for their beauty as well as utility.

Regardless of what era or in which genre art is made, it serves to preserve history in tangible ways. As artifacts from earlier cultures shed light on what life was like in the past, art created today will tell future generations about what our lives are like. Artists can record history, interpret history, and, sometimes, make history.

Art as Historical Record

Many cultures have recorded history or noted the passage of time in documents or objects that incorporate artistry. Calendar systems using iconographic symbols were used by the Maya (fl. 250-900), Aztec (mid-14th century-1521) and other Pre-Columbian cultures that populated Mexico[2] and Central America. The Aztec calendar, like others used throughout ancient Mesoamerica, used a circular format to represent a 365-day cycle (*xiuhpohualli*, the year count) and a 260-day ritual cycle (*tonalpohualli*, the day count). The *xiuhpohualli* was the agricultural calendar based on the sun.

The *tonalpohualli* kept track of sacred time. Each of its 260 days was signified by a combination of a number from one to thirteen (each representing a particular deity), one of the twenty glyph symbols representing day signs, and an indication of the four cardinal directions. It would, therefore, take 260 days (13 multiplied by 20 signs) for the two cycles to realign and then repeat.

The Aztec, Inka (a.k.a. Inca, ca.1200-1532), and Maya civilizations kept written records through codices and stelae (stone slabs). Mayan codices were folded historical almanacs, written by scribes in glyphic script on *huun* paper, a smooth and durable material developed in the 5th century from the inner bark of trees.[3] While Mayan stelae usually recorded information about the lives and events of the kings and royal families, the codices were primarily documents used by priests, and included information on rituals and agriculture. There were many such books in existence at the time of the Spanish conquest in the 16th century—several of which recorded history for 800 years—but they were destroyed by the conquistadors and Spanish clergy. The *Codex Troana Cortesianus,* or the *Madrid Codex* (ca.13th-14th century), discovered in the 19th century and now at the Museo de América in Madrid, consists of 56 pages created by eight different scribes. In addition to astrology almanacs and information about divination rituals, it includes depictions of various Mayan deities, crafts, and hunting activities.[4]

Another such work, the *Dresden Codex* (Figure 1), on page 75, is considered to be the most comprehensive source of Mayan astronomy and calendar systems. It includes illustrations of eclipses, tables based on the solar cycle for predicting events and scheduling religious ceremonies, and cycles of both the Moon and Venus that were meticulously recorded by Mayan astronomers. The Venus cycle was particularly important to the Maya as it was believed to be associated with war and, consequently, used to divine appropriate times for coronations and battles.

This codex is thought to have been sent by Hernán Cortés (1485-1547) to Emperor Charles V (1500-1558) in 1519. It was later acquired by the Royal Library in Dresden in 1744.[5]

