



## 7. DOMESTIC LIFE

### Introduction

Whether a wooden house, a stone palace, or a leather tent, the home is central to the human experience. Art has figured prominently in domestic life since the earliest human existence, when people painted scenes of the hunt on the walls of their caves, shaped stone tools, and carved jewelry and portable human and animal figures out of stone, bone, antlers, and ivory. Domestic objects exist in many media, from wooden furniture and woven reed mats to ceramic bowls and printed wallpaper, and serve an equally wide variety of specialized functions. Yet to discover the essential meaning of these objects, one must examine the context in which they were created; where, how, and by whom they were used; and what they represented to those who made them.

In some cultures, such as the ancient Romans living in Boscoreale in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE or the Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, painted images of everyday prosperity became an important adornment and source of pride within the home itself. In other cultures, such as the contemporary Tuareg people of Saharan Africa or the Turkomen (a.k.a. Turkmen) of Central Asia, hand-worked and hand-woven domestic objects combine utility with beauty. These objects demonstrate the fusion of functionality and good design. The relationship of art to domestic life showcases the broadest range of human skills and talents, in objects functional and decorative, deceptively simple and highly complex, universal and culturally specific.

Functional objects in the home include a range of items, such as clothing and personal accessories, carpets, baskets, ceramics, hangings, screens, tiles, architectural decoration, tools, metal implements, furniture, personal ritual items, and mechanical devices. These have the potential to be considered as art, based on their uniqueness, the quality of their craft, the extent and quality of their decoration, or their harmony of form and function.

### Functional Art

Some of the earliest domestic objects were baskets and ceramics, designed to store and hold foods, seeds, and other substances. The process of making containers out of a mesh of vegetable fibers (or less frequently, animal leather and sinew) is one of the oldest crafts, with the earliest surviving examples dating from circa 5000 BCE in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Native people in the Americas developed

rich basketry traditions and historically used baskets to carry babies, prepare and cook meals, store goods, and to their dead. Today, baskets are symbols of cultural pride and tradition for Native people, sometimes used in religious rituals, and frequently made for sale.

A similar combination of beauty, utility, and cultural values are reflected in the writing and painting implements found in the domestic studies of elite Korean scholars, or *yangban*, during the Chosôn Dynasty (1392-1910). Poetry, calligraphy, and landscape painting were important to the *yangban*, who were both patrons and amateur practitioners. The *yangban* were expected to hold public office, follow Confucian doctrine through study and self-improvement, and help cultivate the moral standards of Chosôn society. The



Figure 1. *Brush Holder*, porcelain; Korea; Chosôn dynasty, late 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century; H: 5 1/4 in. (13.3 cm.), W: 5 1/4 in. (13.3 cm.); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Hewitt Fund.

implements of writing—brushes, paper, inkstones, and brush holders—were essential tools found in any scholar’s home. Because the Confucian philosophy promoted a modest and practical lifestyle and discouraged extravagant art, the design of these utilitarian objects also served to reflect the aesthetic and philosophical values of their owner.

The brush holder from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century in Figure 1 (pg.193) is made of a particular Korean style of white porcelain favored in the Chosôn period, and produced in the imperial kilns or *punwôn* in present-day Kwangju, outside of Seoul. In the early Chosôn period, the plain porcelain was tinted snow-white or a slightly greyish white. In the mid-Chosôn period, potters preferred a greyish white glaze, while late Chosôn pottery tended to be milky white or blue-white.<sup>2</sup> The white color exemplified the pure minimalism of Confucian aesthetics, although objects were often embellished with openwork designs such as the lotus flowers decorating this porcelain brush holder.

When entertaining guests in the *sarangbang* or study, a host would often unroll painted scrolls like the one in Figure 2 (pg.195) and hang them on the wall for the enjoyment of guests. This hanging scroll is typical of the kind of monochrome ink paintings favored by the *yangban*. The monochrome ink work is minimalist, offering a close-up view of a grapevine rendered with calligraphic elegance. Chosôn literati preferred natural motifs with symbolic meaning tied to Confucian virtues. The grapevine may have signified prosperity and fertility.

Artistry also distinguishes the creations of the Tuareg, a semi-nomadic Islamic people who live in the Sahara region of Africa. They travel seasonally with their herds, but also maintain homes to which they return periodically to grow crops. Despite the harsh weather conditions in which they live, the Tuareg are known for the unusual intricacy and beauty of their domestic objects and jewelry. The elaborate wood and leather *tamzak* or decorative saddle, seen in Figure 3 (pg.196), was made in 1997 by Kaggo Oumba.



Figure 2. Korean artist; *Grapevine in the Wind*; ink on silk; Chosôn Dynasty, 16<sup>th</sup> century; H: 31 ½ in. (80 cm.), W: 15 ¾ in. (40 cm.); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY.





Figure 3. Kago Oumba (Nigerian, 20<sup>th</sup> century); *Camel Saddle (tamzak)*; wood, leather, and metal; 1997; H:32 3/8 in. (82.2 cm), W:29 3/8 in. (74.6 cm.), D:14 1/2 in. (36.8 cm.); Cantor Center for the Visual Arts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA. Photograph courtesy of Thomas Seligman, Cantor Center for the Visual Arts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.

