

*An International Legacy:  
Selections from Carnegie Museum of Art*



A Resource for Teachers

 American Federation of Arts

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American Federation of Arts

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# *An International Legacy: Selections from Carnegie Museum of Art*

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Cover image:

Elizabeth Murray

*Don't Be Cruel*, 1985-86

Oil on Canvas

9 ft. 7 in. x 9 ft. 8 ½ in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Henry L. Hillman Fund (86.20)

## About This Resource

Art can be a great source of inspiration for students. Contemporary art, in particular, shows students how artists establish their own rules for art-making, creating works that encourage people to see and understand the world around them in different ways. The aim of this resource is to facilitate the process of looking at and understanding paintings, sculpture, photographs, performance art, and installations from the last four decades of the twentieth century and to help teachers educate students about how to approach contemporary works of art using critical thinking skills. Teachers may utilize these materials either in conjunction with a class visit to the museum or independently.

Suggested discussion questions and activities focus on a selection of works from the exhibition and offer ways of making them more accessible to students. They are the first step in engaging students in looking at and analyzing art. Students should be encouraged to make connections between various works of art; to establish links with topics and concepts they are studying in school; and to give expression to their ideas about the works of art in this resource and about contemporary art forms in general. The activities in this resource are designed for middle and high school students.

This resource was prepared by Nelly Silagy Benedek, Director of Education, American Federation of Arts, with the assistance of Suzanne Elder, Assistant Educator, AFA. The Exhibition Overview is drawn from the didactic wall texts written by the exhibition's guest curator Sheryl Conkelton. Information on individual works of art is adapted from the catalogue entries in *An International Legacy: Selections from Carnegie Museum of Art* (New York: American Federation of Arts, 2003) written by Sheryl Conkelton and Elizabeth Thomas. Discussion Questions and Activities were written by Nelly Silagy Benedek. The Glossary and Select Bibliography were prepared by Nelly Silagy Benedek and Suzanne Elder. The Web Resources were compiled by Suzanne Elder.

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## Exhibition Overview

Unlike many other late nineteenth-century art institutions, Carnegie Museum of Art opened without a collection. Instead, founder Andrew Carnegie initiated an annual exhibition of contemporary American and European painting from which a “chronological collection” would be amassed. Since its debut in 1896, that exhibition has evolved into the triennial, global, all-media presentation now known as the *Carnegie International*. Mr. Carnegie’s early advice to the trustees of the Carnegie Institute—as the museum was originally known—was to assemble “the old masters of tomorrow,” and the collection continues to reflect that mission today. The only such survey of contemporary art in North America and the only one in the world presented in a museum, the *Carnegie International* has generated much of Carnegie Museum’s collection, as revealed by this selection.

The Carnegie’s contemporary art collection offers a view of art-making since 1970 in which an interest in materials and a preference for powerful physical expression are persistent themes. The Minimalism of the late 1960s provides the starting point for an initial examination of these ideas. During the 70s, artists considered the viewer’s experience of art as an act of intellectual apprehension and experimented with this interpretation. The following decade witnessed a return to more traditional methods of object-making with a particular emphasis on exuberantly applied paint. More avant-garde practitioners of the 80s countered with art that was predicated on the notion that experience is always simulated or mediated—never direct. In the 1990s, conversely, artists began to focus on art that engaged the real world directly and provided viewers with a physically concrete experience. By the end of the century, inflected with critical and philosophical ideas, a number of artistic practices had invested the material and physical qualities of art with new theoretical weight.

Using these ideas as a foundation, *An International Legacy: Selections from Carnegie Museum of Art* presents one of many possible histories of late twentieth-century art-making. By focusing on the manipulation of material and evolving conceptions of the physical character of art, the exhibition also provides an illuminating perspective on artistic purpose and process during this era.

## **Exhibition Itinerary**

Oklahoma City Art Museum  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
May 16–August 10, 2003

Nevada Museum of Art  
Reno, Nevada  
January 9–April 4, 2004

Mobile Museum of Art  
Mobile, Alabama  
January 7–April 3, 2005

## Selected Works of Art from the Exhibition with Discussion Questions and Activities

### 1. Carl Andre

*Aluminum-Lead Plain*, 1969

Aluminum and lead

72 x 72 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; William G. Bechman Charitable Trust in Memory of William G. and Beatrice M. Bechman (76.56)

Copyright Carl Andre/Licensed by VAGA, New York



Carl Andre was one of the defining practitioners of Minimalism, an approach to art-making that proposed a radical reinvention of the sculptural medium. Andre created literal, rule-bound sculptures made of essential materials like wood, and base metals like lead and copper. His art challenged fundamental assumptions about art—most important that it should be precious, handmade, and expressive of the artist's psychic state. In the early 1960s, Andre crafted sculptures of carved wood and assembled found objects into abstracted forms; by 1965 he had embarked on a reductive practice that worked against the traditional vertical orientation of sculpture. His floor pieces, made of industrial timbers, bricks, slate, or metal tiles arranged in symmetrical or near symmetrical configurations, are pared-down objects, stripped of decorative or extraneous detail and hermetically self-referential.