Between 1200 and 1532, the Inka (a.k.a. Inca) established an empire called *Tawantinsuyo*, or "Four Corners of the World," which stretched over 3,000 miles of South America. Groups of Inka colonizers, called *mitimaes*, were sent to settle in different regions to establish their language, way of life, and a system of labor taxation. This labor system, called *mita*, was used for work including the construction of roads and towns, mining, agriculture, and the production of crafts.[6] Because the Inka did not have a system of writing, they developed a portable system of record-keeping based on arithmetic to keep track of all of the tributes, contracts, and accounts. Hand-held objects, called *quipus*, used a
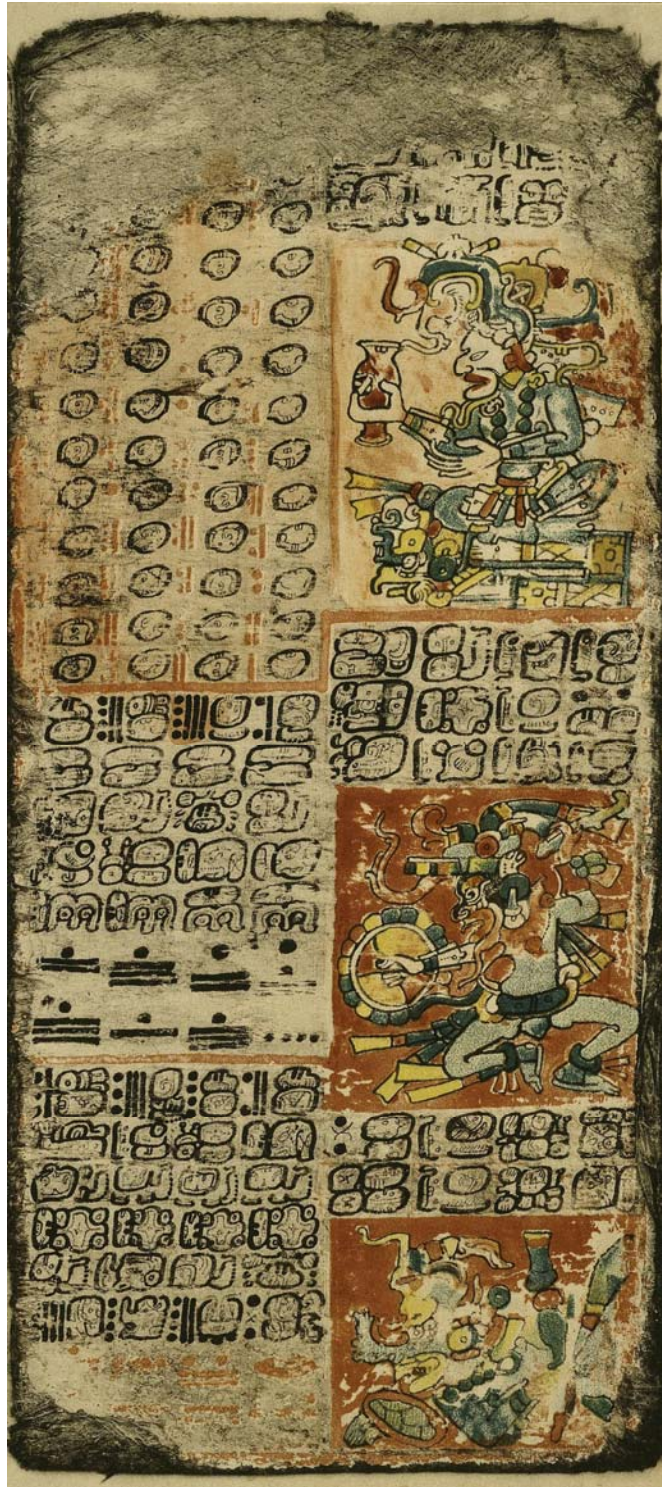
Figure 1. Unknown artist (Maya); *Venus table showing the phases of the planet alongside depictions of gods from the Dresden Codex* (1892 facsimile edition); paint and lime plaster on *Amate* (ficus) fiber paper; Yucatan Peninsula probably, Mesoamerica; Pre-Columbian, ca. 13th-14th century; H: 12 ¼ in. (31.5 cm.), W: 9 in. (23 cm.); Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussicher Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

a system of cords with knotted, colored strings attached to represent different kinds of information. The colors represented particular types of information, such as land, harvests, ceremonies, taxes, and buildings, while the type and configurations of knots represented different numbers. *Quipus* were "read" by special interpreters, but they were also used to facilitate remembrance and storytelling.[7]

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, sailors in the Marshall Islands used a memory device, map-like charts constructed by trained navigators from the midribs of palm fronds that indicated the positions of islands as well as the presence and intersection of ocean swells. Only the individual chartmaker knew the significance of the features represented on these stick charts or *rebbilib*, which were used on land to prepare for a voyage or to teach novices.[8] This device allowed knowledge of the art of navigation to remain a closely guarded secret passed down within certain families while also ensuring that sailors could guide vessels safely to shore despite the fact that the geography and topography of the two parallel island chains made them difficult to see from the ocean.

Among the Luba people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, memory boards (*lukasa*) are hand-held wooden objects that represent fundamental aspects of Luba culture. Some boards are carved in relief. Others, like the one in Figure 2 (pg.77), feature arrangements of beads and cowrie shells. Different colors and sizes have particular meanings, such as indications of specific tribes, regions, or residencies. Through a unique design, each board gives sculptural form to the revelations of a spirit medium. The configuration of beads and shells illustrates the political system, chronicles the history of the Luba state, and maps territorial diagrams of local chiefdoms. This may include journeys to, or the location of, sacred lakes, trees, and *kitenta*, "spirit capitals" that house the tombs of divine kings. Circles of beads refer to chieftaincies, while lines of beads may signify paths or migration routes.

The Luba's relationship to the environment is also reflected in some board designs representing indigenous plants and animals. The carved form of the board itself signifies a plan of the royal court, and the surface is a map of the physical and religious geography of the region. *Lukasa* are kept by the Luba *mbudye* association, a special group that is charged with sustaining and interpreting the political and historical principles of the Luba people, and passing this knowledge on to initiates.[9]

Figure 2. Unknown artist (Luba); *Memory Board (lukasa)*; wood, beads, nails, cowrie shells; Democratic Republic of the Congo; 20th century; H:7 ¾ in. (19.7 cm.), W: 5 in. (12.7 cm.), D: 2 in. (5.1 cm.); Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. Photograph courtesy of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University.

Sculptural Commemoration

For centuries, societies have used art to honor important individuals or to celebrate significant events. While much recorded history may be tucked away in books, sculpture and other three-dimensional commemorative artwork in public spaces ensure that people and events are not forgotten.