Artists called *inadan* are a special class of people who travel and live among various Tuareg groups throughout the year, fashioning objects for both ceremonial and daily use. They make a variety of specially designed objects, including leather bags, baskets, or carved metal boxes to store possessions. While metal forging and wood carving is typically done by men, women are commonly responsible for weaving and leatherworking. Figure 4 (pg.198) shows elaborate leather bags created by Andi Ouhoulou, an *inadan* from the Niger region (2004).<sup>3</sup> Tuareg men and women also literally wear their wealth on their bodies as intricately carved jewelry and religious amulets. Engraved metal knives are worn by the men, while keys, which open handmade locks on boxes or leather bags, are often used by women to weigh down and adorn their veils. Although, contemporary Tuareg *inadan* continue to produce artistic items for domestic and personal use, they have turned their skills to the production of objects for the tourist trade, such as sterling silver jewelry, leather cassette holders, picture frames, and desk accessories.<sup>4</sup>

### Textile Artistry

Throughout history textiles have been highly valued. In addition to clothing the body and providing warmth and comfort to the home, they can represent wealth and status. Pre-Columbian Andean cultures began producing sophisticated woven textiles as early as 2500 BCE.<sup>5</sup> Weaving looms were invented in Peru in the second millennium BCE, and tapestry weaving, in which each colored section is woven as an independent unit to create more complex and representational designs, appeared around 900 BCE.<sup>6</sup> In the first millennium, people of the southern coastal Nasca culture developed techniques for embedding and sewing brilliantly colored feathers of tropical birds onto the surface of woven textiles. The practice was expanded in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Wari people, who may have produced large feather-covered panels for festive or religious uses, and in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries by the northern coastal Chimú culture, who created feathered tabards (short coats) and litters (curtained couches) for their royalty.<sup>7</sup>

The Inka civilization (ca. 1200-1535) valued finely hand-woven textiles as much as gold. They developed specialized textiles for every aspect of life—clothing, ritual burial shrouds, shaman's costumes, rope bridges, bed coverings, and a system of knots used for record-keeping, called *quipus*. Weavers and embroiderers were primarily women, and the best female weavers, called *Aclla* (Chosen Women), were culled from throughout the empire to be cloistered in special communities for their entire lifetimes so that they could brew *chicha* (sacred corn beer) and produce magnificent textiles exclusively for the elite.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4. Andi Ouhoulou (Tuareg, Kel Ewey, n.d.); *Bag*; leather, pigment, metal; 2004; H: 40 in. (102 cm.), W: 24 in. (61 cm.), D: 2 in. (5.1 cm.); private collection. Photograph courtesy of Thomas Seligman, Cantor Center for the Visual Arts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA.





Figure 5. *Tunic*; camelid fiber, silk, metallic thread; South Highlands, Peru; 1532-1700; H: 26 3/4 in. (67.9 cm.), W: 31 in. (78.7 cm); Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum.

Certain textiles became symbols of social status and significant burial objects in the Inka culture. Elaborate tunics for men, called *uncu* (Figure 5), and mantles for women, called *lliclla*, were the basic garments for the Inka nobility, and featured designs that scholars believe were not simply decorative, but carried important symbolic messages, including a person's ethnic identity. Persons of high social rank wore garments encoded in small, colorful square designs called *t'oqapu*, which were believed to represent specific people, places, or objects.<sup>9</sup>

Among the nomadic Turkmen (Turkoman) people of Central Asia, women traditionally felt or weave woolen yarn into fabrics used for furnishings and tents. Silk and cotton fibers, introduced from China and India, are also woven into fine fabrics, sometimes decorated with embroidery.<sup>10</sup> A particularly complex textile produced across central Asia is the pile carpet, in which knots of yarn are tied around the wool or cotton warp (the vertical foundation threads), and evenly trimmed to produce a plush surface. Turkmen rugs and carpets feature culturally specific ornamental patterns and motifs, including octagonal medallions, called *göls*, which usually appear on a red background in horizontal or diagonal rows.<sup>11</sup> An example is the intricately designed carpet created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for use as a tent door, or *ensi*, shown in Figure 6 (pg.200). This door covering features the rich, dark colors and dramatic design typical of the Turkmen weavers. Its thick pile would have protected the





Figure 6. Turkmen (Turkoman) artist; *Tent door cover (ensi)*; wool; 19<sup>th</sup> century; H: approx. 52 in. (132 cm.), W: approx. 60 in. (152 cm.); De Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA. Photograph courtesy of De Young Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Gift of George and Marie Hecksher.



family from the elements and added color and comfort to the interior of their tent-like home, called a yurt.

Some of the most complex carpets, with intricate designs that influenced carpet making around the world for centuries, were made in the Islamic world. Highly valued carpets were made in the sixteenth century courts of the Ottoman dynasty (1299-1922) in Caucasus and Anatolia, the Mamluk dynasty in Egypt and Syria (1250-1517), the Safavid dynasty (1502-1922) in Persia (present-day Iran), and the Mughal dynasty in India (1526-1707). These artists provided the intricate patterns that weavers then wove in workshops.<sup>12</sup> These fine carpets decorated the floors of palaces, shrines, and royal tent encampments and were given as diplomatic gifts. Many Europeans coveted Persian carpets, especially as they became status symbols.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 7. Elizabeth Van Horne Clarkson (American, 1771-1852); *Honeycomb Quilt*, cotton; 1830; H: 107 5/8 in. (273.4 cm.), W: 98 1/4 in. (249.6 cm.); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William A. Moore.

In eastern North America, from the colonial era to the present, quilts have emerged as an inventive traditional form of functional textile art. Quilting involves securing wadding (soft material) between two layers of fabric with lines of stitching, but the term also refers to other decorative techniques involving stitching or padding. The uniquely American form of patchwork quilting, using repeated pieces of fabric, became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of developments in the textile industry. The industrialization of spinning, weaving, and cloth-printing made cheap, colorfully printed cotton fabrics available and affordable for women of limited means. The honeycomb quilt made by Elizabeth Van Horne Clarkson (1771-1852) in the 1830s, shown in Figure 7 (pg.201), followed the traditional geometric pattern of repeated hexagonal pieces while incorporating a color configuration that suggests a field of flowers.

