Artists speak to us, the viewers, through their works. Sometimes, they tell a story. At other times, as in this self-portrait, they express strong emotions. What emotion, or feeling, do you “read” in this artist’s painting of herself? Does she appear happy? Sad? Explain your reaction.

Art in Your World

The urge to create art is as old as humanity itself. Since the dawn of history, people have used art to communicate information, tell stories, and record events. Art is one of the deepest forms of personal expression.

In this chapter, you will:

- Identify the purposes of art.
- Compare and contrast sources to which artists turn for inspiration.
- Create visual solutions using direct observation and imagination.
- Compare and contrast the use of the elements of art in artworks.

Figure 1.1 is one of many self-portraits painted by the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907–1954). Kahlo’s tragic personal history was a driving force in her art. At the age of 6, she was stricken with polio, a crippling disease. Twelve years later, a bus accident broke nearly every bone in her body. She spent a year in a full-body cast and underwent 30 operations. Her self-portraits, which are highly expressive, seem to reflect a life of physical pain and emotional difficulties. She never appears smiling but, rather, always wears the expression appearing in Figure 1.1.

Compare and Contrast. Examine the work in Figure 4.23 on page 82. It is also a self-portrait of a twentieth-century artist. List similarities and differences in the subject and content between the two works.
What Is Art?

An artwork is the visual expression of an idea or experience created with skill. Visual art is more than paintings hanging on a wall. Visual art includes drawing, printmaking, sculpture, architecture, photography, filmmaking, crafts, graphic arts, industrial and commercial design, video, and computer arts.

Art Is Communication

When you talk to someone or write a letter, you communicate. You share your ideas and feelings by using words. You can also communicate through the arts. Art is a language that artists use to express ideas and feelings that everyday words cannot express. In order to experience art fully, you must do more than simply look at it with your eyes; you must develop the ability to perceive. To look is to merely notice and label an object with a name such as “chair” or “house.” To perceive is to become deeply aware through the senses of the special nature of a visual object. Perception is the result of perceiving. To understand a work of art, you must train yourself to perceive. Try to perceive what Meyer Straus is expressing in his painting, Bayou Teche (Figure 1.2). If you concentrate on his image, you can feel the humid atmosphere of the Louisiana swamps and hear the mosquitoes buzzing. You can understand how it feels to be enclosed by branches dripping with Spanish moss. You can almost hear the water lapping at the boat.

Meyer Straus. Bayou Teche. 1870. Oil on canvas. 76.2 × 152.4 cm (30 × 60”). Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia.
The Purposes of Art

People created art to record ideas and feelings long before they had written words. They used art then as we use it today. The following are some of the most common functions of art:

- **Personal functions.** Artists create art to express personal feelings. Edvard Munch had a tragic childhood. His mother died when he was very young, and one of his sisters died when he was 14. His painting, *The Sick Child* (Figure 1.3), shocked viewers who were used to seeing happy paintings with bright colors. The work was meant to remind viewers of personal family tragedies. Perhaps the artist wanted to tell them to appreciate what they had. Often people who have suffered a loss remind others to live each day as if it were their last. That is what Munch is saying with his striking image.

- **Social function.** Artists may produce art to reinforce and enhance the shared sense of identity of those in a family, community, or civilization (Figure 12.17, page 332). That is why many families commission or hire an artist or photographer to produce a family portrait. Art produced for this purpose also may be used in celebrations and displayed on festive occasions. Think of the many forms of visual art that might be seen in a parade—costumes, band uniforms, floats, and dances are all forms of visual art that might be included in the public celebration of a parade to commemorate an important holiday or event.

- **Spiritual function.** Artists may create art to express spiritual beliefs about the destiny of life controlled by the force of a higher power. Art produced for this purpose may reinforce the shared beliefs of an individual or

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**Figure 1.3** The child in the painting appears pale and calm. She is not looking at her mother. What is she staring at? Notice the exaggerated drooping of the woman’s head. What has the artist done to focus your attention on the sick child?

a human community. In *Pueblo Scene: Corn Dancers and Church* (Figure 1.4), the artists have created a three-dimensional representation of a religious festival that connects two cultures and two religions. Works of art have been created for religious purposes throughout history. Many experts believe that the prehistoric cave paintings of animals had ceremonial purposes, which means they were more than simple records of events. The Greek Temples were built to honor the ancient gods. During the Middle Ages in Europe, almost all art was created for the Catholic Church.