The Victory Stele of Naram-Sin, one of the first works of art created to celebrate a specific achievement of an individual ruler, depicts the victory by Akkadian King Naram-Sin (ca. 2190-2154 BCE) over the people of the Zagros Mountains, in present-day western Iran. The iconography carved in limestone presents the ruler as divine, conveyed by his size, which connotes importance relative to the subordinate figures descending from his perch. Smaller soldiers follow his lead, and even smaller defeated enemies beg for mercy. He ascends the mountain in the center of the scene, while the vertical form of the stele mirrors the tall, narrow shape of the mountain—a sharp break in tradition from the typically horizontal sections of Mesopotamian and Egyptian art.[10]

A monument in Rome, *Trajan's Column,* built in113 (Figure 3, pg.79), stands 98 feet tall. Unfurled, the bands would stretch almost 625 feet. In a single, uninterrupted pictorial narrative, the bands tell the story of the Dacian campaigns (102-103 and 105-106) and include more than 2,500 figures wedded by landscape and architecture, along with the recurring figure of Emperor Trajan (53-117), who appears 59 times among his troops.[11] The bottom band, closest to the viewer, is 3 feet tall and grows larger as it ascends farther from view. The reliefs of figures are deliberately carved deeper than those depicting architectural elements to stand out more prominently. Hadrian dedicated the column in honor of Trajan in 113. After Trajan's death in 117, the Roman Senate voted to have his ashes buried in the column's square base, which depicts the arms and armor captured from the Dacians on its surface.

Also in Rome, *The Arch of Constantine* (312-315) spans the *Via Triumphalis,* the route victorious emperors took when they returned to the city from battle. While this triumphal arch commemorates the victory by Constantine (ca. 274-337) over Maxentius (ca. 278-312) at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312,[12] it also recycles older images of victory onto façades of two subsidiary arches flanking the central arch. The relief panels on either side of the inscriptions are taken from a monument that celebrated the victory of Marcus Aurelius (121-180) over the Germans in 174. As in *Trajan's Column*, on the attached piers framing the panels are large statues of prisoners made to celebrate the victory of Trajan over the Dacians. Over each of the side arches are pairs of

Figure 3. Unknown artist(s) (Roman); *Column of Trajan*; marble; 113; H: 125 ft. (38.1 m.) (with base); Trajan's Forum, Rome, Italy. Photograph courtesy of Giraudon/ the Bridgeman Art Library.

large roundels taken from a monument to Hadrian. The reused elements attempt to visually transfer the old Roman virtues of strength, courage, and piety associated with these earlier, beloved emperors to the Emperor Constantine.[13]

The *Arc de Triomphe* (1840) at the western end of the Champs-Élysées in Paris honors all those who fought for France, particularly during the Napoleonic Wars. Names of generals and wars fought line the inside and upper portion of the arch that stands on a tomb dedicated to an unknown soldier, who died in World War I (1914-18). The triumphal arch is modeled after the Roman *Arch of Titus,* which was built after 81.

The enormous scale and prominent positioning of the *Lincoln Memorial*[14] (1914-1922) in Washington, DC, signifies both the importance of the16[th] president in American history as well as the ideals he upheld for the country. Created through the combined efforts of architect Henry Bacon (1866-1924), who designed the structure, Daniel Chester French (1850-1931), who designed the 19-foot-tall statue, Jules Guérin (1866-1946), who painted the interior murals, and many others, the memorial, intended to honor a man who defended democracy, was based on the Parthenon temple in Athens, Greece—the historic birthplace of democracy.[15]

Peter Eisenman's *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* (1999-2005), shown in Figure 4 on page 81, uses a vast array of architectural forms to honor the Jews exterminated under the Nazi regime in World War II (1939-1945). Installed on a sloping plot of land between East and West Berlin, 2,711 concrete blocks of varying heights rest like tombstones in an overcrowded Jewish cemetery. The blocks are set at different angles, with some tilting slightly on the uneven ground. Toward the center of the group, some vertical blocks stand over 12 feet tall, so a visitor cannot see around them or know if someone else is nearby. The architect intended the memorial to be a place of contemplation, while at the same time evoking feelings of insecurity, hopelessness, and the inability to escape.[16]

Figure 4. Peter Eisenman (American, b. 1932); *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*; concrete; 1999-2005; (total) Covers 5 ½ acres; (Blocks) H: 0-13.1 ft. (0-4 m.), W: 37.4 in. (95 cm.), L:7.79 ft. (2.375 m.) (each); Berlin, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Simon Sinek.

Imaging Historical Events

The depictions of historical conflicts, heroic actions, tragedies, symbolic allegories, and daily life in art inform our notions of the past. Visual works can both confirm and contradict what we know about history from the written record.