Offering his own formula for sculpture—“FORM = STRUCTURE = PLACE”—the form of Andre’s sculptures is derived from the underlying compositional structure of the piece, which is a function both of the given size and shape of his chosen industrial materials and of the physical environment in which the work is displayed. Andre’s compositions rely on order, rhythm, and repetition, essentially combining and recombining similar elements. These elements are non-hierarchical—one form does not occupy a privileged position over another. Although his materials are scavenged from the world at large, they are meant to be devoid of narrative associations.

Beginning in 1967, Andre produced a series of simple, gridded combinations of metal tiles, originally purchased at a local salvage yard. He made dozens of variations on his theme, changing the metal of the tiles, their size, and their arrangement. *Aluminum-Lead Plain* comprises thirty-six alternating aluminum and lead tiles. Like all Andre’s works of this type, it is placed directly on the floor, with no stanchion or platform to set it apart from the physical space of the viewer. This carpetlike placement is crucial to Andre’s intent—not only does it break with historical conventions of exhibition display, it also underscores Andre’s interest in the function of an object as it relates to

the specific physical context in which it is placed. Visually, the grid of tiles is framed by the architecture around it, set off by the particulars of the floor and engaging its setting as it acts upon and is acted upon by the surroundings. Most important, the placement invites the intentional or incidental participation of the viewer in that it is meant to be walked on. Andre purposefully compromises the sculpture's preservation as an unaltered pristine object; the imperfect marred and patinated surface is part of the work. The sculpture completely reinvents the viewer's experience of looking at art. Not only is the viewer's perception reoriented from looking across to looking down, but Andre's invitation to walk all over the sculpture forces the viewer to question what art is and how it is to be experienced.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe Andre's *Aluminum-Lead Plain*. What is it made of? How is it displayed?
2. Does the sculpture remind you of anything?
3. Is this sculpture what you would expect to find in a museum? How is it different from more traditional sculpture? Discuss its placement on the floor and how viewers are allowed to walk on it.
4. How do you think Andre's work challenges the way we think about sculpture?

### **Activity: Traditional Versus Minimalist Sculpture**

Aim: To understand how Andre's sculpture is innovative.

Materials: Paper, pencil, and/or books on American or European sculpture.

Procedure:

1. Find an example of a more traditional sculpture in your local art museum or look in books on American or European sculpture for a work that predates the twentieth century.
2. Compare Andre's sculpture with the more traditional one.
3. Think about the following when comparing the two sculptures: Are they representational? From what angles can they be viewed? Can they be seen from all sides? What are they made of? Do they tell a story?
4. Discuss how Andre's work departs from convention.

