Distance Learning with the Cleveland Museum of Art

INTERPRETING AMERICA’S STORY THROUGH ART
Lesson 5: America Diversifying, 1945-2000

The Packet Includes:

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CLASS FOR THE DISTANCE LEARNING PRESENTATION

TEACHER INFORMATION GUIDE

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES: ................................................................. 3
COMMON CORE STANDARDS: ......................................................... 3
NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS: ......................................... 5
PREREQUISITE ACTIVITIES: .......................................................... 5
SELECTED VOCABULARY: .............................................................. 6
TEACHING EXTENSIONS (ACTIVITIES) ........................................... 6
SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: ...................................... 12

MERRITT PARKWAY ........................................................................... 14
THE FORGOTTEN ONES ..................................................................... 15
THE BIRTH OF THE BIG, BEAUTIFUL ART MARKET ......................... 20
VIEWING GUIDE FOR AMERICA DIVERSIFYING: 1945-2000 .............. 26
SELECTED IMAGES ........................................................................... 27
THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART DISTANCE LEARNING EVALUATION FORM ..................................................................................... 29
How to Prepare Your Class for the Distance Learning Presentation

Teacher Information will be sent or made available to you prior to the program.

Please familiarize yourself with the materials and discuss them with your class.

Have the Teacher Information Packet (T.I.P.) materials on hand in the classroom, ready for the program. These materials may be used during the videoconference.

Be prepared to facilitate by calling on students yourself during the lesson. Students are sometimes initially shy about responding to questions during a distance learning lesson.

Explain to students that this is an interactive medium and encourage them to ask questions.

Reinforce topics discussed in the program by asking students to complete some of the suggested pre- and post-conference activities in the Teacher Information Packet.

We ask teachers, after the program, to please fill out the Evaluation Form and return it to:

Dale Hilton/Distance Learning
The Cleveland Museum of Art
11150 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106

Thank You!
Program Objectives:

Students will be able to explain the link between art and major domestic developments after 1945 with emphasis on:
   a. Postwar prosperity in the United States
   b. McCarthyism
   c. The growth of suburbia
   d. The counterculture movement
   e. The women’s liberation movement
   f. The linkages between the civil rights movement and movements to gain justice for other minority groups

Students will be able to explain how advances in communication and transportation have impacted:
   a. Globalization
   b. Cooperation and conflict
   c. Popular culture

Students will be able to explain how the United States has been affected politically, economically and socially by its multicultural diversity (e.g., work force, new ideas and perspectives, and modifications to culture.)

Students will be able to identify appropriate sources and gather relevant information from multiple sources (e.g., school library catalogs, online databases, electronic resources and internet-based resources.)

Common Core Standards:
Grades 9-10
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4**
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.4**
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7**
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.7**
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6**
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9**
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Grades 11-12**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1**
Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3**
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4**
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.4**
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7**
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7**
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6**
Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
National Education Standards:
For Fine Arts - Visual Arts (grades 9-12):
- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

For Language Arts - English (grades K-12):
- Reading for Perspective
- Reading for Understanding
- Evaluation Strategies
- Communication Skills
- Communication Strategies
- Applying Knowledge
- Evaluating Data
- Developing Research Skills

For Social Sciences – U.S. History (grades 5-12):
- Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)
- Era 10: Contemporary United States (1968 To The Present)

For Social Sciences – Civics (grades 9-12):
- Foundations of the Political System
- Principles of Democracy

Prerequisite Activities:

For the Teacher and/or student...
1. Familiarize students with the vocabulary terms enclosed, as well as the following terms: Generation Gap, The Establishment, Drive-ins, Rock’n’Roll, N.O.W.
2. Distribute questions for the Library Scavenger Hunt and prepare librarian for their assignment.

For Students...
1. Complete the Library Scavenger Hunt.
2. Study the vocabulary words.
Selected Vocabulary:
It would be helpful for the students to be familiar with these terms.

**Aesthetic** - appreciation of beauty and good taste; artistic, pleasing

**Empowerment** - act of conferring legality or sanction or authorization

**G.I. Bill (of Rights or Servicemen's Readjustment Act)** - in 1944 provided education for returning World War II veterans, as well as, one-year of unemployment compensation and loans to buy homes or start businesses. G.I. = government issue.

