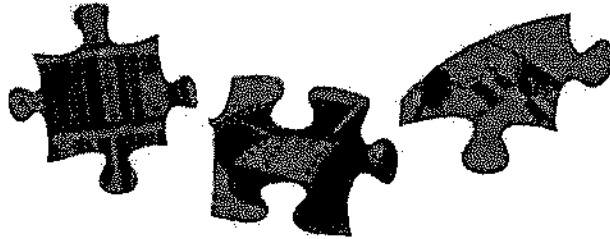


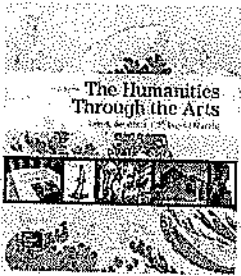
Again, I believe the academic skills I've described above apply to all students in all classes; however, a Humanities 1301 course—by definition and course description—is all about making connections between all the areas listed above and then some! So, the informal “Exploring Humanities” assignments should not only be the easiest to complete for HUMA 1301 students, but they should also be among the most interesting because of their eclectic nature!

Now, before we get to the specific prompts at the end of this handout, read the “Content Guidelines” below and be sure you understand how ALL three listed categories apply to ALL of the EH assignments.



II. Content Guidelines

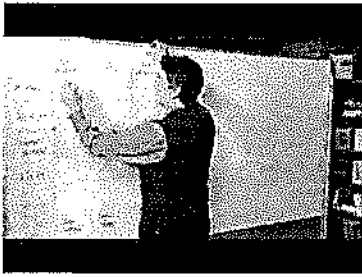
What do these assignments contain?



Assignment #1
pictures are enclosed
↓
please review

1. Book Content: Humanities Through The Arts

As you read each specific assignment prompt in part III, you'll notice that **the primary source they address is your class text**. These “Exploring Humanities” assignments lose significant points, if they earn any points at all, when students either ignore our class text or write so generally that comments could refer to any book. OR they fail to provide plenty of specific examples from this book. Of course, you know from the description of these assignments in the syllabus that **the last thing I want to see in them is a mere retelling of the chapter contents, SO DO NOT RETELL WHAT THE BOOK SAYS!** *Chapters need to be analyzed and/or discussed critically (this means offering your interpretation and opinions about chapter contents—not just regurgitating them).* For each assignment, you will need to select a combination of **SIX or SEVEN** works of art/specific examples from **TWO or THREE CHAPTERS**.



Assignment #2

2. Time-Era Content: Stephen Hicks ...

Stephen Hicks, Ph.D, is our resident philosopher-historian extraordinaire! More specifically, in his short video clips, Dr. Hicks explains the three time-eras into which all of world history can be divided: 1. the "pre-modern" age; 2. the "modern" age; and 3. the "post-modern" age. I'm sure you've either heard of or used these specific terms in your life at some point already. If not, no worries! Dr. Hicks will get you up to speed in his **short sequential videos**. Be sure to watch them in the order listed below; otherwise you will be confused (this is NOT the order in which they appear in the Canvas Media Gallery). *Note: The total number of minutes required to see all 9 clips is just under 1 hour.*

1. "What Modernism Is" – Clip 1 (5:32); Clip 2 (7:40)
2. "The Enlightenment Vision" Clip 1 (8:18); Clip 2 (6:00); Clip 3 (5:06)
3. "Postmodern Philosophy: Introduction" (3:14) + "Postmodernism's Themes" Clip 1 (7:57), Clip 2 (7:06), Clip 3 (7:33)

3. Your Choice: 1. TED Talk Video OR RSA Video (Royal Society for the Arts)

Assignment #3



Finally, there is one more thing you'll need to add to the mix in each assignment: ONE VIDEO from either TED Talks or the RSA that YOU SELECT on your own, and which YOU BELIEVE applies beautifully to your already-selected collection of examples from the class text! Hence, the TED or RSA video you select should fit nicely into the theme/thesis for each assignment! In terms of applying the video to Hicks' time era characteristics, it should simply be included with all of the other examples you selected and discussed accordingly.

So, to recap: I hope you see how each of the four aspects to these assignments play out in your informal "Exploring Humanities" assignments! Again: 1. The *Humanities Through the Arts* book is where specific content examples are selected and applied to each assignment; 2. Stephen Hicks provides you with the time era characteristics/context surrounding any/all examples you use; 3. In the same way you made choices regarding the examples you selected from the book chapters based on your theme or thesis, the video choice from either TED or the RSA (only 1 for each assignment) are entirely yours to make!

III. Writing the Assignments

Now that you know how each informal assignment needs to contain the four components just discussed, you are probably asking what will specifically be the focus in each assignment.