- **Physical functions.** Artists and craftspeople constantly invent new ways to create functional art. Industrial designers discover new materials that make cars lighter and stronger. Architects employ new building materials such as steel–reinforced concrete to give buildings more interesting forms. In Figure 1.5, notice how the artist has combined a variety of precious and semiprecious materials to create a unique necklace.

- **Educational function.** In the past, many people could not read and art was often created to provide visual instruction. Artists produced artworks, such as symbols painted on signs, to impart information. Viewers could learn from their artworks. In the Middle Ages, artists created stained-glass windows, sculptures, paintings, and tapestries to illustrate stories from the Bible or about rulers of a kingdom.

![Figure 1.4](image)

*Figure 1.4* The figures and buildings for this scene were made by a family of artists. Look closely and you will notice that some of the figures are made of painted clay, while others have hair made from yarn and clothing made of fabric. What do the different figures appear to be doing? What does the procession in the foreground seem to be about?

In addition, when we look at art from the past, we learn from it. Art from other places and other times can tell us what people did. Paintings such as *Anne of Cleves* (Figure 1.6) show us people from the past, what they wore, and how they looked.

**Art as a Lifelong Pursuit**

Art can be a part of your lifelong learning. You may choose to pursue a career in art or to explore art as an avocation, or hobby. Avocational opportunities in art include making art or craft projects at home, taking classes for personal enjoyment, and getting involved in community art programs.

In this book you will learn to analyze and evaluate artworks. You’ll also find many opportunities to create artworks and discover the tools, materials, and techniques of various art media. There are many ways to make art a part of your life and education.

**Check Your Understanding**

1. What does it mean to *perceive*?
2. Name the five purposes of art.
3. Describe two of the purposes of art.
Why Do Artists Create?

The urge to create is universal. Artists are driven by their sense of wonder and curiosity. The creative impulse is often suppressed if one becomes afraid of making mistakes. Artists exhibit the courage to take risks. They are able to see their surroundings in new and unusual ways. They are willing to work intensely for long periods of time to achieve their goals. Artists who are self-taught and therefore have had little or no formal schooling in artistic methods are called folk artists. Most artists learn skills and techniques from other artists. Eventually artists develop their own unique styles.

The impulses that drive artists to create vary. Both Leo Twiggs and Roger Brown created art in response to a devastating natural catastrophe: Hurricane Hugo. Twiggs, who lives in South Carolina and witnessed the hurricane, used strong lines to represent the force of the winds (Figure 1.7). Brown, who lives in Chicago, responded to the same tragedy in a different way. He illustrated only the aftermath of the hurricane. He turned the event into a giant postcard in which he depicted the fury of the storm by showing the trees in neat rows, broken off at exactly the same level (Figure 1.8).

Where Do Artists Get Ideas?

Artists are creative individuals who use imagination and skill to communicate in visual form. They use the materials of art to solve visual problems. Artists look to many sources for inspiration. Some look outward to their natural and cultural environment for ideas. Others look within themselves for creative motivation.

Nature

Sometimes artists look to their natural surroundings and record them. The first group of landscape artists in the United States was called the Hudson River School because most of them lived near that river in New York. They painted the world around them, paying meticulous attention to realistic detail. One Hudson River School artist, George Inness, lived in Newburgh, New York. His early work depicted the vast American landscape in a romantic manner (Figure 1.9).


George Inness. The Lackawanna Valley. c. 1856. Oil on canvas. 86 × 127.6 cm (33⅜ × 50¼”). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. © 1998 Board of Trustees. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hurtleston Rogers.
People and Real World Events

Another artist, Grant Wood, captured the essence of the Midwestern American spirit during the Great Depression in his work, *American Gothic* (Figure 1.10). The stern, small town citizens posed before their house. The couple's determination was meant to reassure those shaken by the stock market crash during the Great Depression.

Grant Wood grew up on a farm and drew with whatever materials could be spared. Often he used charcoal from the wood fire to sketch on a leftover piece of brown paper. He was only ten when his father died, and his mother moved the family to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where Wood went to school. He studied part-time at the State University of Iowa and attended night classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. When he was 32, he went to Paris to study at the Académie Julian. In 1927, he traveled to Munich, Germany, where some of the most accomplished artists of the period were working. While there, he saw German and Flemish artworks that influenced him greatly, especially the work of Jan van Eyck. After that trip, his style changed to reflect the realism of those painters.