**Hough, Watts, Harlem** - areas of Cleveland, Los Angeles and New York City that had riots and **demonstrations during the 1960s**

**Sensory overload** - excessive or overwhelming stimulation of one or more of the senses

**Cobbled** - joined

**Coherence** - logical, orderly, and consistent relations of parts.

**Minimal Art** - a name adopted in the late 1960s for a movement in which three-dimensional structures of basic or simplified form and flat color are created, suggesting the lines, planes and solids of geometry

**Implied Motion** - indicated movement but not directly expressed or shown; understood action

**Geometric** - using simple shapes, e.g., the straight line, the circle, the square, the rectangle

**Figural** - consisting of or forming human or animal figures

**Literal** - being or reflecting the essential or genuine character of something; actual, real

**Introspective** - looking inside one’s self; inspecting within

**Quiétude** - a state of peace and quiet; tranquility, repose

**Profundity** - intellectual depth; penetrating knowledge; keen insight

**Pixilated** - used to describe an image on a computer or television screen that is made up of pixels, especially one that is unclear or distorted

**Homogenization** - the act of making something uniform in composition

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**Teaching Extensions (Activities)**

**Language Arts:**

1. Short Story Selection: Read John Updike’s “A & P.” This short story is widely anthologized and available on the Internet. This is also found in the following anthology: *Winchester Reader*. Eds. Donald McQuade and Robert Atwan. New York: St. Martin’s Press. 1991.

   A. Have students identify the literary devices of special importance:
      - Theme (central or dominating idea in a work)
      - Point-of-View (vantage point from which an author presents the action of the story)
      - Epiphany (a grasp of reality achieved in a quick flash of recognition)
B. **Final project**: a brochure created by each student to market John Updike’s short story *A&P*. Microsoft and other companies offer free downloads of brochure templates such as tri-folds.

Each student should begin by creating the name of his publishing company. Then have the students fold a piece of paper into threes and plan the lay out incorporating the following parts:

* A section about the reviewer (the student)
* Section about Updike—picture and bio sketch
* Summary of the short story
* A list of the literary devices used and apply to the story
* 3-5 quotes about Updike or the short story from periodicals (use electronic resources such as EPSCOHost), *Short Story Criticism* or *Studies in Short Fiction*. Use the school library and media specialist to locate needed materials.

If students do not have access to the brochure template, they may devise a brochure by creating a word document with three columns.

2. Read “Shopping” by Joyce Carol Oates, which can be found in the following anthology:

   A. Pre-reading Exercise: choose one and free write for 10 minutes:
      1. Complete the sentence: The most memorable time I went shopping with my (mom or dad) was…. Be sure to think about the who, what, why, where, when questions and give plenty of details!!!!

      2. Write about any parent/child relationship that has meaning to you. Reflect on the relationship, has it changed? If so, how? Compare it to other relationships.

   B. Ask for volunteers, and read a few aloud. After that, have them read only the first paragraph of the short story. Present TONE: an emotional feeling. Discuss how an author creates this. Have them identify the tone of the first paragraph—giving specific reasons (passages from the text) to support.

   C. Homework: Read the short story, and be aware of (highlighted) passages which reflect the following:
      - Tone
      - Mother-daughter relationship
      - Their shopping experience
      - Contrasting concepts

   D. Next day: In-class writing. Choose one of the following and write a well-developed paragraph supported with details from the short story.
      * This shopping experience is filled with details of contrasting qualities.
      * The overall tone of this short story is__________________.
* The paragraph focuses on the theme of love and loss.

3. Read “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien. This can be found in a book of short stories by the name “The Things They Carried” published by Houghton Mifflin, 1990. After students read the selection, hand out highlighters and have them highlight everything the soldiers carried during this segment of the war.

Secondly, have students group and categorize those things highlighted. Offer a few suggestions to get them started, such as weapons or correspondences from home. Discuss the larger category of “Tangible” or “Intangible” and suggest that they identify those areas as well. After they think that they have exhausted their list making, have them write some groups on the board, and this will stimulate more ideas.

Lastly, have students write a 1-2 page journal entry completing the following statement: If I went to war, I would carry many things, both tangible and intangible.
4. Library Scavenger Hunt
   1. In what year does Playboy magazine first appear?
   2. What is a transistor radio, and when was it invented?
   3. Smooth Talk is a movie made in 1986—what significance does it have at this point?
   4. In what year did NOW (National Organization of Women) begin?
   5. “Generation Gap” - When was this phrase used in American culture?
   6. “Drive-ins” - What are they, and when were they a part of the culture?
   7. When did “Rock and Roll” begin?
   8. Who popularized the term “Rock ‘n’ Roll?”
   9. Who was James Dean?
  10. Look in a literature handbook and find the definition of “foreshadowing.” Write it below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key for Library Scavenger Hunt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1953  2. 1950’s  3. Smooth Talk is based on the short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” 4. 1966  5. 1965-70  6. 1925-30s in American culture and applies to motion pictures theaters, refreshment stands, banks, etc.—anything that is designed to accommodate an automobile. In the 50s teenagers started to own and drive cars and the “drive-in” became a place to socialize. 7. 1950’s  8. Alan Freed, a Cleveland DJ. 9. Film star and icon during the 50s who represented the discontented, rebellious young people  10. to prefigure an event or indicate beforehand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Creative Writing—Résumé. Using a template from Microsoft word or create a résumé for a person below. Add a picture. Include the following:
   - address
   - education
   - personal interests and hobbies
   - professional organizations and memberships
   - employment
   - major works
   - references