So, here's what you do: you are free to select any one of the prompts below for any informal assignment when it is due, provided you do not duplicate them and that you use all of them among your six informal assignments! Likewise, do not duplicate any examples from the book either. In other words, simply use the course schedule (due dates) as your guide, but do not feel obligated to follow the thematic list as it appears below. Again, YOU DO NOT NEED TO FOLLOW THE ORDER IN WHICH THE TOPICS ARE LISTED BELOW in chronological order. It doesn't matter which prompt you select for any particular assignment, just as long as you use all of the prompts listed below and do not duplicate them. You also need to make sure you have included all of the assigned book chapters through these six informal assignments!

Each informal assignment should open with a statement that serves as a thesis—a “main idea” that captures the essence of your montage!

Very Important! Each assignment needs to be a minimum of 1.5 pages of paragraphed writing, and each assignment must have the following information listed separately and clearly BEFORE you begin writing the assignment:

1. The SIX or SEVEN examples you selected from TWO to THREE different BOOK CHAPTERS (provide the full names/titles of works or historical events you select, including page and chapter numbers in the book AS A LIST AT THE END OF EACH ASSIGNMENT); 2. The specific/full title of the TED Talk or RSA video you selected; and 3. The specific time eras, according to the Hicks videos, that apply to your selections from Sayre and the TED/RSA selections you make.

EXPLORING HUMANITY PROMPTS (In No Particular Order)

- a. EH #?: Human Ability to Innovate, Create, and Generate
- b. EH #?: Human Quest to Leave a Unique Legacy and/or to be Immortalized
- c. EH #?: Human Need for Spiritual Transcendence Beyond this World/Life
- d. EH #?: Human Appreciation for Beauty/Aesthetic
- e. EH #?: Human Identification with Tragedy (Empathy) and Pathos
- f. EH #?: Human Desire for Love, Companionship, and Eros
- g. EH #?: Human Lust for Power and Influence
- h. EH #?: Human Capacity to Reinvent, Reconstruct, and/or Re-imagine New Realities

of taste are not disputable" can be credited with making many of us feel righteous about our own taste. What the saying means is that there is no accounting for what people like in the arts, for beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Thus, there is no use in trying to educate anyone about the arts. Obviously we disagree. We believe that all of us can and should be educated about the arts and should learn to respond to as wide a variety of the arts as possible: from jazz to string quartets, from Charlie Chaplin to Steven Spielberg, from Lewis Carroll to T. S. Eliot, from folk art to Picasso. Most of us defend our taste because anyone who challenges it challenges our deep feelings. Anyone who tries to change our responses to art is really trying to get inside our minds. If we fail to understand its purpose, this kind of persuasion naturally arouses resistance.

For us, the study of the arts penetrates beyond facts to the values that evoke our feelings—the way a succession of Eric Clapton's guitar chords playing the blues can be electrifying, or the way song lyrics can give us a chill. In other words, we want to go beyond the facts about a work of art and get to the values revealed in the work. How many times have we found ourselves liking something that, months or years before, we could not stand? And how often do we find ourselves now disliking what we previously judged a masterpiece? Generally we can say the work of art remains the same. It is we who change. We learn to recognize the values illuminated in such works as well as to understand the ways they are expressed. Such development is the meaning of "education" in the sense in which we have been using the term.

RESPONSES TO ART

Our responses to art usually involve processes so complex that they can never be fully tracked down or analyzed. At first they can only be hinted at when we talk about them. However, further education in the arts permits us to observe more closely and thereby respond more intensely to the content of the work. This is true, we believe, even with "easy" art, such as exceptionally beautiful works—for example, those by Giorgione (Figure 2-9), Cézanne (Figure 2-4), and O'Keeffe (Figure 4-12). Such gorgeous works generally are responded to with immediate satisfaction. What more needs to be done? If art were only of the beautiful, textbooks such as this would never find many users. But we think more needs to be done, even with the beautiful. We will begin, however, with three works that obviously are not beautiful.

The Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2) is a highly emotional painting, in the sense that the work seems to demand a strong emotional response. What we see is the huge head of a baby crying, and, then, as if issuing from its own mouth, the baby himself. What kinds of emotions do you find stirring in yourself as you look at this painting? What kinds of emotions do you feel are expressed in the painting? Your own emotional responses—such as shock, pity for the child, irritation at a destructive, mechanical society, or any other nameable emotion—do not sum up the painting. However, they are an important starting point, since Siqueiros paints in such a way as to evoke emotion, and our understanding of the painting increases as we examine the means by which this evocation is achieved.

Chapter 1
for
picture #
1

Picture #1

FIGURE 1-2
 David Alfaro Siqueiros, Mexican,
 1896–1974, *Echo of a Scream*,
 1937. Enamel on wood, 48 x 36
 inches (121.9 x 91.4 cm). Gift of
 Edward M. M. Warburg, Museum of
 Modern Art, New York. Siqueiros,
 a famous Mexican muralist, fought
 during the Mexican Revolution
 and possessed a powerful political
 sensibility, much of which found its
 way into his art. He painted some of
 his works in prison, held there for
 his political convictions. In the 1930s
 he centered his attention on the
 Spanish Civil War, represented here.