Myths and Legends

Some artists borrow ideas from famous works of literature. Romare Bearden interpreted one part of an ancient Greek legend, *The Odyssey*, in his painting *Return of Ulysses* (Figure 1.11). The Greek legend, written by the poet Homer, describes the adventures that befall a hero returning home from war. Bearden used his unique style to portray an important scene from this story.
Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

Visual artists in every culture use their skills to create objects and images to be used to express spiritual beliefs. Many non-Western cultures do not even have a word for “art.” Those who create objects do the best work they can because it is important. The mask in Figure 1.12 was made to be worn during ceremonial winter dances by the Yup’ik people who lived in northwestern Alaska.

Creative Techniques

Many artists founded new art movements and developed new techniques to create art. Jackson Pollock was a leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement. He studied painting in the 1930s with Thomas Hart Benton as his teacher. Benton was an American regionalist who painted realistic paintings and murals that celebrated American life (Figure 13.29, page 376). Pollock’s earliest works were in the realistic style of his teacher. After 1947, he developed action painting, the technique of dripping and splashing paint onto a canvas stretched on the floor (Figure 1.13 on page 14). The idea for this style of painting, which influenced many who came after him, came from within himself.
Art is not made in a vacuum. Artists of a particular time period often influence each other. Artists also learn from and build on the work of artists who came before them. Pablo Picasso based his 1957 painting, *Las Meninas* (after Velázquez) (Figure 1.14), on *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) by Diego Velázquez (Figure 1.15), which was painted in 1656. Although Picasso changed the colors and used his own Cubist style, you can recognize some of the figures and objects that are in the realistic Velázquez painting. How many figures and objects can you find that appear in both works?
Keeping a Sketchbook

Creating Visual Solutions Using Direct Observation. Artists develop perception and artistic skills by constantly sketching the world around them. Begin keeping a sketchbook of your own. Choose a notebook with unlined paper. Practice using direct observation to draw anything that catches your eye. The more you draw, the better you will “see” objects. Make written notes about your sketches, such as the quality of light or the colors you notice.

Check Your Understanding

1. Define the word artist.
2. Identify four different sources for artistic ideas.
3. Why do artists keep sketchbooks?
People throughout the world speak many different languages. Spanish, Swahili, Japanese, Hindi, French, English, and Apache are just a few of the 3,000 different languages that are spoken. Each language has its own system of words and rules of grammar. To learn a new language, you need to learn new words and a new set of rules for putting those words together.

The language of visual art has its own system. All that you see in a work of art is made up of certain common elements. They are arranged according to basic principles. As you learn these basic elements and principles, you will learn the language of art. Being able to use the language of visual art will help you in many ways. It will increase your ability to understand, appreciate, and enjoy art. It will increase your ability to express yourself clearly when discussing art. It will even help you improve your ability to produce artworks.

The Elements of Art

A symbol is something that stands for, or represents, something else. In a spoken language, words are symbols. The word chair stands for a piece of furniture that has a seat, a back, legs, and sometimes arms. In the language of art, we use visual symbols to communicate ideas.

The basic visual symbols in the language of art are known as the elements of art. Just as there are basic kinds of words—such as nouns and verbs—there are basic kinds of art elements. These are line, shape and form, space, color, value, and texture. The elements are the visual building blocks that the artist puts together to create a work of art. No matter how a work is made, it will contain some or all of these elements.

When you look an image, it is difficult to separate one element from another. For example, when you look at Figure 1.16, you see a shiny, round bowl outlined with a thin yellow line filled with bumpy, red raspberries.

Create a Symbol

Creating Visual Solutions Using Experiences. In visual art, symbols can be concrete representations of abstract ideas, such as a heart standing for love. Create a visual symbol that represents something important to you. Elaborate on your experiences, such as an activity or club you are involved with. Share your symbol with your classmates. Can they identify what it represents?

Computer Option. Design a visual symbol using a computer application. Choose from the tools and menus to represent this idea with line, shape, or color. Hold down the Shift key when making straight lines or restricting shapes to circles or squares. Title, save, print, and display your best example. Include a short explanation about your symbol.
However, rather than seeing the elements of texture (shiny and bumpy), color (red), shape (round), and line (thin and yellow) separately, you see the bowl of raspberries as a whole. You visually “read” the elements together.