6. Who Are You??????
   Choose one of the following individuals, either an artist or a writer. Also, include a bibliography of sources used to locate the needed information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artists</th>
<th>Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy Warhol</td>
<td>J.D. Salinger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck Close</td>
<td>Rita Dove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claes Oldenburg</td>
<td>Ken Kesey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellsworth Kelly</td>
<td>Edward Albee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franz Kline</td>
<td>Rachel Carson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Segal</td>
<td>Allen Ginsberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Pollack</td>
<td>Sylvia Plath</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
James Rosenquist | Saul Bellow
---|---
Jasper Johns | Jack Kerouac
Mark Rothko | Gwendolyn Brooks
Philip Guston | Ntozake Shange
Robert Motherwell | August Wilson
Robert Rauschenberg | Philip Roth
Roy Lichtenstein | William Carlos Williams
Willem de Kooning | John Updike

7. Time Capsule. Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students. Pretend each group has dug up a *Time Capsule* from an assigned decade in American history (50s-90s).

They must bring to class and “show and tell” the 20-25 items found in the capsule.

These items tell about the culture of that decade in terms of technology, styles, entertainment, historical people and events, etc.

The items in the capsule (which could be a cardboard box) can be the actual items, a representation of the item or person, a picture, a part. The more creative the higher the grade!

How to come up with the items in the capsule? Talk to parent, grandparents, and neighbors. Browse *Decades* and *Century* Books in the library. Also look through old magazines. Lastly, use the internet. Variety, variety, variety!!

Bibliography must accompany Time Capsule. Have fun.

8. Poetry Selections (Read, Respond, Write)

A. *“Merritt Parkway”* by Denise Levertov *(See attachment)*

Read the poem carefully and then write a well-developed paragraph to support the following topic sentence: This poem is “modern” in terms of subject matter, style, and theme.

B. After working with “Merritt Parkway” read several of Tupac Shakur’s poems. A good source is his book *The Rose That Grew From Concrete* (New York: Pocket books, 1999.) In addition, many of his poems can be found on the Internet. A helpful site is [http://allpoetry.com/Tupac-Shakur](http://allpoetry.com/Tupac-Shakur). Suggestions for specific Tupac poems include “Liberty Needs Glasses” or “Starry Night.”

First, brainstorm about the characteristics of these poems in terms of style and subject matter, character and attitude. Tupac’s poetry, which seems to easily connect with students, offers large, thought-provoking themes. For a selection of large themes to which students can also relate and can follow up with their own poetry, consider the issues raised by reality TV. Examples of topics involved on reality TV shows include competition, exclusion, quick and severe judgments, fear, embarrassment, rapid profits, dating, superficiality, celebrity, and
venality. Using the topics of reality TV, have students write a **REALITY POEM.** Try to make the format of the poem on the page relates to the key ideas; content and form should correlate as is the case in “Merritt Parkway.”

C. This assignment should be completed **AFTER** the videoconference and discussion of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

Read and discuss **“The Forgotten Ones.”** *(See attachment.)* What names are unfamiliar to students? Write those names on the board and assign for research if needed. *(See attachment)*

Have students choose a portion or a page of the poetry and illustrate it in the margins (as if framing) in the style of Abstract Expressionists or Pop Art.

9. For Teachers: To get a sense of this period you may enjoy reading the essay **“The Birth of the Big Beautiful Art Market.”** *(See attached.)* Please be advised that this observation of American consumerism is written with a wry but salty voice by art critic Dave Hickey. The essay is included in this packet with the kind permission of the publishers:

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**Social Studies:**

1. Have students make newspapers based on the month and day of their birth. Various decades or years can be assigned to get a diverse sampling of class papers. Students can utilize microfilmed copies of local or national newspapers. National, state and local news stories should be included with advertisements, obituaries, comics or other articles of their choosing. Naming the paper and creating illustrations will allow each student to demonstrate his/her own creativity.

2. Have students identify important issues. *(Personally, locally, nationally)* Then have each student create a poster or collage illustrating the chosen issue. Have students orally present their posters. Posters can then be hung in the classroom, around the school or in a special glass case.

3. Have students identify and interview adults who were in their late teens or twenties in the late 1960s to early 1970s. Have students inquire about the interviewee’s point of view and activities during that time period. Interviews can be written or shared orally with the class.