Quilts made more recently by African American women from Gee's Bend, Alabama, emphasize improvisation and bold, geometric patterns. These quilts, fabricated between 1930 and the present, were shown in the 2005 traveling museum exhibition, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Tinwood Alliance of Atlanta, Georgia. This exhibition fostered widespread public recognition of the rich and diverse craft of this relatively isolated community, where the women of African American sharecropper families made quilts out of necessity after long days working in the fields. Created from scraps, the quilts have spontaneous and unique designs, many of which recall the lively and evocative geometric designs of modernist painting. The front side of each quilt is designed and pieced together by an individual maker, reflecting her personal artistic vision. The women of the community, members of a group organized in 2003 and called the Gee's Bend Quilter's Collective, then collaborate to complete each quilt by stitching the individually created front design to a back piece with a layer of soft batting in between. The example in Figure 8 (pg.203), made by Mary Lee Bendolph in 2005, exemplifies the improvisatory, dynamic, sophisticated designs found in many of the Gee's Bend quilts.

American artist Faith Ringgold (b. 1930) also makes quilts, but she paints on them to tell stories. *Tar Beach 2* from 1999, seen in Figure 9 (pg.204), recalls pleasant childhood memories during the hot summer evenings Ringgold spent with her family, picnicking on the roof of her apartment building. "Tar Beach" is a nickname for the tar-covered roof, which was an accessible summer getaway for urban families in lieu of a real seaside beach. Ringgold's image depicts the reality of domestic life for many working class city-dwellers, but it is also a work of fantasy and imagination. The young heroine, Cassie Jones Lightfoot, rests on a blanket alongside her brother, dreaming of the freedom to fly up into the starry sky.





Figure 8. Mary Lee Bendolph (American, b.1935), Gee's Bend Quilter's Collective, Gee's Bend, AL; *Blocks, Strips, Strings, and Half-Squares Quilt*; cotton; 2005; H: 84 in. (213.4 cm.), W: 81 in. (205.7 cm.); Collection of the Tinwood Alliance. Photograph courtesy of Gee's Bend Foundation/Collection of the Tinwood Alliance/ Photo Courtesy of Stephen Pitkin, Pitkin Studio, Rockford, IL.





Figure 9. Faith Ringgold (American, b.1930); *Tar Beach 2*; silkscreen on silk; 1990; H: 66 in. (167.6 cm.), W: 67 in. (170.2 cm.); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Ringgold's process combines traditional African American quilt-making and a simplified modern style of figurative painting, reminiscent of self-taught artists. This is a conscious style in her case; she studied painting in college. Her quilts also feature detailed and personalized textual narratives written directly on the painted quilt surface. Ringgold's imagery is historically significant in late 20<sup>th</sup>-century America because it gives greater visibility to the particular urban experience of African-Americans, who have been underrepresented in mainstream visual culture.

### Fine Art vs. Decorative Arts

The idea of "fine art" is a recent and culturally specific invention. Scholars believe that it originated in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, when art academies were

expanding and developing systematic guidelines, professionalizing the fine arts (or in French, *beaux arts*) of the classical Western tradition. The academies divided the fine arts into the five categories of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry.<sup>14</sup> This period also saw the beginning of aesthetic theory as a philosophical discipline based on the appreciation of an object's formal qualities as separate from its function. Hence, this was the origin of the modernist definition of fine art as “non-functional”—which means that its function is purely conceptual, psychological, or philosophical. In other words, the fine arts were intended to give pleasure, whereas the mechanical arts, later known as the decorative arts, were merely useful. Paintings and poems were fine art, but objects used in the home, however opulent, were relegated to the category of decorative art.

The concept of decorative art became a major topic of discussion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the market was flooded with inexpensive decorative items. Some artists, such as British designer William Morris (1834-1896), reacted by celebrating hand-crafted objects as part of the Arts and Crafts movement. Others, such as American-born, British-based artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), attempted to break down the distinction between fine and decorative art within painting itself.

According to academic distinctions, Whistler's 1864 oil painting *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks*, shown in Figure 10 on page 206, would be considered fine art, despite the painter's obvious fascination with the decorative arts.<sup>15</sup> It features a female model holding a blue and white vase, wearing a Japanese kimono, and surrounded by a number of finished blue and white porcelain pieces.

The Whistler painting records a moment when European artists became fascinated with the decorative arts. Painters of the avant-garde, who were strongly critical of the strict categories of the academies, were attempting to dispel the distinctions by demonstrating their enthusiasm for the decorative arts. Many French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters, including Claude Monet (1840-1926), Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), Berthe Morisot (1841-1895), Mary Cassatt (1844-1926), and others actively collected East Asian art in the form of textiles, ceramics, painted fans, and screens. Elaborately decorated Chinese ceramics, particularly blue and white porcelain such as the vase shown in Figure 11 (pg.207), had become quite popular.<sup>16</sup> However, although these items were prized as luxury goods, even the finest vases would have been dismissed by academicians as “decorative.”