Sometimes the differences between the elements are not clear-cut. A line may be so wide that it looks like a shape, or an artist may manipulate light and dark values to indicate different surface textures. Look at the variety of textures Janet Fish has created in Raspberries and Goldfish (Figure 1.16).

When you first learned to read, you did not begin with a full-length novel. You learned by reading one word at a time. That is how you will start to read the language of art: one art element at a time.

The Principles of Art

After you have learned to recognize the elements of art, you will learn the ways in which the elements can be organized for different effects. When you learn a language, you learn the
rules of grammar by which words are organized into sentences. Without these rules, people would find it difficult to communicate.

Visual images are also organized according to rules. The rules that govern how artists organize the elements of art are called the principles of art. They also help artists organize the art elements for specific effects. The principles you will learn about are rhythm, movement, pattern, balance, proportion, variety, emphasis, and harmony. When the elements and principles of art work together to create a sense of wholeness, unity is achieved. The elements and principles of art are often referred to as the formal qualities in artworks.

The Work of Art

In art, it is important to understand the three basic properties, or features, of an artwork. These are subject, composition, and content.

The Subject

The subject is the image viewers can easily identify in a work of art. The subject may be one person or many people. It may be a thing, such as a boat. It may be an event, such as a dance. What are the subjects in Gabriele Münter’s painting, Breakfast of the Birds (Figure 1.17)?

Some artists choose to create nonobjective artwork. Nonobjective art is art that has no recognizable subject matter (Figure 1.13, page 14). In these types of works, the elements of art themselves become the subject matter.

The Composition

The second property of a work of art is the composition of the work. The composition is the way the principles of art are used to organize the elements of art. Notice how Münter has used the reds to separate indoors from outdoors, yet she ties the woman to the birds by using related colors. The woman is
placed with her back toward the viewer, so that the viewer looks in the same direction as the woman, toward the birds. As you learn more about the elements and principles of art, you will discover how to control the composition of your artwork.

**The Content**

The third property of a work of art is the content. The *content* is *the message the work communicates*. The message may be an idea or a theme, such as patriotism or family togetherness. It may be an emotion, such as pride, love, or loneliness. Sometimes you know what the intention of an artist might have been when he or she created the work, therefore the meaning of the work may be clear. However, at other times, you may not be certain of what the work might mean, and you have to consider all possibilities. Many artists can paint the same subject, a woman looking out a window, but each painting may have a different message. What do you think is the content of Münter’s painting?

**The Credit Line**

Look at Figure 1.17. The credit line appears beneath the caption. A *credit line* is *a list of important facts about a work of art*. Every artwork in this book has a credit line.

Most credit lines contain at least six facts. They are as follows:

- **Name** of the artist.
- **Title** of the work. This always appears in italics.
- **Year** the work was created. Sometimes, in the case of older works, “c.” appears before the year. This is an abbreviation for *circa*, a Latin word meaning “about” or “around.”
- **Medium** used by the artist. This is *the material used to make art*. If more than one medium is used, the credit line may read “mixed media.”
- **Size** of the work. The first number is always the height, the second number is the width, and if the work is three-dimensional, the third number indicates the depth.
- **Location** of the work. The location names the gallery, museum, or collection in which the work is housed and the city, state, and country. The names of the donors may also be included.

**Check Your Understanding**

1. List the elements and principles of art.
2. Compare and contrast the use of the elements of art in Figure 1.16 on page 17.
3. How do subject and composition differ?
4. Name the six facts most credit lines include.
CHAPTER 1
Art in Your World

FIGURE 1.18
Critiquing the Artwork

Art criticism is a four-step process for using your perception skills to get deeply involved in a work of art. You will learn more about these four steps in Chapter 2.

1. **DESCRIBE What do you see?**
   - During this step, you will collect information about the subject of this artwork.
   - List all the information from the credit line.
   - What is the subject of this work?

2. **ANALYZE How is this work organized?**
   - This step deals with the work’s composition or formal qualities. In it, you note the art elements used as well as the art principles that organize them.
   - How are the shapes arranged in this work?
   - What colors are used?
   - How large is each can? (Note: Refer to the credit line to help you determine your answer.)
   - Are the cans evenly spaced throughout? Explain.
   - In what way is the bottom row of cans different from the others?