4. Have students choose a popular song from the 1945-2000 year period. Students will write out lyrics and then analyze the meaning. Discuss the lyrics and what they may or may not demonstrate about the time period.
Suggested Additional Resources:


http://americanhistory.si.edu/
Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Behring Center

http://memory.loc.gov/
American Memory: Historical Collections for the National Digital Library. Contains numerous primary source materials relating to the history and culture of the United States.

http://www.indigenouspeople.net
Indigenous Peoples Literature: An educational resource for the advancement of all cultures.

http://time.com/4551817/50-women-political-history/
50 Women Who Made American Political History

http://americanhistory.si.edu/topics/womens-history
Women’s History Resources at the National Museum of American History

http://staff.kings.edu/hbfedric/history425spring.html
History 425 student project website links diverse topics, areas of research and available resources from the last half of the twentieth century.

http://www.loc.gov
Library of Congress website.

http://lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties
Academic project devoted to studying the decade. Offers a number of exhibits, primary documents, personal narratives, and poetry.

http://www.bbhq.com
Baby Boomer Headquarters features a tribute to the decades of the 50s, 60s and 70s with fun facts and historical summaries.

http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/
The Journal of American History is a scholarly publication for students and teachers. It includes reviews of books, films, exhibitions, and Web sites as well as articles and historiographic essays.

Written by Susan MacDonald, Tim Mitchell, Patricia Lawrence and Lisa Roth.
Merritt Parkway
by Denise Levertov

As if it were
forever that they move, that we
keep moving—

Under a wan sky where
as the lights went on a star
pierced the haze & now
follows steadily
a constant
above our six lanes
the dreamlike continuum…

And the people—ourselves!
the humans from inside the
cars apparent
only at gasoline stops
unsure,
eying each other
drink coffee hastily at the
slot machines & hurry
back to the cars
vanish
into them forever, to
keep moving—

Houses now & then beyond the
sealed road, the trees/tress, bushes
passing by, passing
the cars that
keep moving ahead of
us, past us, pressing behind us
and
over left, those that come
toward us shining too brightly
moving relentlessly
in six lanes, gliding
north & south, speeding with
a slurred sound—
THE FORGOTTEN ONES

between every moan
every tone
of a note on the saxophone

listen
and hear the story
of a people

from the earth-shattering
blare
Louis Armstrong blew
to
blues-infused
New Orleans produced
Wynton Marsalis
music

tales
woven into every chord

tales
of strife and discord
triumph
poignant struggle
and setbacks
at every corner

living in a stranger’s land
on borrowed time

generations oblivious
to the pain
that bore them into existence

it was Byrd’s pain
twisted
into staccato symmetry
rhythmically wailing

yearning
to be free from the pain
of
blackAmericareality

1955
segregation kicking his behind
like the white horse
trickling into his veins
kind of pain

couldn’t escape from
Parisian memories of
BlackManHumanity
and
coming back to
NewYork negromanreality
again
degradation again
and he would never be the same
again

c caught a vision of
Selma Alabama
1963

a Negro 12 year old’s eyes
stinging from
Bull Connor’s tear gas
and high pressure fire hose spray
ripping the clothes off his back

the man is wearing a mask
the boy’s flesh is a mass
of sinew and brownish-red
blood and sweat

but I want **FREEDOM**
are the words
circling in his head

weaving in and out of
Charlie Parker’s
masterfully crafted excursions
to oneness with the Creator
the story
is told again
this time it's Dizzy Gillespie
and he's eight steps ahead
of the rest
saying

it's deep up here
but you don't hear me
yet...

and from his place
in the beyond
he shakes his head and says

…and you don't hear me now
either

it's like they're keeping him
a secret
and the kiddies
are sucking on Nintendo lollipops
and MP3
hooked up to headphones
blasting
Cash Money tales of woe
into their ears
on project chicks
platinum shhhhhhh
expensive whips
and excessive violence

they'll never know
of Ellington's elegant protest

the musical
civil rights movement
that opened doors
for Martin Luther King
a decade later

they'll miss completely
the curious eccentricities
and genius of
Thelonious Monk

stuck on
Snoop Dogg and Pharoah Monche
they
are the Forgotten Ones

tragically banished
to a place
where only a privileged few
go to consume the greatness
of endless aural intellectual conversations

the blues
so eloquently pronounced in sound
by Billie Holliday

the blues
in the flawless diction
Ella Fitzgerald
effortlessly enunciated
while she was shown the back door
shunned from dining rooms
and luxury Pullmans

her skills
wielded her conviction
she would be heard still

unlike
four little girls
in Birmingham
that went to church
for the last time
when the white man's dynamite
ended their lives
so suddenly

it was 1963

people
were still being separated legally
with
Plessy versus Ferguson
and the U.S. Supreme court’s
constitutional blessing

Kennedy
called for a remedy
and met tragedy in Dallas
1963

in 1965
they gave Black folk
the legal right to vote
and
ignored it in Florida
in the year 2000

Coltrane
must have known then
what was coming when
he blew his
alto
tenor and soprano saxophones
singing the song
of a people

blues people

playing in a band
that created music
never heard before

writing the score
crafting the door
and walking through
no matter what’s standing
in their path

deserving remembrance
in the 21st century

and don’t worry
Dizzy

we hear ya’….