©2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New
 York/SOMA/AP, Mexico City. Photo:
 ©The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by
 SCALA/Art Resource, NY



PERCEPTION KEY *Echo of a Scream*

1. What are the important distortions in the painting?
2. What effect does the distortion of the baby's head have on you?
3. Why is the scream described as an echo?
4. What are the objects on the ground around the baby? How do they relate to the baby?
5. How does the red cloth on the baby intensify your emotional response to the painting?

genome has identified certain genes for inherited diseases, such as breast cancer or Alzheimer's disease, that could be modified to protect individuals or their offspring. Genetic research also suggests that in a few years individuals may be able to "design" their children's intelligence, body shape, height, general appearance, and physical ability.

Scientists provide the tools for these choices. Their values are centered in science in that they value the nature of their research and their capacity to make it work in a positive way. However, the impact on humanity of such a series of dramatic changes to life brings to the fore values that clash with one another. For example, is it a positive social value for couples to decide the sex of their offspring rather than following nature's own direction? In this case who should decide if "designing" one's offspring is a positive value, the scientist or the humanist?

Even more profound is the question of cloning a human being. Once a sheep had been cloned successfully, it was clear that this science would lead directly to the possibility of a cloned human being. Some proponents of cloning support the process because we could clone a child who has died in infancy or clone a genius who has given great gifts to the world. For these people, cloning is a positive value. For others, the very thought of cloning a person is repugnant on the basis of religious belief. For still others, the idea of human cloning is objectionable because it echoes the creation of an unnatural monster, and for them it is a negative value. Because this is a worldwide problem, local laws will have limited effect on establishing a clear position on the value of cloning of all sorts. The question of how we decide on such a controversial issue is at the heart of the humanities, and some observers have pointed to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's famous novel *Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus*, which in some ways enacts the conflict among these values.

These examples demonstrate that the discoveries of scientists often have tremendous impact on the values of society. Yet some scientists have declared that they merely make the discoveries and that others—presumably politicians—must decide how the discoveries are to be used. It is this last statement that brings us closest to the importance of the humanities. If many scientists believe they cannot judge how their discoveries are to be used, then we must try to understand why they give that responsibility to others. This is not to say that scientists uniformly turn such decisions over to others, for many of them are humanists as well as scientists. But the fact remains that many governments have made use of great scientific achievements without pausing to ask the "achievers" if they approved of the way their discoveries were being used. The questions are, Who decides how to use such discoveries? On what grounds should their judgments be based?

Studying the behavior of neutrinos or string theory will not help us get closer to the answer. Such study is not related to the nature of humankind but to the nature of nature. What we need is a study that will get us closer to ourselves. It should be a study that explores the reaches of human feeling in relation to values—not only our own individual feelings and values but also the feelings and values of others. We need a study that will increase our sensitivity to ourselves, others, and the values in our world. To be sensitive is to perceive with insight. To be sensitive is also to feel and believe that things make a difference. Furthermore,

Chapter 1
picture # 2



FIGURE 1-1
Cave painting from Chauvet Caves, France. Discovered in 1994, the Chauvet Caves have yielded some of the most astonishing examples of prehistoric art the world has seen. These aurochs may have lived as many as 35,000 years ago, while the painting itself seems as modern as a contemporary work.

©Javier Trueba/M&B/Science Source.

it involves an awareness of those aspects of values that cannot be measured by objective standards. To be sensitive is to respect the humanities, because, among other reasons, they help develop our sensitivity to values, to what is important to us as individuals.

There are numerous ways to approach the humanities. The way we have chosen here is the way of the arts. One of the contentions of this book is that values are clarified in enduring ways in the arts. Human beings have had the impulse to express their values since the earliest times. Ancient tools recovered from the most recent Ice Age, for example, have features designed to express an affection for beauty as well as to provide utility.

The concept of progress in the arts is problematic. Who is to say whether the cave paintings (Figure 1-1) of 30,000 years ago that were discovered in present-day France are less excellent than the work of Picasso (Figure 1-4)? Cave paintings were probably not made as works of art to be contemplated. Getting to them in the caves is almost always difficult, and they are very hard to see. They seem to have been made for a practical purpose, such as improving the prospects for the hunt. Yet the work reveals something about the power, grace, and beauty of all the animals it portrayed. These cave paintings function now as works of art. From the beginning, our species instinctively had an interest in making revealing forms.