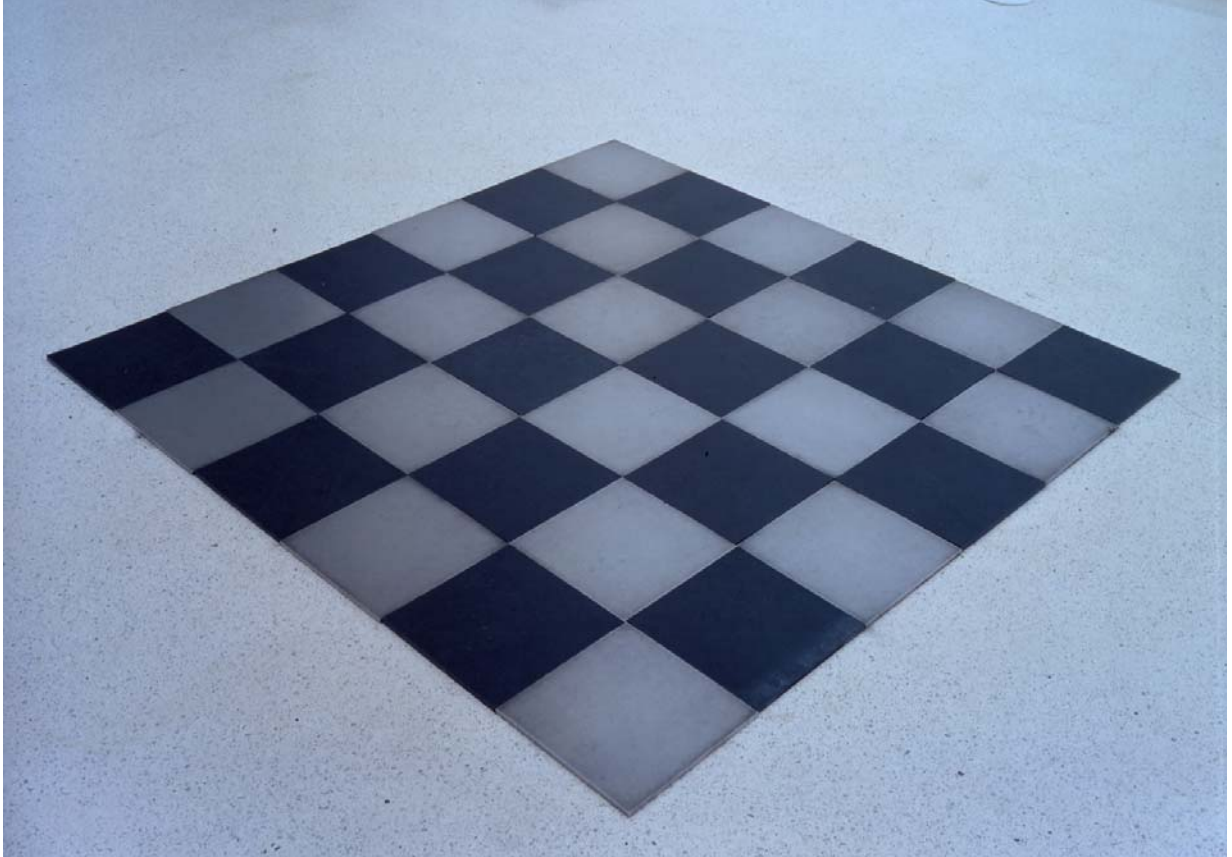
### **Activity: Finding Minimalist Subjects in the Environment**

Aim: To discover patterns and shapes that may be used to create Minimalist works of art.

Materials: Paper, pencil, and/or cameras

Procedure:

1. Ask students to look around their environment at home or at school for patterns in factory-made objects such as the repeated shapes and designs on floors, walls, fences, or gratings.
2. Have them list what they see. They may include descriptions and sketches of the patterns.
3. If possible, have students photograph some of the patterns they discover.
4. Discuss students' observations. Do they view the patterns differently outside of their usual context?



1. Carl Andre, *Aluminum-Lead Plain*

## 2. John Baldessari

*That Is*, 1986

Gelatin silver print with sepia, acrylic, oil, and gouache

7 ft. 4 1/2 in. x 6 ft. 5 1/8 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Patrons Art Fund (86.48.2a–d)

Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York



John Baldessari has said that all his work is based on the question “What made art art?” “I’d been drilled in school that art was painting and sculpture,” he has written, “but I’d get to thinking, why are some things art and some not? It was a problem that constantly propelled me.” This compulsion to test the boundaries of established art practice led Baldessari toward Conceptual art, a movement he helped to define during the 1960s. As part of a larger tendency of questioning political and cultural authority, Conceptual artists challenged the essence of what art is and how it is made. Baldessari rejected his own involvement in traditional art practice with his *Cremation Project* (1970): In one radical gesture he incinerated his entire output of conventional paintings from 1953 to 1966, baked cookies with the ashes, ate some of them, and flushed these relics from his past out of his system. The rest of the ashes were retained in a book-shaped funerary urn that he later displayed with documentation.

Baldessari’s early Conceptual work, from the late 1960s, includes paintings combining text and image that he made through processes including sign painting and mechanical photo transfer, in all cases erasing his gesture from the surface. These simple works reinvent found symbols, altering their meaning by changing their context. An investigation of visual and verbal methods of communication, the works make the connection between art and language explicit. Photography entered Baldessari’s practice around this time as a means of visual notation, a method he used to capture the elements of the world that would become the subjects of his paintings. By 1969 he had abandoned painting completely. Baldessari’s interest in syntactical structures produced work based on the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated elements, a practice that echoed his early interest in word-and-image compositions.