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In the beginning was the Car, and the Car was with Art, and the Car was Art. Thus it was in the American boondocks during the nineteen fifties and sixties. Especially for me. For me, cars were not just art, they were everything. None of the schools I attended (as we gypsied around the American West) were ever that great, nor ever quite real to me. So such secondary education as I received, I received in the physical culture of cars. Wherever I found myself, kids bought them, talked them, drew them, and dreamed them—hopped them up and dropped them down—cruised them on the drag and dragged them on the highway, and I did, too. Thus, of necessity, I learned car math and car engineering, car poli-sci and car economics, car anthropology and car beaux-arts.

Even my first glimmerings of higher theory arose out of that culture: the rhetoric of image and icon, the dynamics of embodied desire, the algorithms of style change, and the ideological force of disposable income. All these came to me couched in the lingua franca of cars, arose out of our perpetual exegesis of its nuanced context and iconography. And it was worth the trouble, because all of us who partook of this discourse, as artists, critics, collectors, mechanics, and citizens, understood its politico-aesthetic implications, understood that we were voting with cars—for a fresh idea of democracy, a new canon of beauty, and a redeemed ideology of motion. We also understood that we were dissenting when we customized them and hopped them up—demonstrating against the standards of the republic and advocating our own refined vision of power and loveliness.

My own endeavors in this regard were devoted to a black 1946 Chevrolet Coupe, a coral-and-cream 1955 Ford Victoria, a turquoise-and-white 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air, and a bronze-lacquered 1937 Chevrolet pick-up, dago-raked with a Chevy 357 under its pin-striped hood. I bought these cars in sequence, trading one in on the next and paying out the balance with money I earned from before-and-after-school jobs—and this was important, because the guys whose folks bought them their cars tended to be dilettantes, were less inclined to know their vehicles intimately, to tear them down and put them back together at a whim, to adjust and refine their operation and iconography.

We true devotees aspired to full consciousness of our rides. There was no aspect of their technology and design whose historicity we did not comprehend, whose efficacy we had not analyzed, whose aesthetics we had not contemplated. We knew these cars and knew what they meant; and what they meant, over and above everything, was freedom, but freedom is a gem with many facets: So we pondered the halting gurgle of big V-8s with racing camshafts, the rhetoric of shrouded headlights, the ethics of "cherry" restorations, and the proprieties of altering a vehicle's profile by chopping, channeling, lowering, and raking.

Thus, years before I had ever seen a work of art, I could claim an evolved aesthetic. I could have told you, if you had asked, that I was neither minimalist nor formalist, that I did not hold with the suppression of text and ornament in order to create a blank, reflective sleeve of aerodynamic color. Nor was I a modernist, in the architectural sense, devoted to stripping away
the cosmetic surface of a vehicle to reveal its glamorized functional apparatus. Nor was I an expressionist beguiled by Gaudi lead-work and gaudy flame jobs. Why? Because I did not want to drive a singular, autonomous work of art. I wanted to dissent, not defect.

So I was always looking for something fresh and disconcerting. To borrow Edward Ruscha's expression, I wanted to achieve "Huh? Wow!" (as opposed to "Wow! Huh?"). I wanted that subtle jolt of visual defamiliarization as a prelude to delight. So I liked appropriating décor, subtly redesigning details and trim to reconstitute the car's composition and profile. I liked enhancing dumb stuff that other guys just instinctively trashed, like the cartouche on the trunk lid. And I loved tiny pin-stripes that nuanced the highlights, and big engines with no high-end acoustics, just that low rumble bubbling on the edge of audibility, like my Fender bass run through a concert stack. My optimum set of wheels, then, looked and sounded like a high-performance production model from a company you never fucking heard of—as if I had walked into a Dave dealership one afternoon and bought it off the showroom floor—and now you wanted to buy one, too. That was my idea of cool.

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As a consequence of this apprenticeship, my inadvertent discovery of the commercial art world of the nineteen sixties felt just like coming home. In a twinkling, I was back where I never had been. Andy Warhol's customized Marilyns and Edward Ruscha's standardized Standard Stations confirmed my aesthetic, of course, but most importantly, I knew the whole gig—the entire business of dreaming and drawing and talking and trading and buying and selling—the deep rituals of sitting around in a big room filled with disconcerting objects, chatting about them, looking at them, privately balancing your desire and your vision of America against your bank account.

There were structural differences, of course, the principle one being that, since production was disseminated, the custom-model came first in this art economy. It was clear, however, that the large institutions of the art world, like the Whitney Museum uptown and the art school out at Yale, functioned like General Motors, establishing brand-names, institutional agendas, and hierarchies of value out of materials provided by the custom market. I could live with this. I didn't care about it, but I could live with it, as long as Richard Bellamy, in his dumpy little gallery downtown, continued to function like George Barris in his Kustom Kar Shop out in Los Angeles—promoting rebellion, proposing outrageous reconfigurations and different ideas of how the world should look.