Among the numerous ways to approach the humanities, we have chosen the way of the arts because, as we shall try to elucidate, the arts clarify or reveal values. As we deepen our understanding of the arts, we necessarily deepen our understanding of values. We will study our experience with works of art as well as the values others

picture # 2

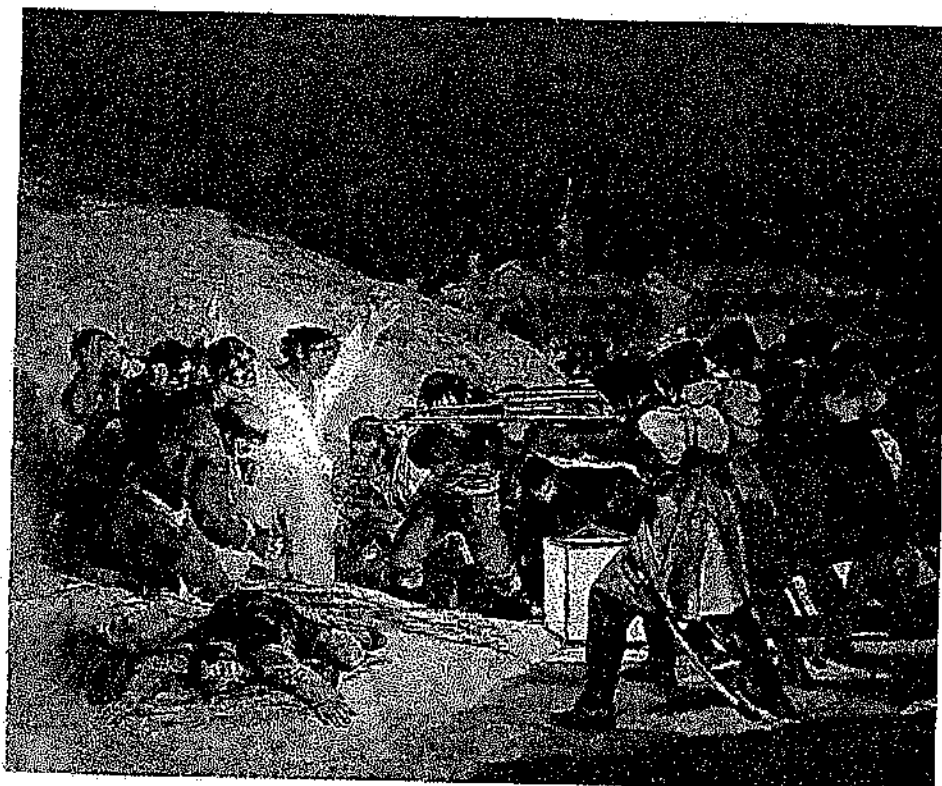


FIGURE 2-3
Francisco Goya, *May 3, 1808*, 1814–1815. Oil on canvas, 8 feet 9 inches X 13 feet 4 inches. The Prado, Madrid. Goya's painting of Napoleonic soldiers executing Spanish guerrillas the day after the Madrid Insurrection portrays the faces of the victims, but not of the killers.

© Copyright of the image Museo Nacional del Prado/Art Resource, NY

had accomplished this, we would be inclined to believe that it was more luck than skill. Adams's skill in catching the scene is even more evident, and he risked his life to get it. But do we admire this work the way we admire Siqueiros's *Echo of a Scream* (Figure 1-2)? Do we experience these two works in the same basic way?

Compare a painting of a somewhat similar subject matter—Goya's *May 3, 1808* (Figure 2-3). Goya chose the most terrible moment, that split second before the crash of the guns. There is no doubt that the executions will go on. The desolate mountain pushing down from the left blocks escape, while from the right the firing squad relentlessly hunches forward. The soldiers' thick legs—planted wide apart and parallel—support like sturdy pillars the blind, pressing wall formed by their backs. These are men of a military machine. Their rifles, flashing in the bleak light of the ghastly lantern, thrust out as if they belonged to their bodies. It is unimaginable that any of these men would defy the command of their superiors. In the dead of night, the doomed are backed up against the mountain like animals ready for slaughter. One man flings up his arms in a gesture of utter despair—or is it defiance? The uncertainty increases the intensity of our attention. Most of the rest of the men bury their faces, while a few, with eyes staring out of their sockets, glance out at what they cannot help seeing—the sprawling dead smeared in blood.

With the photograph of the execution in Vietnam, despite its immediate and powerful attraction, it takes only a glance or two to grasp what is presented. Undivided attention, perhaps, is necessary to become aware of the significance of the event, but not sustained attention. In fact, to take careful notice of all the details—such as the

Chapter 2
picture #3

patterns on the prisoner's shirt—does not add to our awareness of the significance of the photograph. If anything, our awareness will be sharper and more productive if we avoid such detailed examination. Is such the case with the Goya? We believe not. Indeed, without sustained attention to the details of this work, we would miss most of what is revealed. For example, block out everything but the dark shadow at the bottom right. Note how different that shadow appears when it is isolated. We must see the details individually and collectively, as they work together. Unless we are aware of their collaboration, we are not going to grasp fully the total form.