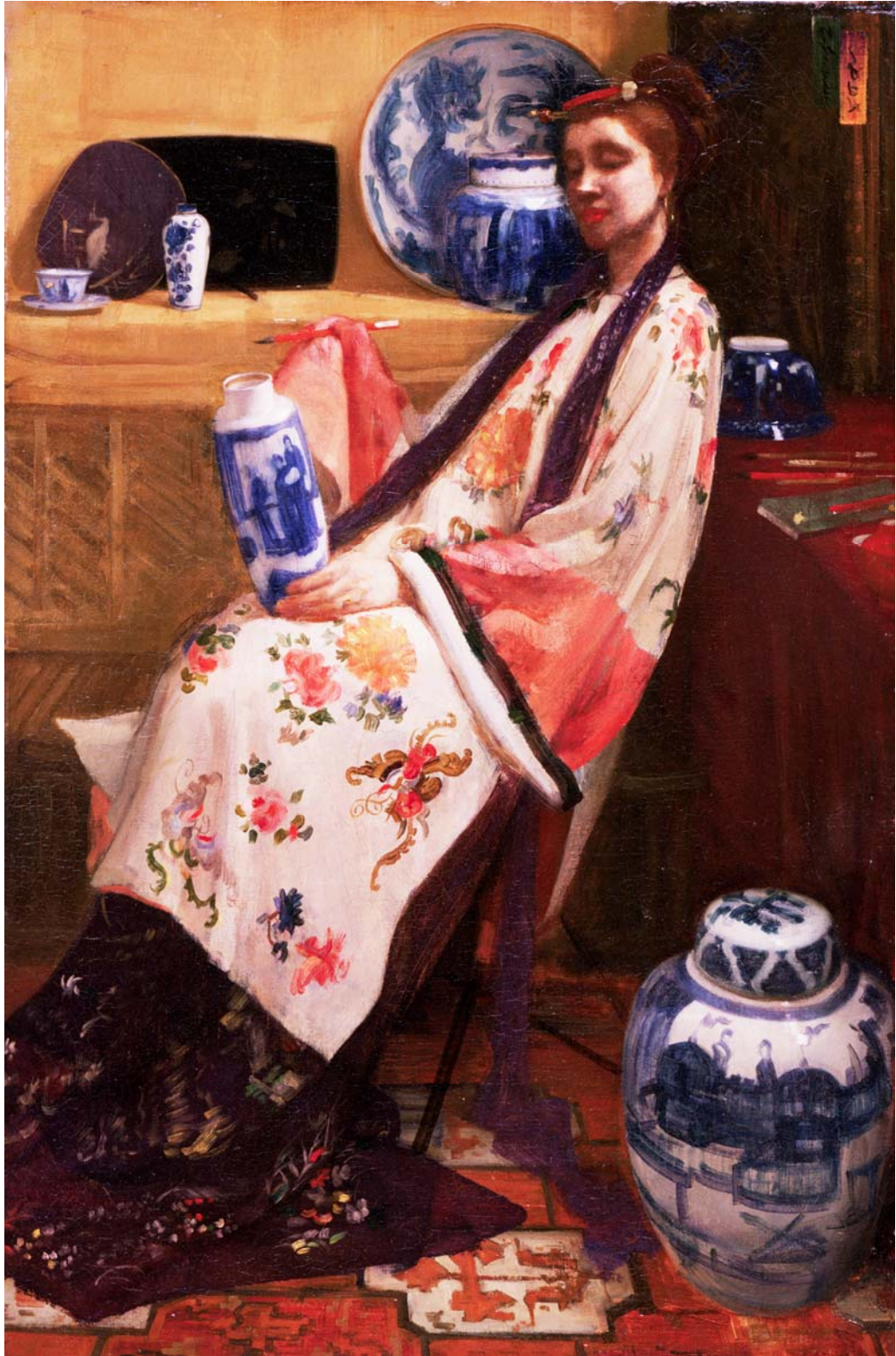


Figure 10. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (American (active England), 1834-1903); *Purple and Rose: The Lange Leizen of the Six Marks*; oil on canvas; 1864; H: 36 3/4 in. (93.3 cm.), W: 24 1/8 in. (61.3 cm); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA. Photograph © Philadelphia Museum of Art/Corbis.



Figure 11. *Chinese Porcelain Jar with Cover*, porcelain; China; 1622-1722; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain. Photograph courtesy of Victoria & Albert Museum, London / Art Resource, NY.

This categorical divide continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century among many key theorists of modern art, but for slightly different reasons. The decorative arts were sometimes viewed as unoriginal if they were not considered the individual expressions of a single maker. Objects of domestic life are often still classified as “decorative art” rather than “fine art” because they are functional objects often featuring traditional and codified designs, rather than the personal and original designs that define modern art. Nevertheless, these objects show as much skill and contain as much information about the cultures that made and collected them as any work of modern art.



In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern artists like Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Henri Matisse (1869-1954) not only collected ceramics like their Impressionist forbears, but explored making or painting on ceramics as well, producing purely expressive takes on traditional functional objects. Picasso produced a number of ceramic works at the Madoura pottery workshop in Vallauris, France. An earthenware vase hand-painted by Picasso in 1954, for example, resembles traditional Inka ring-handled vessels in form, but bears the modern image of a sculptor modeling a female figure.<sup>17</sup>

### Responding to the Industrial Revolution

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artists in Europe reacted to the Industrial Revolution and the real threat of the disappearance of craftsmanship under capitalism, with its emphasis on low-cost production in quantity, by embracing high quality craftsmanship. For centuries France was known for high quality, hand-made and manufactured domestic objects, such as ornate wooden furniture, lace, woven silk fabrics, tapestry, and porcelain. British designers, on the other hand, realized in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that their national design standards were inferior. The “Good Design” movement was launched in order to correct a tendency toward indiscriminate, excessive use of ornamentation, veneering, and illusionist decoration that often negated the fundamental designs of objects.

Design reformers like Owen Jones (1809-1874) saw indiscriminate decoration as lamentable on both aesthetic and moral terms. Owens was involved in design reform efforts by the Government Schools of Design (founded in 1837), which intensified after the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, London, was universally panned by critics as a showcase of gaudy, industrially produced furnishings. Jones’s 1856 encyclopedia, *The Grammar of Ornament*, compiled historical, non-Western, and botanical designs and set forth guidelines for a more restrained and harmonious integration of ornament and function in everything from chair backs to architectural decoration. Jones advocated using logical, geometric principles to produce stylized patterns that would integrate surface design and three-dimensional elements in a harmonized overall décor.<sup>18</sup>

Jones’s colleague, Christopher Dresser (1834-1904), has been called the first industrial designer. Dresser aimed to create economical, well-designed, mass-produced domestic objects for a consumer market that was expanding in response to industrialization. Throughout his career, he designed wallpapers, textiles, carpets, ceramics, cast-iron furniture, and metalwork for firms in Great Britain, Ireland, France, and the United States.<sup>19</sup> Dresser’s *Traveling Tea Set* (1879) reflects his principles of economy of space, material, and cost, and takes inspiration from Japanese design for the nesting forms and the woven bamboo handle.<sup>20</sup> This piece, with its relative lack of ornamentation, anticipates the 20<sup>th</sup>-century interest in the essence of





Figure 12. William Morris (English, 1834-1896); “Wandle” *printed fabric*, manufactured by Morris and Co. and Aymer Vallance; 1884; Calmann & King, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.



form seen in the international design movements of the 1920s, promoted at the Bauhaus in Germany, and exemplified in the International Style.