So, this new world was exciting to me, not least of all because it meant that I hadn't squandered my youth, that I was bringing something to the table. I remember sitting at a table, in a bar down in El Paso, with Luis Jiménez, one afternoon in the late sixties, saying just that, marveling at the fact that, for dudes like us, who had grown up in the protean discourse of American cars, the permutations of American art from Jackson Pollock's drip paintings to Frank Stella's protractors were virtual child's play. What we did not understand, as we sat there smugly sipping our Dos Equis, was that the age of incarnate ideology was over and the protesters had won.

If we had thought about it from the perspective of old car freaks, however, we would have known and surely could have predicted that the General Motors of the art world—the museums and universities—would ultimately seek to alleviate their post-market status and control the means of production. They would soon succeed in doing this by revisions in the tax code, the expansion of public patronage, and the proliferation of graduate education—all of which eroded the distinction between art history and art now—and eroded, as well, the even
more critical distinction between art and the "liberal arts." Within ten years, the art world was well on its way to becoming a transnational bureaucracy. Everybody had a job description and a résumé. Junior professors (!) began explaining to me that non-portable, non-object art had arisen during the nineteen sixties as a means of "conceptualizing" the practice of art in response to the increasing "commodification" and "commercialization" of the art object during the postwar era.

This would have been a wonderful argument if a painting by Edward Ruscha or Jacques-Louis David were any less "conceptual" than a pile of dirt on a museum floor—or if that pile of dirt were any less "commercial" for being financed by minions of the corporate state. My own experience of the facts suggested quite the reverse: that non-object, non-portable art arose in the mid-sixties as a strategic reaction to a commercial reality; to wit, all the walls were full! After fifteen years of the greatest and most broadly-based painting market in the history of the world, every inch of available wall space was expensively inhabited by Pollocks and Poones, Rothkos and Rosenquists. Thus, the fashion for conceptual, documentary, and installation art arose ("floor and drawer art," as Richard Serra called it). Over the next seven or eight years, this new art had its commercial cynosure, and no one I knew even considered the possibility that it couldn't be sold. As a dealer friend told me at the time, "Anybody who can't sell a handful of air with a dream in it doesn't deserve to call himself an American, much less an art dealer." That was the temper of the time.

In the early seventies, however, as these "new" practices began to lose steam in the natural course of things—as other practices had lost steam before them—they were adopted by a whole new set of venues, by museums, kunsthalles, and alternative spaces across the country, first as trendy, economical exhibition fodder for the provinces, and then as "official, noncommercial, anti-art"—as part of a puritanical, haut bourgeois, institutional reaction to the increasing "aesthetification" of American commerce in general. Works of art, after all, had its commercial cynosure, and no one I knew even considered the possibility that it couldn't be sold. As a dealer friend told me at the time, "Anybody who can't sell a handful of air with a dream in it doesn't deserve to call himself an American, much less an art dealer." That was the temper of the time.

So, to return to the lingua franca of cars, we should remember that America's industrial base—and its automotive industry particularly—came out of World War II in great shape. Its production potential was greatly expanded, its technology much improved, and its facilities unscathed by the conflict. Its products, however, were no longer being consumed by violence, so it soon became clear that if these enterprises were to continue at postwar production levels with prewar marketing and design strategies, they would almost immediately out-supply demand and effectively put themselves out of business. Thus, American industry found itself facing the challenge that has confronted every artist since Watteau, that of a finite, demanding market for a necessarily overabundant supply of speculative products.

The problem is this: As any dealer will tell you, it is perfectly possible for any artist with decent work habits to produce more work in three or four years than there are buyers worldwide who might possibly acquire them, ever. The pool of probable purchasers is even tinier. So the logic is inescapable: Somebody, sometime, is going to have to buy more than one. In the years following World War II, American mercantile culture found itself in exactly the same situation, and in response to this challenge, those enterprises that survived completely transformed their design, production, and marketing strategies to an artistic model.
First, companies introduced a hierarchy of "lines." As an artist might produce prints, drawings, and paintings, American manufacturers began introducing "economy" and "luxury" lines to bracket their mid-range product—thus creating the possibility of the consumer "moving up" without moving out. Second, and again like artists in the nineteenth century, these manufacturers began designing visual obsolescence into their products by institutionalizing style change. In this way, manufacturers hoped to create cyclical demand for their products by shifting emphasis from their value or utility to their extrinsic "currency," by having one style supplant another.