Close examination of the Adams photograph reveals several efforts to increase the unity and thus the power of the print. For example, the flak jacket of General Loan has been darkened so as to remove distracting details. The buildings in the background have been "dodged out" (held back in printing so that they are not fully visible). The shadows of trees on the road have been softened so as to lead the eye inexorably to the hand that holds the gun. The space around the head of the victim is also dodged out so that it appears that something like a halo surrounds the head. All this has been done in the act of printing sometime after the picture was taken. Careful printing helps achieve the photograph's artistic formal unity.

Yet we are suggesting that the Goya has a higher degree of perceptible unity than Adams's photograph, that perhaps only the Goya has artistic form. We base these conclusions on what is given for us to perceive: the fact that the part-to-part and the part-to-whole relationships are much stronger in the Goya. Now, of course, you may disagree. No judgment about such matters is indisputable. Indeed, that is part of the fun of talking about whether something is or is not a work of art—we can learn how to perceive from one another.

PERCEPTION KEY Adams and Goya

1. How is the painting different from Adams's photograph in the way the details work together?
2. Could any detail in the painting be changed or removed without weakening the unity of the total design? What about the photograph?
3. Does the photograph or the painting more powerfully reveal human barbarity?
4. Do you find yourself participating more with the Adams photograph or the Goya painting?
5. How does blurring out the buildings in the background of the photograph improve its visual impact? Compare the effect of the looming architecture in the painting.
6. What do the shadows on the street add to the significance of the photograph? Compare the shadows on the ground in the painting.
7. Does it make any significant difference that the Vietcong prisoner's shirt is checkered? Compare the white shirt on the gesturing man in the painting.
8. Is the expression on the soldier's face, along the left edge of the photograph, appropriate to the situation? Compare the facial expressions in the painting.
9. Can these works be fairly compared when one is in black and white and the other is in full color? Why or why not?
10. What are some basic differences between viewing a photograph of a real man being killed and viewing a painting of such an event? Does that distinction alone qualify or disqualify either work as a work of art?

Chapter 2
picture #3

PARTICIPATION

Both Adams's photograph (Figure 2-2) and the Goya (Figure 2-3) tend to grasp our attention. Initially for most of us, probably, the photograph has more pulling power than the painting, especially as the two works are illustrated here. In its setting in the Prado in Madrid, however, the great size of the Goya and its powerful lighting and color draw the eye like a magnet. But the term "participate" is more accurately descriptive of what we are likely to be doing in our experience of the painting. With the Goya, we must not only give but also sustain our undivided attention so that we lose our self-consciousness—our sense of being separate, of standing apart from the painting. We participate. And only by means of participation can we come close to a full awareness of what the painting is about.

Works of art are created, exhibited, and preserved for us to perceive with not only undivided but also sustained attention. Artists, critics, and philosophers of art (aestheticians) generally are in agreement about this. Thus, if a work requires our participation in order to understand and appreciate it fully, we have an indication that the work is art. Therefore—unless our analyses have been incorrect, and you should satisfy yourself about this—the Goya would seem to be a work of art. Conversely, the photograph is not as obviously a work of art as the painting, and this is the case despite the fascinating impact of the photograph. Yet these are highly tentative judgments. We are far from being clear about why the Goya requires our participation and the photograph may not. Until we are clear about these "whys," the grounds for these judgments remain shaky.

Goya's painting tends to draw us on until, ideally, we become aware of all the details and their interrelationships. For example, the long, dark shadow at the bottom right underlines the line of the firing squad, and the line of the firing squad helps bring out the shadow. Moreover, this shadow is the darkest and most opaque part of the painting. It has a forbidding, blind, fateful quality, which in turn reinforces the ominous appearance of the firing squad. The dark shadow on the street just below the forearm of General Loan seems less powerful. Sustained attention or participation cannot be achieved by acts of will. The splendid singularity of what we are attending to must fascinate and control us to the point that we no longer need to will our attention. We can make up our minds to give our undivided attention to something. But if that something lacks the pulling power that grasps our attention, we cannot participate with it.