The 230 feet of the medieval *Bayeux Tapestry* (before 1082), shown in Figures 5-7 on pages 82 and 83, present a vividly embroidered account of the Norman invasion of England and the Battle of Hastings, in which Harold, Earl of Wessex (ca.1022-1066), and William, Duke of Normandy (ca.1027-1087), vied for the throne of England. Embedded clues have suggested to scholars that the makers were most likely English; thus, the tale of triumph is being told by the vanquished. It also has been suggested that imagery in the borders, including vignettes from Aesop's fables, may provide commentary that undermines the Norman version of the main narrative.

Figure 5. Unknown artist(s) (French or English); *"King Edward the Confessor (c.1003-1066) giving his instructions to Earl Harold," (detail) from the Bayeux Tapestry*; wool embroidery on linen; before 1082; H: 20 in. (50 cm.), L: 230 ft. (70 m.) (entire tapestry); Musée de la Tapisserie, Bayeux, France. Photograph with special authorization of the city of Bayeux, courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

Figure 6. Unknown artist(s) (French or English); *"Many fall in battle and King Harold is killed" (detail) from the Bayeux Tapestry*; wool embroidery on linen before 1082; H: 20 in. (50 cm.), L: 230 ft. (70 m.) (entire tapestry); Musée de la Tapisserie, Bayeux, France. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

Figure 7. Unknown artist(s) (French or English); *"The trees are chopped down to build the ships," (detail) from the Bayeux Tapestry*; wool embroidery on linen; before 1082; H: 20 in. (50 cm.), L: 230 ft. (70 m.) (entire tapestry); Musée de la Tapisserie, Bayeux, France. Photograph with special authorization of the city of Bayeux, courtesy of Giraudon / the Bridgeman Art Library.

An illustration from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Figure 8), on page 84, from around 1550 depicts an alliance between indigenous people and conquistadors. The *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* was a series of sequential images painted on cloth showing the conquest of the Aztec Empire in Mexico and post-conquest exploration. The original *lienzo* was lost in the 19th century; only copies remain. The *lienzo* contains numerous scenes of ceremonial events in which both Spanish and Tlaxcalan individuals participate.

Here, Maxixcatzin, the ruler of Ocoteloko, one of the four *altepetl* (constituent states) of Tlaxcala,[17] presents gifts to the Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés (1485-1547), seen with his indigenous translator and lover, Malinche, at his side. The Tlaxcalans were the main Indian allies of the Spanish and, therefore, largely responsible for the extent of their conquest in Mexico and the surrounding regions. The image of lavish gift-giving to Cortés has been understood by scholars as an example of the post-conquest documentation used by the Tlaxcalans, who petitioned the Spanish for economic and political privileges by reminding them of their debt.[18] As a reward for their military alliance, Tlaxcala remained under the rule of the Spanish royal government, rather than having to answer to local Spanish administrators in *encomienda* (a feudal-type system).

Figure 8. Mexican school; *The Aztec Chieftain, Maxixcatzin, Presents a Bouquet of Roses and Other Gifts to Hernán Cortes as tokens of welcome*, illustration from a facsimile of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*; color lithograph; original illustration ca. 1550, lithograph ca. 1890; private collection. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

In *The Conquest or Arrival of Hernán Cortés in Veracruz* (1951), Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957) offers a different interpretation of the same event. Christopher Columbus is seen being paid—perhaps for paving the way to the New World—by Cortés, standing next to a faceless Malinche, who became an icon of the conquest of Mexico.[19] The indigenous people and even their animals are tortured and enslaved by weapon-bearing, sour-faced Spaniards. It is clear in Rivera's mural that the arrival of Cortés foreshadows the total destruction of the Indian world.

Spanish artist Diego Velázquez (1559-1660) depicts a propagandistic scene of Spanish military success in *The Surrender at Breda* (1634-35), shown in Figure 9 on page 85. In the background, the newly conquered Dutch city of Breda still smokes after the lengthy siege, as Spanish General Ambrosio Spinola (1569-1630) magnanimously receives the keys from the disgraced Dutch governor, Justin of Nassau (1559-1631). Velázquez emphasizes both the submission of the Dutch and the clemency of the Spanish. Unlike traditional scenes of surrender, the conqueror is not positioned above the defeated. Spinola graciously prevents Justin from kneeling in his presence, placing a consoling hand on his shoulder. However, scholars have determined that this event never actually happened as pictured. Justin was forced to petition for an honorable surrender when all provisions from the Breda fortress had been depleted. However, it is doubtful that Spinola treated the Dutch governor as an equal, even though the Spanish terms for surrender were considered generous. Moreover, the Spanish troops are shown as alert and in clean uniforms, instead of as weary, war-torn soldiers. Although the painting appears to be a factual depiction, the artist idealized events to create a work that would please his patron, King Philip IV (1605-1665).[20]

Figure 9. Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez (Spanish, 1599-1660); *Surrender at Breda*; oil on canvas; 1634-1635; H: 21 in. (307 cm.), W:144 ½ in. (367 cm.); Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY/Photo by Erich Lessing.