And, finally, American business stopped advertising products for what they were, or for what they could do, and began advertising them for what they meant—as sign systems within the broader culture—emphasizing what every collector wants to know: who owned them and where they were owned. Thus, rather than producing and marketing infinitely replicable objects that adequately served unchanging needs, American commerce began creating finite sets of objects that embodied ideology for a finite audience at a particular moment—objects that created desire rather than fulfilling needs. This is nothing more or less than an art market. If you don't think so, price out a 1965 Ford Thunderbird.

The Leonardo of this new art market (or more precisely, its Monet) was an ex-custom-car designer from Hollywood named Harley Earl, who headed the design division at General Motors during the postwar period. Earl's most visible and legendary contributions to American culture were the Cadillac tailfin (based on the tail assembly of the P-38 Fighter plane) and the pastel paint-job—design innovations that, when combined, as they often were, simultaneously "masculinized" and "feminized" the American automobile, translating it into a distinct, all-purpose polymorphous object of desire in the best tradition of the Rococo.

Most importantly, however, Earl invented the four-year style-change cycle linked to the Platonic hierarchy of General Motors cars, and this revolutionary dynamic created the post-industrial world. Basically, what Earl invented was a market situation in which the consumer moved up the status-ladder within the cosmology of General Motors products—from Chevrolet to Pontiac to Buick to Oldsmobile to Cadillac—as the tailfin or some other contagious motif moved down the price-ladder, from Cadillac to Chevrolet, year by year, as styles changed incrementally.

From the viewpoint of production, this sliding dynamic greatly mitigated the cost problems that traditionally proved the downfall of rapid style-change in mass-produced products; to wit, the accelerated obsolescence of hugely expensive production technology. In Earl's scheme, the tailfin technology, say, that had become stylistically obsolete on the Cadillac, could be retooled and used to produce Oldsmobiles, then Buicks, then Pontiacs, then Chevrolets, by which time it had been totally redesigned. From a marketing point of view, it was heaven. It bound consumers to the parent company and invited them to make incremental steps up the price ladder, as that exquisite, finny grail gradually descended toward their aspiring spirit.

As a consequence, the "commercial art" that advertised American commodities during this period (1950-1970) took on the qualities and functions that "religious art," "courtly art," and "official art" served in other eras. It became a theater and a palimpsest of the competing values and contexts that made the wheels go round—a contextualizing discourse for the democracy of objects we all inhabit. Like the courtly, religious, and official art of the past, then, these images functioned in aid of commerce, society, religion, and official policy, illustrating without actually embodying those particular values. The task of embodying cultural values, in all their multifarious complexity, has fallen, in this century, to "art objects" like Les Demoiselles.
D’Avignon, the Brillo Boxes, or the Pink Cadillac. These objects propose for moral and monetary investment those redeemed values that are distorted and submerged by the advocacy of the market or the institution.

Today, of course, it is all an art market, the whole of American commerce. We can't make a toaster anymore, a VCR, or even a decent faucet, but we can create desire. We can make fetching footwear, beautiful games, exquisite motorcycles, hot TV, great rock-and-roll records, and dazzling movies. Such artifacts constitute our principle contributions to global commerce. The alternative discourse of embodied dissent, however, has all but disappeared. Those customized and hopped-up objects and images we might expect, that demonstrate against the standards of the republic and advocate their own refined vision of power and loveliness, are nowhere to be seen—since power and loveliness themselves are presumed to be at issue—as if they might be talked away, along with the image, the object, and commerce itself, as evidence of human vanity, so that art might more closely approach the paper body of bureaucracy.

In today's art world, then, in place of the ongoing struggle for refinement and redemption, we have pre-millennial renunciation. In place of the tumultuous forum, we have the incestuous cloister, and in place of customized art, we have an academic art, which, like the commercial, courtly, religious, and official art of yesteryear, is content to advertise its pre-approved corporate values and agendas. Why? What Happened? My own suspicion is that something new came into being and could not be let to stand. So let me return for a moment to my conversation with Luis Jiménez in that bar in El Paso in the late sixties. On that afternoon, while we were talking about cars and art, Luis explained to me that his earliest ideas of becoming an artist had come from watching the glimmering lowriders cruising the streets of Juárez and El Paso. They seemed to him, he said, the ultimate synthesis of painting and sculpture—the ultimate accommodation of solidity and translucency—and more importantly, for Luis, they seemed a bridge between the past and the future because he recognized the visual language of the Baroque in these magical automobiles—in the way the smooth folds of steel and the hundreds of coats of transparent lacquer caught the light and held it as the cars slipped through the bright streets like liquid color—like Caravaggio meets Bernini, on wheels.