In contrast to the industrial approach of the Government Schools of Design, the Arts and Crafts movement rejected modern industry, reviving methods of hand production and medieval aesthetics. The movement was founded by the socialist designer and theorist William Morris (1834-1896) in an attempt to reclaim the pre-industrial techniques and collective ethos of medieval English society. Morris drew on the teachings of the influential art critic and theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900) and the designer August Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-52), who helped redesign the Houses of Parliament in the Gothic style following a fire in 1834.<sup>21</sup> A ceramic bread plate designed by Pugin (ca. 1850) features the message “Waste Not Want Not” in Gothic lettering, encouraging its users toward a more wholesome, frugal existence.<sup>22</sup>

In 1861, Morris and several colleagues, including architect and designer Philip Webb, established the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner, & Co., which became Morris & Co. in 1875. The company sold furnishings handmade by artist-craftspeople, including rural peasantry. Morris aimed to create affordable, handcrafted goods that reflected the workers’ creativity and individuality, and used natural materials.<sup>23</sup> The firm’s domestic furnishings like the Sussex chair, a simple wooden chair with a design inspired by a chair found in the rural Sussex region, quickly became popular.<sup>24</sup>

Morris also created textiles inspired by historic designs in the Victoria and Albert Museum, an institution founded in 1852 as the “Museum of Manufactures,” a repository for art objects intended to serve as inspiration to the design community and the public at large. Morris fabrics like the 1884 “Wandle” print (Figure 12), on page 209, were printed using a pre-industrial woodblock printing method. This type of hand-block printing had been displaced by industrial roller printing, which employed a revolving engraved metal cylinder to print cloth continuously, greatly speeding production capacity. Morris’s hand-designed and hand-printed wallpapers, which, resisted the impersonal designs of the factories, were among his most popular products. Their elegant natural forms were intended to create a domestic environment on the model of a bower, a natural refuge from modern life.

Morris revived tapestry, a form that flourished in the Middle Ages that he believed to be the most worthwhile craft. The heavy, woven textiles both insulated and beautified drafty rooms, often conveying messages about virtuous living. The tapestry in Figure 13 (pg.211) shows four figures in romanticized medieval garb, holding a scroll with verses about the seasons illustrated with matching motifs.



Figure 13. William Morris (British, English, 1834-1896) and John Henry Dearle (British, 1860-1932) (designers); *The Orchard* (also called *The Seasons*); tapestry woven in wool, silk and mohair on a cotton warp; ca. 1890; H: 7 ¼ ft. (2.21 m.), W: 15 ½ in. (4.72 m.); Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, NY.

Morris's ideals were shared by designers of the French and Belgian *Art Nouveau* ("new style") and Austrian and German *Jugendstil* ("style of youth") movements. These late 19<sup>th</sup>-century movements rejected historical revivals and embraced natural forms as an antidote to the alienation of city life. Morris believed that industrialized society had lost the solace of virtuous labor accomplished with traditional skill and at a natural pace, and that popular art should be espoused over luxury production.<sup>25</sup> The great irony of the Arts and Crafts movement was that the expense of handcrafting in an industrial age meant that its high-quality works were primarily available to the gentry class, who commissioned the majority of Morris and Co.'s products.

In 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and the United States, the notion of "good design" found new life, based on principles similar to those the 19<sup>th</sup>-century British movement was based. Embracing efficient design and the idea that "form follows function," twentieth-century designers added new design ideas of modern machine-inspired sleekness, simplicity, and a more extreme distrust of ornament as superficial and inauthentic.

The Austrian designer Adolf Loos (1870-1933), a critic of the ornate excesses of the Art Nouveau style, was famous for his pronouncement that "ornament is crime," meaning that he associated decoration with a "degenerate" culture. Loos designed austere, geometric furniture and architecture for a new century, exemplified in his design for the Steiner house in Vienna (1910). This structure features a radically austere façade, with plain, rectangular windows, and an unusual curved roof of reinforced concrete to allow the runoff of rain and snow.<sup>26</sup> The Steiner house announced a new architecture of reductive



geometric form and the principle of functionalism—the idea that a design form should be reduced to the most simple and elegant expression of its function. The interest in functionalism was shared by most of the great modernist designers, including Walter Gropius (1883-1969), the founder of the Bauhaus in Germany in 1919.



Figure 14. Marcel Breuer (American, born Hungary, 1902-1981); “Wassily” Chair; chrome-plated tubular steel, canvas upholstery; 1927-1928; H: 28 ¼ in. (71.8 cm.); W: 30 ¾ in. (78.1 cm.); D: 28 in. (71.1 cm.); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Photograph © The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Herbert Bayer/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

The Bauhaus (“House of Building”) was the most important early 20<sup>th</sup>-century design school, located in Weimar, Dessau, and then Berlin, until the Nazi government closed it down in 1933. Gropius, inspired by the collective working methods of the medieval guilds who built the great German cathedrals, established the Bauhaus by combining the Weimar state schools of art and craft. He aimed to unify all the arts and break down the division between art and craft. The Bauhaus revolutionized the teaching of art and design in a program that today is still widely emulated in contemporary art

schools. Students would spend their first years learning through in-depth explorations of the fundamental qualities of specific materials, and only later moved on to producing finished products. At every turn, the concept incorporated the latest advances in materials and technology, establishing direct contact with industrial leaders in order to mass-produce Bauhaus designs inexpensively for a wide audience. Bauhaus innovations, such as the tubular metal frames of the “Wassily” chair (Figure 14, pg.212), became classics of 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernist design. Marcel Breuer (1902-1981) designed and named the chair for Bauhaus painting teacher Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944). Because Breuer’s simple, streamlined design made it easy and inexpensive to reproduce in large quantities, the “Wassily” chair would soon be found in both domestic and institutional settings.