In depicting a battle that occurred centuries later, the English painter J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) took liberties by compressing several key events of *The Battle of Trafalgar* (1824) into a single scene. This prompted a critical reaction from the government and naval experts who had commissioned the work*,* and had expected a literal depiction of one of England's most crucial naval victories.[21] However, Turner was not concerned with historical accuracy. Rather, his central narrative was meant to be symbolic, simultaneously representing the rise and fall of the various ships, the surrender of crews, and the desperate pull of survivors from the sea. It was more important to him to evoke an emotional response about this significant historical event.

An image that provoked a profound emotional response by the American public was the photograph *Marines Raising the American Flag on Iwo Jima* (1945), shown in Figure 10 on page 86, by American Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal (1911-2006). The photograph's harmonious composition, the obscured faces in which every mother could see her own

son, and the waving flag made it an iconic image commemorating the beginning of the end of World War II. The photograph appeared on the front page of every U.S. newspaper and subsequently on postage stamps and advertisements for war bonds which, as late as 1945, led to an unprecedented surge in the war effort. The image also served as the basis for a sculpture and earned Rosenthal a Pulitzer Prize. However, he was accused of staging the photograph. Although he had not, the truth was that the event he captured was not the first time soldiers planted the flag following a successful reconnaissance mission. This photograph shows a second group of men sent to replace the first flag with a larger one that would be more visible.

Figure 10. Joe Rosenthal (American, 1911-2006); *American Marines Raising American Flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima*; gelatin silver print; 1945. Photograph courtesy of Corbis / Bettmann.

The Convergence of History, Legend, and Religion

History—or narrative—paintings may or may not represent events that actually happened, sometimes drawing upon stories from other sources, such as the Bible, other religious texts, mythology, or legends. Artists often depicted narratives that would convey heroism or virtue, especially if the work was intended for the public.

The *Siyer-i Nebi* is a 14th century Turkish epic about the life of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad (ca. 570-632). Based on a work by an Arabic poet and enriched with pre-Islamic Arabic legends and verses from the Qur'an, it was written by Mustafa, son of Yusuf from Erzurum (a.k.a. Darir), and commissioned by Sultan Az-Zahir Sayf ad-Din Barquq, or Sultan Berkuk (r.1382-1389 and 1390-1399), the Mamluk ruler in Cairo. Two hundred years later, the Ottoman ruler Murad III (r.1574-1595) ordered the work to be illustrated by the calligrapher Lutfi Abdullah, overseer of the painting workshops at the Ottoman royal palace. The completed epic (1595), containing 814 hand-painted miniatures in six volumes, is said to reveal everything known at the time about the Prophet Muhammad.[22]

A narrative cycle—39 frescoes inside the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy, by Giotto di Bondone (ca.1267-1337)—depicts significant events in the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Giotto was an Italian painter and architect from Florence. Completed around 1305, this cycle is noted for the way the artist unified Christian iconography, emotionalism conveyed through expression and gesture, and naturalism.[23] Giotto also employed innovative perspectival conventions, creating the illusion of three-dimensional space.

The trials of epic heroes are designed to serve educational purposes, whether religious, historical, or political. This elaborate manuscript leaf, "Alexander Fights the Monster of Habash" (before 1335), shown in Figure 11 on page 88, illustrates a scene from the celebrated Persian national epic, the *Shahnama* ("Book of Kings"), a 60,000-verse poem composed over a period of several decades by Abu'l Qasim Ferdowsi (a.k.a. Firdausi, ca. 940-1020). Combining history and myth, the complex text begins with the creation of the universe, telling the story of ancient Persia and showing the consequences of good and bad rule, beginning with its first king and ending with its conquest by Muslim Arabs in the 7th century.[24] *Shahnamas* combining illustration and text flourished in Persia, present-day Iran, during the 14th century, This page from the Demotte *Shahnama* depicts the epic hero Iskander—Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE)—fighting to protect his empire from the monster Habash in Ethiopia and, consequently, demonstrating the appropriate, brave response to a formidable opponent. Regarded as a masterpiece of Persian literature, the *Shahnama* relates Persia's history while also incorporating the country's cultural values and profound sense of nationhood.