The ultimate test for recognizing a work of art, then, is how it works in us, what it does to us. Participative experiences of works of art are communions—experiences so full and fruitful that they enrich our lives. Such experiences are life-enhancing not just because of the great satisfaction they may give us at the moment but also because they make more or less permanent contributions to our future lives. Does da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5) heighten your perception of a painting's underlying structure, the power of simplicity of form, and the importance of a figure's pose? Does Robert Herrick's "The Pillar of Fame" (Chapter 1) affect your concept of fame? Do you see shovels differently, perhaps, after experiencing *Shovel* by Dine (Figure 2-1)? If not, presumably they are not works of art. But this assumes that we have really participated with these works, that we have allowed them to work fully in our experience, so that if the meaning or content were present, it had a chance to reveal itself to our awareness. Of the four basic distinctions—subject matter, artistic

Chapter 2
Picture # 3

Delacroix's are explained: "Those things which are most real are the illusions I create in my paintings." Or Edward Weston's: "The photographer who is an artist reveals the essence of what lies before the lens with such clear insight that the beholder may find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual object." Camus: "If the world were clear, art would not exist." Artistic form is an economy that produces a lucidity that enables us better to understand and, in turn, manage our lives. Hence, the informing of a work of art reveals a subject matter with value dimensions that go beyond the artist's idiosyncrasies and perversities. Whether or not Goya had idiosyncrasies and perversities, he did justice to his subject matter: He revealed it. The art of a period is the revelation of the collective soul of its time.

PARTICIPATION, ARTISTIC FORM, AND CONTENT

Participation is the necessary condition that makes possible our insightful perception of artistic form and content. Unless we participate with the Goya (Figure 2-3), we will fail to see the power of its artistic form. We will fail to see how the details work together to form a totality. We will also fail to grasp the content fully, for artistic form and content are inseparable. Thus, we will have failed to gain insight into the subject matter. We will have collected just one more instance of barbarity. The Goya will have basically the same effect on us as Adams's photograph except that it may be less important to us because it happened long ago. But if, on the contrary, we have participated with the Goya, we probably will never see such things as executions in quite the same way again. The insight that we have gained will tend to refocus our vision so that we will see similar subject matters with heightened awareness.

Look, for example, at the photograph by Kevin Carter (Figure 2-5), which was published in the *New York Times* on March 26, 1993, and which won the Pulitzer



FIGURE 2-5

Kevin Carter, *Vulture and Child in Sudan*, 1993. Silver halide. Carter saved this child but became so depressed by the terrible tragedies he had recorded in Sudan and South Africa that he committed suicide a year after taking this photograph.

©Kevin Carter/Sygma/Getty Images

picture #4
Chapter 2

Picture 4

Chapter 2

Prize for photography in 1994. The form isolates two dramatic figures. The closest is a starving Sudanese child making her way to a feeding center. The other is a plump vulture waiting for the child to die. This powerful photograph raised a hue and cry, and the *New York Times* published a commentary explaining that Carter chased away the vulture and took the child to the feeding center. Carter committed suicide in July 1994.

PERCEPTION KEY Adams, Goya, and Carter

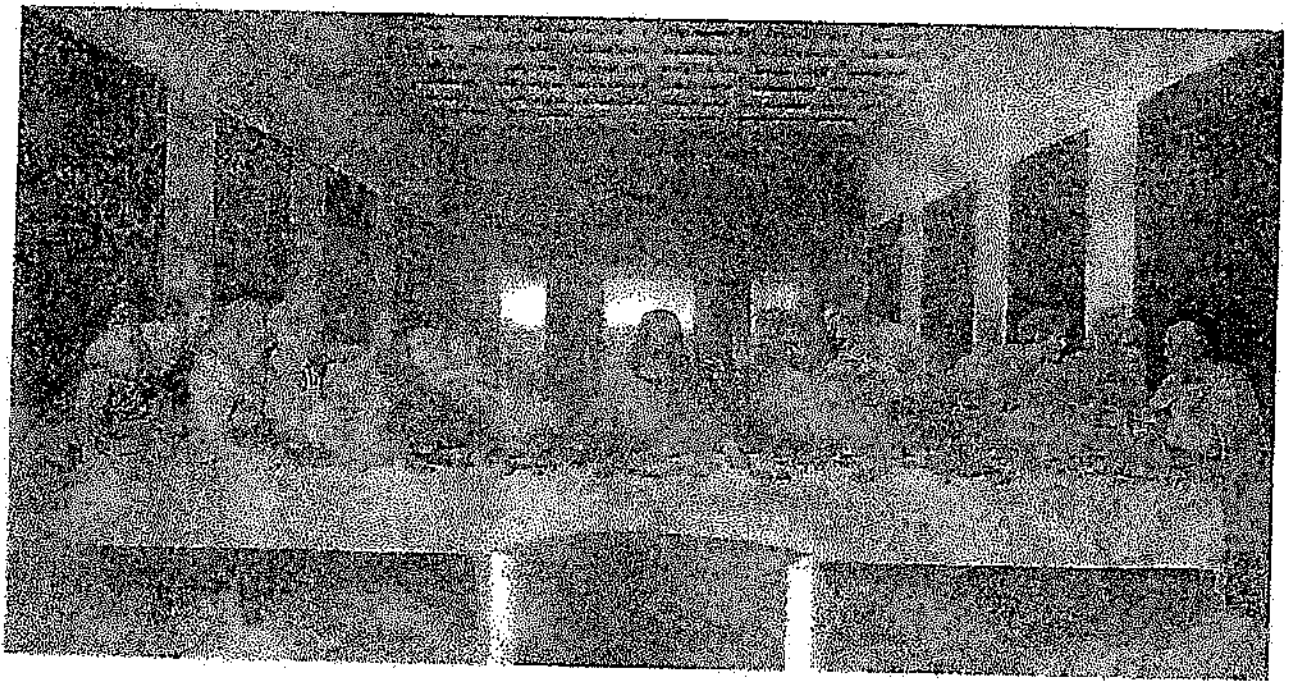
1. How does our discussion of the Adams photograph affect your response to Carter's photograph?
2. To what extent does Carter's photograph have artistic form?
3. Why are your answers to these questions fundamentally important in determining whether Adams's photograph, Carter's photograph, Goya's painting, or all of them are works of art?
4. Describe your experience regarding your participation with either Adams's or Carter's photograph or Goya's painting. Can you measure the intensity of your participation with each of them? Which work do you reflect upon most when you relax and are not thinking directly on the subject of art?
5. The intensity of your reactions to the Adams and Carter photographs may well be stronger than the intensity of your experience with the Goya. If so, should that back up the assertion that the photographs are works of art?