Between 1928 and 1931, influential French modernist Le Corbusier (1887-1965) designed his Villa Savoye as a *machine à habiter*, or machine for living in (Figure 15). Constructed from concrete and glass, the house’s exterior presents a geometric, uniform rectangular mass propped up on piers that Le Corbusier called *pilotis*. While the style is today associated with large, impersonal, corporate structures and massive housing projects, it was,



Figure 15. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) (Swiss, 1887-1965); *Villa Savoye*; concrete and masonry; 1929–1931; Poissy, France. Photograph © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris/FLC/ Courtesy of Anthony Scibilia/ Art Resource, NY

in its heyday, successfully applied to the innovative design of both public and domestic spaces such as American architect Philip Johnson's (1906-2005) own "Glass House." This 1949 house at New Canaan, Connecticut, applied the glass curtain wall normally used in industry to a private home entirely surrounded by natural scenery, creating the paradoxical effect of a purified indoor space situated outdoors, sparsely and elegantly furnished as an example of a total modernist lifestyle.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1950s, American designers modified Bauhaus principles to suit a broader range of taste. The Museum of Modern Art in New York selected a wider range of new designs for its series of "Good Design" exhibitions held between 1950 and 1955. These exhibitions were intended to influence wholesale buyers, convince manufacturers of a potentially large market for well-designed objects, and educate the public on what good design meant. Curator Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., attempted to influence the increasingly substantial buying power of the postwar consumer by selecting examples based on "eye appeal," function, construction, and price.<sup>28</sup>

Among the major designers whose names became known in these exhibitions were the Finn Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) and the Americans Charles and Ray Eames (1907-1978 and 1916-1988, respectively). Aalto's designs are marked by a quiet elegance and notable use of natural materials, such as his trademark bent wood. His *Paimio Chair* of 1931-1932 was inspired directly by Breuer's "Wassily" chair. It consisted of two closed loops of bent laminated birch wood and a single bent sheet of plywood, angled to facilitate breathing for patients of a sanatorium in Finland. The design is typically Scandinavian modern in its warm, organic feel and humanizing take on the functionalist aesthetic. The Eameses, directly inspired by the warmth of Aalto's work, built a long and successful career by always keeping the end user in mind in their designs. Compared to Breuer's "Wassily" chair, which might seem austere and uninviting, the Eames's lounge chair and ottoman (1956) of molded rosewood, plywood, and down-filled leather cushions, exudes comfort nestled within a modern shell.<sup>29</sup>

An architect who revolutionized American domestic architecture was Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Wright gained prominence as an architect by the 1930s, particularly for his design of domestic houses. His Robie House in Chicago (completed 1910) exemplified Wright's approach to "organic architecture" with its Prairie-style design of low-pitched roofs and horizontal lines that blended into the Midwestern landscape. Wright truly achieved the integration of architectural form with nature in what has become an iconic structure, *Fallingwater* (1936-1938), shown in Figure 16 on page 215. Designed as a country retreat in western Pennsylvania for the Kauffman family, the building features wide, flat, cantilevered, concrete terraces that appear to float above the rocky landscape and waterfall below. Because the design has ample living space on the outdoor terraces, Wright achieved his



goal of enabling the Kauffman family to live with the natural environment as part of their daily lives.



Figure 16. Frank Lloyd Wright (American, 1867-1959); *Fallingwater*, concrete, steel, stone, and glass; 1936-1938; 5,330 sq. ft. (1,625 sq. m.); Bear Run, Pennsylvania. Photograph © Robert P. Ruschak, Courtesy Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

## Documenting Daily Life

People have documented their daily lives since the beginning of recorded history. Long before individuals like Walker Evans used photography for this purpose, the most common method of documenting human life was in the a tomb, which contained the necessities the deceased might require in the afterlife.

In ancient China, ceramic *mingqi*, or “spirit utensils,” were detailed, hand-carved objects and figures modeled on family members, farm animals, or utilitarian objects that would accompany the dead into the next life. These were made of crude earthenware or fine glazed stoneware (a particularly durable ceramic fired at a higher temperature), depending on the wealth of the person buried. The practice of offering wooden and clay models of people as burial gifts was established under the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 BCE), but



in the Qin (221-207 BCE) and Han (202 BCE-220 CE) Dynasties, the number of figures placed in tombs grew enormously.<sup>30</sup> For people across different classes, these small replicas were believed to provide nourishment for the deceased, but also served as a way to document the lifestyles of these people. For example, a Han Dynasty replica called *Animal Pen with Figures* provides a record of the architecture of the pen, the animals inside, and even an image of a woman holding a baby. Such clay sculptures document details of domestic design and construction that disintegrated long ago, such as the low-pitched wooden roof replicated in clay.<sup>31</sup>

In ancient Egypt, similar models accompanied the dead in their tombs, such as the bakery, brewery, granary, and other extensive household models built out of plastered and painted wood for the tomb of Meketre, an official who worked for the Pharaoh Amenemhat I around 1975 BCE.<sup>32</sup> Tomb walls also included detailed information on the activities of domestic life in ancient Egypt. A painting from the tomb of Nebamun (ca. 1375 BCE) depicts many activities that would have taken place in a private estate: men gathering grapes for wine, date palms growing in a courtyard, cattle being branded, and a scribe making records.<sup>33</sup>