Figure 11. Unknown artist (Iranian); *"Alexander Fights the Monster of Habash" from the Shahnama*; opaque watercolor, gold, and ink on paper; before 1335; H: 23 ¼ in. (59.05 cm.), W:15 5/8 in. (39.69 cm.); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

During the Renaissance in Europe (ca.1400-1600), some artists used classical stories and figures to please their patrons. The Roman deity Mars, for example, represented war. Venus and the amorous adventures of the gods were the subjects of paintings destined for Renaissance bedrooms. By the 16th century, artists were less concerned with showing biblical or classical figures in their historical context. Some paintings focused on the story itself; others focused on specific events in the life of a protagonist, who was usually depicted as the "star."[25]

At a time when Marie de' Medici (1575-1642) was embroiled in political turmoil, the Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) painted a cycle of portraits that depicted her in fantastic allegorical surroundings. Marie de' Medici was the second wife of King Henri IV of France (1553-1610). When Henri was assassinated in 1610, Marie acted as regent to the 10-year-old Louis XIII (1601-1643), the successor to the throne, even while persistent rumors circulated of her complicity in the king's death.[26] However, even after Louis formally came of age at 13, Marie continued to rule in his stead. In 1617, Louis took matters into his own hands and exiled her to Blois. Upon her return in 1621, Marie focused on decorating the Luxembourg Palace and commissioned Rubens to paint two large series of works: the first depicting her life and the second depicting the life of her late husband.

The first series of 24 canvases, which includes *The Triumph of Juliers* (1622-25), shown in Figure 12 on page 90, visualizes the life of Marie in idealized allegorical terms. Rubens was faced with the delicate task of portraying events in the life of a disgruntled queen who, in her principal role as wife and mother, had no glorious military triumphs to highlight. In addition, Rubens had to be careful not to offend the son with whom Marie had quarreled, as he was now the ruling monarch of the French court. The artist's preliminary sketches needed to pass muster with court censors. With guidance from his subject, Rubens used allusions to classical literature, art, mythology, and religion[27] to present the Queen Mother in a positive light. In a version of the equestrian portrait traditionally used to commemorate war heroes, Marie wears the helmet of Athena, the goddess of war. However, in reality, she played almost no role in the battle for Juliers (September 1,1610), in which the Protestant princes she supported defeated Imperial Catholic forces.

Figure 12. Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577-1640); *The Triumph of Juliers from the Marie de' Medici Cycle*; oil on canvas; 1622-25; H: 12.9 ft. (3.94 m.), W: 9.68 ft. (2.95 m.); Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photograph courtesy of Giraudon/the Bridgeman Art Library.

Figure 13. Rajasthani School (Indian); *"Battle of Lanka, between Rama and Ravana, King of the Rakshasas" from the Ramayana*; watercolor on paper; early 19th century; H: 8 5/8 in. (22 cm.), W: 13 ¾ in. (35 cm.); private collection. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.

An ancient epic from India, the *Ramayana*, relates an important Hindu legend. While some believe the Ramayana existed in the oral tradition as far back as 1500 BCE, it is generally accepted that the *Ramayana* was probably composed in Sanskrit by the mythical sage Valmiki between the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE.[28] In 24,000 couplets written in seven books, it tells the story of the life and death of Rama, rightful prince of Ayodhya, his exile in the forest, his wife Sita's abduction by the demon king Ravana, and his crucial battle to get her back. The 19th-century watercolor in Figure 13 is entitled "Battle of Lanka, between Rama and Ravana, King of the Rakshasas." The story explores the concept of *dharma*—living one's life according to moral laws and spiritual discipline that will enable one to be happy and contented.[29] To Hindus, this is central to understanding the workings of the universe.[30]

The *Ramayana* operates on multiple levels. Like Homer's *Iliad*, it is an epic story of adventure, complete with heroes, villains, vast empires, courtly intrigue, loyalty, deception, human relationships, and, ultimately, the triumph of good over evil. In addition, it illustrates how an ethical man and leader conducts himself, facing challenges with equanimity regardless of his own tragedies and limitations. It is also a story of religious significance about King Rama, the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the protector and preserver of

the world, and Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune, who has been reborn in human form as Queen Sita.[31] One of the most important literary works on ancient India, the *Ramayana* has had a profound impact on the art and spiritual life of India and Southeast Asia.

The Académie's Influence on History Painting

Rendering history on a canvas with appropriate grandeur and scope was a high priority of French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. A history painting, as defined by the Académie, had specific criteria: monumental size, multiple figures, classically proportioned figures, an allegorical, historical, or biblical narrative, and a didactic intent.