Artistic Form: Examples

Let us examine artistic form in two examples of work by an anonymous cartoonist and Roy Lichtenstein. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lichtenstein became interested in comic strips as subject matter. The story goes that his two young boys asked him to paint a Donald Duck "straight," without the encumbrances of art. But much more was involved. Born in 1923, Lichtenstein grew up before the invention of television. By the 1930s the comic strip had become one of the most important of the mass media. Adventure, romance, sentimentality, and terror found expression in the stories of Tarzan, Flash Gordon, Superman, Wonder Woman, Steve Roper, Winnie Winkle, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Batman and Robin, and the like.

The purpose of the comic strip for its producers is strictly commercial. And because of the large market, a premium has always been put on making the processes of production as inexpensive as possible. And so generations of mostly unknown commercial artists, going far back into the nineteenth century, developed ways of quick, cheap color printing. They developed a technique that could turn out cartoons like the products of an assembly line. Moreover, because their market included a large number of children, they developed ways of producing images that were immediately understandable and striking.

Lichtenstein reports that he was attracted to the comic strip by its stark simplicity—the blatant primary colors, the ungainly black lines that encircle the shapes, the balloons that isolate the spoken words or thoughts of the characters.



PERCEPTION KEY *Last Supper*

Descriptively criticize the *Last Supper*. Point out every facet of form that seems important. Look for shapes that relate to each other, including shapes formed by groupings of figures. Do any shapes stand out as unique—for example, the shapes of Christ and Judas, who leans back, fourth from the left? Describe the color relationships. Describe the symmetry, if any. Describe how the lines tend to meet in the landscape behind Christ's head.

Leonardo planned the fresco so that the perspectival vanishing point would reside in the head of Jesus, the central figure in the painting (Figure 3-2). He also used the concept of the trinity, in the number 3, as he grouped each of the disciples in threes, two groups on each side of the painting. Were you to diagram them, you would see they form the basis of triangles. The three windows in the back wall also repeat the idea of three. The figure of Jesus is itself a perfect isosceles triangle, while the red and blue garment centers the eye. In some paintings, this kind of architectonic organization might be much too static, but because Leonardo gathers the figures in dramatic poses, with facial expressions that reveal apparent emotions, the viewer is distracted from the formal organization while being subliminally affected by its perfection. It seems that perfection—appropriate to his subject matter—was what Leonardo aimed at in creating the underlying structure of the fresco. Judas, the disciple who will betray Jesus, is the fourth figure from the left; his face in shadow, pulling back in shock,

FIGURE 3-1

Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper*. Circa 1495–1498. Oil and tempera on plaster, 15 feet 1 1/4 inches X 28 feet 10 1/2 inches. Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan. Leonardo's painting was one of many on this subject, but his is the first to represent recognizably human figures with understandable facial expressions. This is the dramatic moment when Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him.

©Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Chapter 3
picture #5



FIGURE 3-2
The *Last Supper* is geometrically arranged with the single-point vanishing perspective centered on the head of Jesus. The basic organizing form for the figures in the painting is the triangle. Leonardo aimed at geometric perfection.

©Erin Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Chapter 3
Picture #5

Detail and Structural Relationships When we address a painting we concern ourselves both with the *structural relationships* and the *detail* that control our visual attention. For example, the dominant structures in the *Last Supper* are the rectangular table cloth contrasting with the high receding white walls that create the single-point vanishing perspective ending in the head of Jesus. These dynamic lines of force imply a dramatic moment. As you examine the painting and consider the following discussion, decide whether the relationship of structural elements to detail elements is dominant in how you see this painting.