Toward the end of the Roman Republic (509-44 BCE)<sup>34</sup> and during the Roman Empire (27 BCE-393 CE),<sup>35</sup> artists were commissioned to adorn the otherwise plain plaster walls of private houses in Rome, neighboring cities such as Pompeii, and the country villas of Boscoreale, outside modern Naples. The earliest wall paintings of circa 200-80 BCE frequently featured landscape scenes and *trompe l'oeil*, a style of painting intended to deceive the eye by creating the illusion of expansive space. Around 80 BCE, artists began painting scenes of figures on a shallow “stage,” directly inspired by contemporaneous theater design, or in a landscape or fantastic cityscape. While the Roman aristocracy tended to promote austere values of order and temperance in public life, their private homes often revealed extravagant displays of fine living, which included eating, drinking, philosophizing, and leisure activities. The architecture and decoration of these villas reflected the significant influence of Hellenic culture on Roman life. Greek philosophers and pastoral figures from Greek mythology appeared in both sculpture and painting.<sup>36</sup>

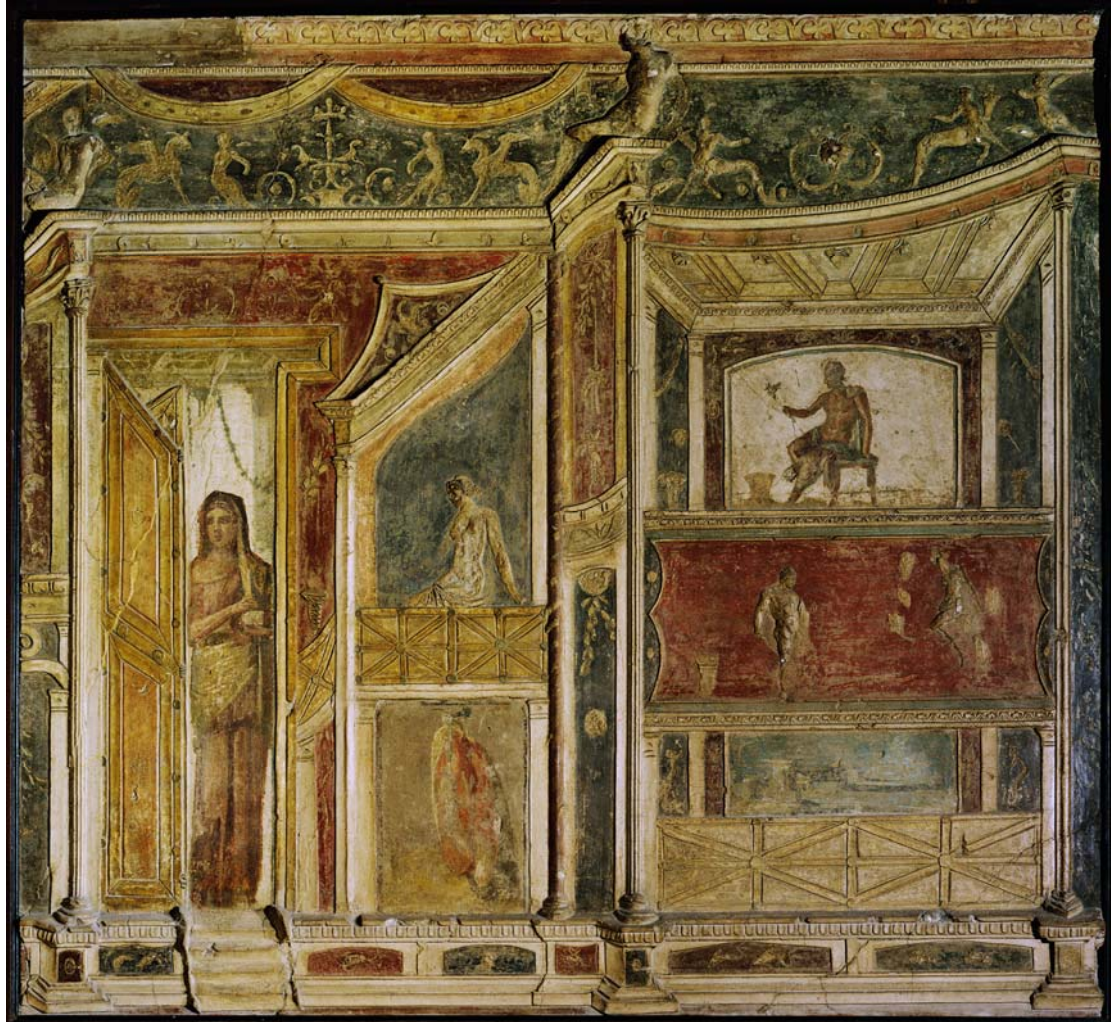


Figure 17. *Theatrical decoration with figures*; Fresco; Pompeii, Italy; ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century; Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy. Photograph courtesy of Art Resource, NY/Photo by Erich Lessing.

Many houses in Pompeii and Boscoreale were preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, which buried the entire region in a thick layer of ash. In a bedroom from the country villa of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (Figure 17), reconstructed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the walls seem to open onto a panorama of fanciful architecture and natural groves, creating an idealized world based directly on stage scenes, as emphasized by the theatrical masks painted above each scene.<sup>37</sup> Objects of daily life are depicted in such a way as to seem real, with metal and glass vases on shelves and tables appearing to project out from the wall, enabling the owner to impress his guests with their sheer artistry. The Romans took great pride in the artistic decoration of their private homes, although in Roman times the painters were considered craftspeople, mastering traditional designs rather than creating works of personal creativity.



In the Low Countries of Flanders (present-day Belgium and Luxembourg) and the Netherlands, painting scenes of everyday life was a tradition dating back to the Gothic period (13<sup>th</sup>-early 15<sup>th</sup> century). In this period, Flemish and Netherlandish artists developed an international reputation for strikingly naturalistic, detailed scenes of daily life in vivid colors, both in manuscript illuminations and in oil paintings. French academicians would later call this form *genre painting*.