One of the most acclaimed artists at the end of the 18th century was Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), known for his epic, allegorical canvases that spoke to contemporary political events. A revolutionary with ties both to the French court and its dissidents, David painted heroic narratives from antiquity that almost always resonated with the revolution. His neoclassical painting, *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789), shown in Figure 14 on page 93, exhibited shortly after the fall of the Bastille and was considered a public manifesto. The painting focuses on Roman politician Brutus (85-42 BCE) who, having led the rebellion that overthrew the monarchy and established the Roman Republic, learned that his own sons participated in a plot to restore the monarchy. As a judge, Brutus was called upon to hand down the verdict, and he sent his own sons to their deaths. After their execution, Brutus sits stoically in shadow, on the opposite side of the composition from his distraught wife and daughters. He has chosen the preservation of the republic over his family.[32]

Theodore Géricault's (1791-1824) *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) conforms to Académie standards for history painting. The bodies of the figures possess musculature reminiscent of sculpture from antiquity. They are arranged in a double pyramidal composition, at the moment of highest dramatic intensity. However, the narrative depicted is a contemporary event—the sensational shipwreck of the Medusa. In 1816, a ship of French colonists headed for Senegal ran aground near its destination. Because the ill-prepared captain and crew did not ensure that the ship had sufficient lifeboats, a hastily built raft was set adrift holding 152 people. When the raft was rescued 13 days later, starvation, violence, and cannibalism had reduced the group to 15 survivors. Géricault painted the canvas as an indictment of the French government that allowed this tragedy to happen. The heroic scale with which he depicted a contemporary event and his use of anonymous, rather than historical, figures caused a huge scandal at the Salon of 1819.[33]

Figure 14. Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748-1825); *Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*; oil on canvas; 1789; H:10 ft. 7 1/8 in. (3.23 m.), W:13 ft. 10 1/8 in. (4.22 m.); Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY/Photo by Erich Lessing.

French artist Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) in *The Burial of Ornans* (1849-1851) appropriated elements of the history painting genre to depict common people as a grand subject, which critics deemed a radical act. Instead of looking towards history to illustrate the present through a parable that must be translated by viewers, he presented them with a vision of the contemporary world. Courbet's 20-foot-long painting presents a mundane gathering of individuals around an anonymous grave, represented by an unceremonious hole in the ground. People stand in a democratic, compositionally uninteresting line, cut off on the sides, with faces that are realistic, rather than idealized. Religion, represented by the distant figure of Christ on the cross, is far from the point. Courbet's funeral is a frank, unromantic depiction of real life, reflecting the extensive growth of the poor population struggling in Paris during the 19th century. It is a modern history painting. [34]

Personal Histories

Art depicting personal history draws upon autobiographical or biographical sources. Firsthand perspectives are particularly meaningful when made by artists from cultures with oral traditions, as they are works that preserve and reconstruct the past. Native American culture has placed great importance on bearing witness and passing down stories, often using ephemeral modes of documentation, such as sand drawing, in order to do so. For the Plains Indians of North America, visualizations of the warriors and chiefs engaged in war, hunting, or ceremonial rituals were created on buffalo hides, robes, tipis, and rocks. However, the arrival of the Europeans gave Native Americans access to ink, pens, colored pencils, and paper—including ledgers used to keep accounting records.

At the end of the Southern Plains Indian Wars in 1875, 72 Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Caddo, and Comanche chiefs and warriors were interned for three years at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. The prisoners were supplied with ledgers and other drawing materials and encouraged to draw their memories of recent experiences.[35] The officer in charge of Fort Marion, Colonel Richard Pratt, sold ledger drawings to tourists and collectors

Figure 15. Arrow (Elk Society, Central Plains, Cheyenne, active 19th century); Untitled, page number 21, from the Arrow's Elk Society Ledger; graphite and colored pencil on ledger paper; ca.1875; H: 6 1/8 in. (15.5 cm.), W:14 ¾ in. (37 cm.); Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. Photograph courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art; gift of Mark Lansburgh, Class of 1949, in honor of James Wright, President of Dartmouth College.

on behalf of the artists as evidence of the Native Americans' assimilation. These same images were a means of preserving not only a Native American art form but also Native American history.

Such works were a transitional form of visual expression, linking pre-reservation styles with Plains and Pueblo styles that later emerged in Oklahoma and New Mexico Indian Schools during the 1920s.[36] The drawing in Figure 15 (pg.96), depicting a Cheyenne warrior who has dismounted and run into a Ute camp *(ca.*1875), is an artwork that captures and preserves a moment in Native American history, presenting a perspective seldom shared.

Folk art commonly is considered to be work made by individuals with little or no formal academic training in art that reflects the styles, materials, and traditions of a culture or region. An example of a form of folk art used to preserve the past is the memory vessel, a relic of African American culture from the turn of the 20th century. Each vessel was handcrafted by embedding small found objects, such as keys, screws, nails, shells, coins, buttons, jewelry, and mirror shards into wet adhesive covering the surface of bottles or ceramic jugs. Although their exact purpose remains unknown, some believe the vessels were made to commemorate a specific person. Others believe they were used in cemeteries as grave markers,[37] a custom derived from African spiritual practices that may have been brought to America during the time of slavery.