3. **INTERPRET What message does this artwork communicate to you?**
   - This step focuses on the content of the work. In it, you make assumptions and guesses about the meaning.
   - Why do you think the artist made the bottom row different?
   - Why do you think the artist spaced the cans as he did?
   - Form a conclusion about the meaning of depicting ordinary soup cans.

4. **JUDGE What do you think of the work?**
   - In this step, you will tell whether you think the artwork is successful or not.
   - Do you think this is a successful work of art? Why or why not?

Andy Warhol was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, just outside of Pittsburgh. He began his career as a commercial artist in New York City. He was a painter, movie director and producer, and publisher. Warhol was a leader of the Pop art movement, an art style that celebrated images from contemporary culture, such as comic book characters and everyday objects, helping viewers to see them in a whole new light. Warhol’s favorite subjects included celebrities and product packaging, as in Figure 1.18. When asked why he chose soup cans as his subject, he explained that he had soup for lunch every day for 20 years.
Museum Web sites offer interactive art experiences.

Imagine peeling back the layers of paint on a canvas to discover a “hidden” image underneath, or hearing the words of one of your favorite artists. You may not be able to do that on a visit to a museum. However, you may be able to do that on a visit to a museum’s Web site! With a click of the mouse you can visit the “virtual” Louvre Museum in Paris, or museums closer to home. Museum officials hope that Web sites will get more people interested in art.

The interactivity of Internet technology allows people to explore art in a new, exciting way. They can get a taste of what the museum experience offers. For example, the Web site of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City lets users move the cursor over the image of a piece of art. For each spot highlighted, users get an explanation of that feature’s importance—the symbolism of a specific object in the painting, for example.

Visitors to the Web site of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles go behind the scenes to learn about research projects on some of the museum’s artworks. The Frick Museum in New York City offers Web browsers a virtual tour of its exhibits, complete with audio histories of the paintings and the artists.

Of course, Web sites can’t duplicate the experience of seeing artworks in person. But for many people, it’s the next-best thing to being there!

TIME to Connect

Using a search engine, locate an art museum or art gallery Web site that interests you. Analyze and evaluate the site. Then write a one-page critical analysis of the site.

- Analyze the features of the site. Which appeal to you? Which don’t? How easy is it to navigate around the site?
- Describe any parts of the site you would change or improve. Evaluate the site’s overall design, visual representations, and clarity of language.
- Evaluate the credibility of information represented on the site.
Building Vocabulary

On a separate sheet of paper, write the term that best matches each definition given below.

1. The visual expression of an idea or experience created with skill.
2. To become deeply aware through the senses of the special nature of a visual object.
3. Self-taught artists who have had little or no formal schooling in artistic methods.
4. Something that stands for, or represents, something else.
5. The basic visual symbols in the language of art.
6. The rules that govern how artists organize the elements of art.
7. Art that has no recognizable subject matter.
8. The way the principles of art are used to organize the elements of art.
9. A list of important facts about a work of art.
10. A material used to make art.

Thinking Critically About Art

16. Compare and Contrast. Survey the avocational opportunities in art mentioned on page 9. Then research art classes and programs in your community. Compare and contrast these avocational opportunities to decide which one interests you the most. Consider such factors as time required, materials, training, and personal interest.

17. Compare and Contrast. Study Figures 1.14 on page 14 and 1.15 on page 15 to list their similarities and differences. Are light and dark values of colors used in the same places in each work?

18. Historical/Cultural Heritage. Review the Meet the Artist feature on page 12. Compare Grant Wood’s American Gothic in Figure 1.10 to his self-portrait on the same page. Can you identify the theme of determination in each artwork? What else do these works have in common? Where does Grant Wood reveal part of his cultural heritage in his self-portrait?

Reviewing Art Facts

Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

11. Describe the five purposes of art.
12. Name and describe four sources of inspiration for artists.
13. Explain the relationship between the elements of art and the principles of art.
14. Select a work of art in this chapter and identify the subject.
15. Read the credit-line information of an artwork from any chapter and list the figure number, the title, the year the work was created, and the medium.
The goal of some artists is to imitate life. Their works are lifelike, down to the smallest detail. The goal of other artists is to create a mood or feeling. What do you think was the goal of the artist who created this work? Explain your reaction.