When we talk about details, we are concerned with how the smaller elements of the work function together. For example, in the *Last Supper*, we see that the figure of Jesus at the center is a geometric shape, an isosceles triangle. Within this triangle, this triangle constitutes a detail. Moreover, when examining the painting for more details, we see that all the apostles are grouped in patterns of triangles. However, their triangular shapes are not as perfect as the center triangle. If you draw the implied triangle for any other group of three, you will see that it is isosceles, but somewhat misshapen. Perfection in this painting is reserved for one figure.

In examining other details in the painting we see that the three open windows in the rear are details that replicate the idea of three, echoing the three lines of the triangle. The four tapestries on each wall act as background, but may refer to the traditional "perfect" number, eight, which signifies the new beginning. (The white keys on a piano illustrate that idea: C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C.)

The triangular figure of Jesus, with red and blue garments, in the center of the *Last Supper* is a dominant settling force for the eye, but it contrasts immediately with the other triangular arrangements of the apostles. Among other contrasting details are the colors of the garments of the apostles. They are paler complements

Chapter 3
picture #6

and threats to civilization. Destruction and skeletons figure in much of Orozco's work in the 1930s. Could the content of the painting point to an apocalypse?

Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4) is more or less balanced with respect to detail and structure. The detail relationships are organized into three major regions: the great triangle—with the apex at the candle and two sides sloping down to the lower corners—and the two large rectangles, vertically oriented, running down along the left and right borders. Moreover, these regions are hierarchically ordered. The triangular region takes precedence in both size and interest, and the left rectangle, mainly because of the fascination of the impassive bull (what is he doing here?), dominates the right rectangle, even though both are about the same size. Despite the complexity of the detail relationships in *Guernica*, we gradually perceive the power of a very strong, clear structure.

The basic formal element in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5) is the isosceles triangle, but in this portrait the roundness of the three points of the triangle soften the impact of the form. We are drawn to the hands, which are crossed in such a way as to create an "upside down" triangle with the elbows and the other points. The flesh of her neck and bosom creates another triangle, while her oval face dominates the composition. Naturally her smile has been an enigma because it implies an understanding between the painter and the model. Its enigmatic quality is echoed slightly by the strange landscapes in the background—they carefully avoid any stable geometric figure as a way of contrast. Return to the discussion of this painting in "Experiencing: The *Mona Lisa*" in Chapter 1 and consider the descriptive criticism offered there.

PERCEPTION KEY Detail and Structural Dominance

1. In the *Last Supper*, do you find that detail or structural relationships dominate—or are equal? Which analysis, of structure or detail, yields the most understanding of the painting's content?
2. Whether detail or structural relationships dominate—or are equal—often varies widely from work to work. Compare Pollock's *The Flame*, Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4), and Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* (Figure 1-5). In which painting or paintings, if any, do detail relationships dominate? Structural relationships?

Interpretive Criticism

Interpretive criticism explicates the content of a work of art. It helps us understand how form transforms subject matter into content; what has been revealed about some subject matter and how that has been accomplished. The content of any work of art will become clearer when the structure is perceived in relation to the details and regions. The Le Corbusier and Sullivan examples (Figures 3-4 and 3-5) demonstrate that the same principle holds for architecture as for painting. The subject matter of a building—or at least an important component of it—is traditionally the practical function the building serves. We have no difficulty telling which of these buildings was meant to serve as a bank and which was meant to serve as a church.



FIGURE 3-3

Jackson Pollock, *The Flame* (1934–1938). Oil on canvas mounted on fiberboard, 20½ × 30 inches (51.1 × 76.2 cm), Enid A. Haupt Fund, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY.

©2017 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
Photo: ©Fine Art Images/agefotostock

colors of red, blue, and ochre, competing with the dominant darkness of the rear wall and the tapestries on the left and right walls. Observing the apostles's colored garments and their less than equilateral triangular grouping is important for interpreting their relationship to the main figure in the painting and its main dramatic moment.

In Jackson Pollock's *The Flame* (Figure 3-3), the details of the flames, in the brilliant reds, the orange-whites, and the deep contrasts in the blacks of the composition, are so vigorous that on first inspection it is difficult to see the forms that begin to appear. If we did not know the name of the painting, we might have no idea whether something is being represented or if the painting is an example of abstraction, a style for which Pollock was usually known. But closer examination shows the formal order in the center of the painting, creating a triangular structure controlled by the angular red flames rising to the top center. The central flame in orange-white seems to rise from two angular forms in white (possibly parts of a skeleton?) that angle down in the middle, the base for the central flames. All the detailed shapes angle upward, as we expect fire to do. The subject matter of the painting is flame, but the intensity of the colors and the power of the contrasts of black, white, and red reveal an energy in the flame that suggests something dreadful. If this were a painting made in the Middle Ages, we would assume it an allusion to the pits of hell. However, Pollock was