The largest community art project in the world, the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* (Figure 16), on page 96, was created to preserve the memories of deceased friends or loved ones. As the largest ongoing community arts project in the world—weighing an estimated 54 tons—the quilt is both a personal and public memorial to those who have died from AIDS.[38] Each twelve-foot square "block" of the quilt is comprised of eight panels sewn together, every one commemorating the life of an individual. There are more than 44,000 individual memorial panels.

The project was originally conceived in 1985 by gay rights activist Cleve Jones (1953-86) who, when planning a march to honor slain gay San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk (1930-1978), learned that AIDS had claimed the lives of over 1,000 San Franciscans. He asked his fellow marchers to write these names on placards to be hung on the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building, creating a patchwork of lost individuals reminiscent of a quilt. This inspired the creation of a larger memorial. By 1992 it included panels from every state and 28 countries.[39] In 1996, the last time the quilt was spread out in its entirety, it covered the entire National Mall in Washington, DC.

Figure 16. *AIDS memorial quilt on the National Mall lawn; 20,000 quilts are displayed*; begun 1987, photographed May 10, 1992; Washington, DC (temporary display). Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey Markowitz/Sygma/Corbis.

History and Identity

Between 1940 and 1941, Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) created the *Migration Series* when he was a 23-year-old living in Harlem, New York. The work is a collection of 60 small tempera canvases that depicts the period during and after World War I. At this time, there was a shift of African-American populations from the poor, rural South to the more prosperous, yet unwelcoming, urban North. This was known as the Great Migration.[40] The series of images accompanied by captions tell an epic story, beginning with depictions of the bleak conditions and social inequities of the South, and moving to the people, industry, and urban landscape of the North. The last works in the series address the improved social conditions as well as the ensuing conflicts within the new northern African-American communities.[41]

The Railroad Stations Were at Times So Over-Packed with People Leaving that Special Guards Had to Be Called in to Keep Order (Figure 17) is the 12th panel in the series. Lawrence presents the migrants—devoid of facial features—as a dynamic, unified group, anonymous and silhouetted, embarking on railway journeys to large Northern cities, seeking to share in the industrial boom of the North and escape from the repressive Jim Crow South. Lawrence's *Migration Series* is a historical record, but also a poignant narrative of people seeking a better life.

Figure 17. Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917-2000); *The Railroad Stations Were at Times So Over-Packed with People Leaving that Special Guards Had to Be Called in to Keep Order* from the *Migration Series*; tempera on gesso on composition board; 1940-1941; H:12 in. (30.5 cm.), W:18 in. (45.7 cm.); the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. © 2009 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation, Seattle / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Contemporary Jewish American artist Shimon Attie (b.1957) examines the ways in which public spaces and historical events contribute to forming personal and collective memories. In the early 1990s, Attie traveled to Germany to explore his family's history in what was formerly Berlin's Jewish quarter—the Scheunenviertel neighborhood. The project that resulted is *The Writing on the Wall, Berlin 1992-93: Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter*. In specific locations, Attie projected slides, derived from pre-Holocaust photographs, of the shops and people who occupied the area before World War II, onto the exteriors of the same (or nearby) buildings that exist there today. He then re-photographed the scenes that resulted.

In *Mulackstrasse 32: Slide Projection of Former Kosher Butcher Shop* (1930),[42] the window and entrance to a 1930s Jewish butcher shop are juxtaposed with what is now a dilapidated, graffiti-sprayed building in the midst of an abandoned area. In another building in the background, two illuminated windows frame a darkened third, in which what appears to be a crucifix hovers over the scene of neglect.

In *Mulackstrasse 37, Berlin* (Figure 18), on page 99, two young Jewish children sit on the stoop of an old building that stands adjacent to an empty garbage-strewn lot. In the distance, a television tower from the 1960s, a symbol of pre-unified Germany, rises above the lights of Berlin Alexanderplatz. Attie's work combines the past with the present, rekindling latent memories that, he believes, remain in the architecture but are not normally visible.[43]

Throughout history and across cultures, artists have found ways to portray the past, imbuing it with their own emotions, opinions, and memories so that it has meaning in the present and will continue to do so in the future. Although history and memory are often dependent on one another, they do not always align. Whether history is recounted in stories or rendered in art, many factors influence its presentation and meaning. Memory is subjective, and even first-hand witnesses often describe the same event from different points of view. Since both history and memory are processed through individual or collective values, beliefs, and perspectives, it is important to try to understand the context in which artworks were produced.

Figure 18. Shimon Attie (American, b. 1957); *Mulackstrasse 37, Berlin* from *The Writing on the Wall, Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter*; photograph (of slide projection); 1993. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

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