Now, let me carry Luis's argument one step further and suggest the precise manner in which these wonderful cars fit into the visual tradition that Hispanic America inherited from the age of the Baroque. First, we must remember that the technique of glazing transparent color was invented in fifteenth-century Italy to do one thing: to paint the body of Christ as a physical being filled with light. This image of luminous materiality stood as a metaphor for the central tenant of Western Catholicism: that Christ was the word of God made flesh—the Incarnate Word—a creature who had lived and suffered and experienced temptation in corporeal form . . . and died a real death. This is the central message of the Eucharist and of the polychrome sculptures that still populate the churches and homes of Hispanic America.

After World War II, however, Chicano car-cultists in the American Southwest began secularizing this central, sacramental metaphor, creating gleaming, iconic automobiles that embodied, not the Word of God, but the freedom and promise of effortless mobility—honoring the traditions of democratic America that they had inherited, as well. Then, under the aegis of custom-car designer Harley Earl, Detroit would begin to incorporate the principles of lowrider design into its products, and, in doing so, effect one of the great iconographic syntheses in the history of Western culture. The masters of American industry would embody—in the Catholic language of material light, of chrome and polychrome—the disembodied intellectual tenants of the Enlightenment: the values of Protestant America's founding fathers.
Thereafter, the emblem of the automobile as an embodiment of the promise of America—as an icon of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—would permeate the entire culture, Catholic and Protestant alike, and this metaphor of corporeal intelligence would be reinforced throughout the nineteen fifties and sixties by other proliferating iconographies of embodied light: by the luminous materiality of new plastics and Technicolor film and by refinements in color photography. Then, amazingly, the metaphor would be confirmed by the new science of genetics, which would inadvertently prove those antique Popes to have been right in their wrongness by demonstrating scientifically that we are all, indeed, the genetic word made flesh.

So this is my idea: The historical confluence of accident, insight, commerce, and iconography in postwar America created the nineteen sixties as America’s transcendent Mediterranean moment—gave birth to the big, beautiful art market as an embodied discourse of democratic values that partook, in equal parts, of the Eucharist and the stock exchange. Thus, the United States emerged from the sixties as the only nation in the history of the world with a freely-elected, fully-embodied iconography of promise—and we might have one yet, I suspect, if the sages of puritan New England had chosen that moment to do what they desperately wished to do: secede from a Union they saw sinking into the mire of idolatry and democracy—vices they might just tolerate in politics, but never in culture. Never.

So, what we got was a secular Reformation—a return of the Word at the expense of the flesh and a new jihad against idolaters, now guilty of "commodification." The old quarrel between "grace" and "works" was reconstituted as a new quarrel between "theory" and "practice." Once again, we drove the money-changers from the Temple of Art, which was not a temple, nor ever had been, not in America, where it had always been a secular discourse in the form of a market. Even so, academic civil servants of the word, horrified by the image and scandalized by looking, mounted an attack on them both on behalf of their own practice—a "critique of representation," which, at its heart, was a critique of representative government—bald advocacy for a new civil service of cultural police.

And for what transgression did we suffer all this theological nit-picking and sensory deprivation? Well, a bunch of citizens made some objects that other citizens thought looked great. Still other citizens thought they could make them look even greater and manifested their dissent by customizing these objects. Other citizens thought these new objects did indeed look greater. They argued with the advocates of the previous objects, and since these objects didn't do anything, weren't worth anything, and came without labels or instructions, people were actually arguing about the values they perceived to be embodied in these objects, values they held dearly enough to argue about and invest in.

It was, in fact, nothing more dangerous than a democratic forum of free opinion that, in its protean liveliness and free-form contingency could only expand, did expand, in fact, and persists today in all our quotidian discussions of popular art in this nation. In the world of high art, however, a bunch of tight-assed, puritanical, haut bourgeois intellectuals simply legislated customized art out of existence, in a fury of self-important resentment. Because Hollywood trash like Harley Earl and lowriders like Luis Jiménez and myself became conversant with the economics of their beautiful, powerful game.

Individual

Blurring Boundaries

Consumers

Changing Gender Roles

Civil Rights

Many Points of View

Free Expression

Empowerment

Icons are simple images.

Here are some images that represent themes in this lesson. In the blank boxes below, try to come up with your own icons for these ideas.

Let this graphic be your own interpretation!

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Selected Images

*New Shoes for H*, 1973-1974
Don Eddy (American, 1944-)
Acrylic on canvas
1974.53
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*Number 5, 1950*, 1950
Jackson Pollock (American, 1912-1956)
Oil on canvas
1980.180
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**Marilyn x 100, 1962**
Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987)
Screenprint ink and synthetic polymer paint on canvas
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Thank you so much for your participation in our distance learning program. We would appreciate your response to these questions by circling the appropriate answer and returning the survey.

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5= Strongly Agree  4= Agree  3= Neither Agree nor Disagree
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   5  4  3  2  1

2. The teaching style of the on-camera instructor was interesting, engaging and fostered interaction.
   5  4  3  2  1

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   5  4  3  2  1

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   If no, why? ___________________________________________________________________

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