An early example was the striking calendar of the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (*The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry*), illuminated by the Netherlandish Limbourg brothers for a French duke from 1413 to 1416.<sup>38</sup> For the calendar section of this Book of Hours (a selection of prayers and readings for daily meditation), the brothers created full-page paintings depicting the daily lives of both peasants and aristocrats. In the February scene, a farm family relaxes cozily before a fire on a comfortable and well-maintained farm, which includes beehives, a sheepfold, and tidy fences. The image also includes details, such as the breath of a bundled worker turning to steam and the smoke from the chimney, framed against a leaden winter sky. Such rich scenes of ordinary life were rare before the Gothic age, since manuscript illumination had been devoted to religious imagery during most of the medieval period.



Figure 18. Jan Olis (Dutch, ca.1610–76); *Dutch Family in an Interior*, oil on panel; 1634; H: 15 in. (38.4 cm.), W: 19 ½ in. (49.9 cm.); Ferens Art Gallery, Hull City Museums and Art Galleries, Kingston Upon Hull, UK. Photograph courtesy of the Bridgeman Art Library.



Genre scenes were popular among citizens of the newly independent Dutch nation, scholars assert, because they were vehicles through which the Dutch could define communal identity and shared social ideals. Figure 18, *Dutch Family in an Interior* (pg.218), was painted by Jan Olis (1610-76) in 1634. Olis's image depicts a household in which sparse furnishings and modest decorations reflect Dutch values. The five figures appear to take pride in their own appearance and that of their home.

Paintings of everyday life became commonplace in Dutch society during this period, and were intended for a domestic market as objects of decoration within the home. Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684) depicts a quiet daytime scene in *The Mother* (1661-1663), shown in Figure 19. The woman, an image of a mother, is lacing her bodice and smiling as she reaches toward the basket holding her baby. Her older daughter stands in the background facing the half-open door.



Figure 19. Pieter de Hooch (Dutch); *The Mother*, oil on canvas; ca.1670; H: 36 in. (92 cm.), W: 39 in. (100 cm.); Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany. Photograph courtesy of Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

The receding lines of immaculate tile floor in the space of the picture connect to the viewer's space through the use of perspective. The painting depicts a smoothly functioning domestic world where all is in place. Such images would have hung in the homes not only of the wealthy, but also of ordinary tradespeople such as butchers or bakers.<sup>39</sup> The scenes reflect the pride the people of Dutch society took in their achievements.

In order to maximize their sales, artists increasingly specialized in particular types of genre painting. Among the genres that became popular during this period was the still life, from the Dutch term *stilleven*, coined about 1650. The still life was a symbolic demonstration of the prosperity of a given home, showcased with a meticulous naturalism.<sup>40</sup> Featuring elaborate displays of plates, glasses, textiles, food, flowers, and other wares, these works demonstrate the vast array of local and imported luxury goods available to the Dutch consumer.

Willem Claesz Heda's (1594-1680) *Banquet Piece with Mince Pie* (1635) portrays a realistic banquet table. It depicts a half-eaten plate of meat pie, a few oysters and rolls, a fallen silver candlestick, a toppled Venetian glass, a sumptuous silver pitcher, and other elements on a fine white tablecloth. The crumpled appearance of the tablecloth demonstrates the painter's extraordinary skill at creating a believable illusion. The plate of rolls and the partially peeled lemon teeter precipitously on the edge of the table, suggesting the transience of earthly pleasures.<sup>41</sup> Even as such scenes celebrated the prosperity of life in the Netherlands, they also served as a warning against over-indulgence.

The invention of photography opened up new creative possibilities for artists interested in documenting domestic life. James Van Der Zee (1886-1983) was an African-American photographer who earned recognition for documenting African-American cultural life. Van Der Zee ran a photo studio in Harlem from 1916 to 1968. His portraits of the flourishing middle class included families, religious and political leaders, athletes, artists, poets, and musicians.<sup>42</sup> His work contrasted with the photojournalistic photography of his day, which often presented African-Americans as victims of poverty.

Another photographer known for his images of domestic American life was Walker Evans (1903-1975), who was hired by the Resettlement



Figure 20. Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975); *Bud (William) Fields, Lily Rogers Fields, and Lilian Fields*; gelatin silver print; 1935-36; Prints and Photographs Division, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Photograph © Metropolitan Museum of Art/Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Administration (RA) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to document the difficult life of the rural poor during the Great Depression. Shortly thereafter, *Fortune* magazine asked Evans to partner with writer James Agee for an article about the plight of white tenant farmers. The image in Figure 20 from 1935-1936 of Bud Fields, Lily Rogers Fields, and their daughter is one of many photographs Evans shot featuring three sharecropper families in Hale County, Alabama.

Although *Fortune* did not publish the story and images, Evans and Agee published their work in the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941. Evans's intent was for his photographs to be impartial descriptions of subjects, but rejected the label "documentary" for his work.

American photographer Tina Barney (b. 1945) takes advantage of the documentary impression conveyed by photography to lend believability to her staged scenes of everyday life in contemporary American upper-class



families. Barney, who grew up in such an environment, depicts well-dressed family members in their well-to-do homes. But rather than taking pride in their affluent surroundings, they often seem to take their material privilege for granted, as they engage in interpersonal dialogues that are both intense and contained by the social decorum expected of their class. In *The Son* (1987) a father seems caught in the gesture of reprimanding his offspring.<sup>43</sup> As the elegantly dressed mother looks on, the son stands at the center of the scene with his hands wrapped pensively around his own neck, his back to a large-scale framed photograph of a young boy, presumably depicting the son at an earlier age. The impact of photographs like these stems, in large part, from the advances in permanent and lifelike color photography and large-scale digital printing that have occurred since Evans's day.

The home and the activities that take place within have been the inspiration for numerous artists. The photography of Barney and Evans, although depicting non-idealized views of domestic life, draws on earlier artistic traditions. As is the case in paintings by 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch or ancient Roman artists, objects featured in these depictions provide information about the social status and values of the inhabitants. People throughout history have incorporated art into their homes through the creation and acquisition of objects that are useful, beautiful, and culturally significant – including quilts, rugs, ceramics, furniture, and paintings. The motivation to do this is universal.

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