Equal parts artist and archivist, since the 1960s Baldessari has collected bits of information from the stream of images and texts that confront us every day. His studio is piled with books, magazines, boxes of both found and unique photographs, and notes, which he reviews for similarities and comparisons between and among images and words. Trying “to look between things instead of at things,” he bases his works on relationships among disparate elements. Beginning in

the 1980s, Baldessari combined these accretions of incongruous images in large, multipart photographic constructions. He crops and alters film stills and found photographs to build compositions syntactically, the images functioning like words, each work constructed like a sentence. Works like *That Is* are never fully translatable, but the contrast of such technologies as electricity and transportation with zoological specimens suggests a narrative of mankind overcoming nature through progress. In particular, the images of the military parade and of President Lyndon B. Johnson holding a snake underscore the tension between control and danger. But any thematic interpretation is pure conjecture—Baldessari refuses to give the viewer either the benefit or the safety of context. As in language comprehension, the viewer builds meaning through subjective understanding, juxtaposition of elements, and individual projections.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. John Baldessari has said that all his work is based on the question “What made art art?” and that he had “...been drilled in school that art was painting and sculpture.” What else may art be besides painting or sculpture? How do you define “art”? What or who determines what is or is not art?
2. Consider Baldessari’s question “Why are some things art and some not?” Discuss this question in relation to the works of art included in this resource.
3. Baldessari builds meaning through the juxtaposition of images. Although he does not communicate a specific narrative, the images combine to create meaning that may be interpreted differently by each viewer. How do you interpret Baldessari’s *That Is*?

### **Activity: Using Images to Build Written Narratives**

Aim: To respond to a visual work of art through writing.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Have students respond to Baldessari’s work in writing.
2. Instead of asking students to propose a narrative reading, ask them to write down the narrative associations, themes, or ideas they see expressed in the work in a descriptive paragraph or a poem.

### **Activity: Using Images to Build Visual Narratives**

Aim: To create narrative relationships between visual images.

Materials: Magazines, scissors, glue, and paper

Procedure:

1. Ask students to bring a variety of magazines to class.
2. Have them choose images from the magazines to organize into a collage.
3. Encourage them to think about narrative relationships as they select their images.
4. After the students have made their collages, hold up each work and discuss with the class.
5. Ask students what sort of narrative threads they observe in a particular work. Emphasize the importance of individual interpretation.



2. John Baldessari, *That Is*

### 3. Chuck Close

*Self-Portrait*, 1995

Silkscreen

64 1/2 x 54 in. Ed. 38/50

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Carol Brown Acquisition Fund,  
Oxford Development Fund, and Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Diederich (1996.1)  
Courtesy Pace Wildenstein Gallery



Like the Minimalist artists who worked concurrently with him in the late 1960s, Chuck Close wanted to break with conventions of painting. “We all wanted to de-artify our work,” he has said, “to make something that didn’t look like art.” Close initially chose to paint deadpan black-and-white reproductions of static, tightly cropped photographs resembling mug shots or passport photos. His works, sometimes classified as Photorealist, are characterized by their extreme legibility and monumental scale. He transferred his head shots from photograph to canvas using a Renaissance grid system, a process in which he divided each image into a series of squares and transcribed them onto corresponding squares on the canvas. Rejecting Abstract Expressionism’s reliance on painterly gesture, he employed an airbrush to make a flat, seamless surface. A faint trace of the grid remained in the final painting as a visual reminder of his analytic and incremental process.

Although Close’s paintings capture likenesses of himself and his friends—New York artists such as Cindy Sherman and Richard Serra, for example—their subjects are not the individual sitters but rather the dispassionately scrutinizing vision of the camera lens itself. Since the camera captures all visual information equally, without privileging the more expressive aspects of a sitter’s physiognomy, Close’s works attack portraiture’s traditional function of conveying the sitter’s emotional state and defining characteristics. The “heads” (as Close refers to them) are vehicles for his practice of translation from “photographic information into paint information.”

Since the mid-1980s Close has used his signature head shots to investigate an increasing dissolution of the image. Playing with color and the device of the grid, he has highlighted the tension between the individual building blocks of the grid and their aggregate function as a whole image. He has called attention to his additive process by using single permutations of mark-making, such as his own inky fingerprint, daubs of watercolor, or Conté crayon scribbles that attempt to convey a central image with as little visual information as possible. The seamlessness and singular quality of his earlier Photorealism ceded in these mosaic-like paintings to an exposed grid, composed

of arrangements of abstract glyphs (rings, bull's-eyes, and lozenge shapes often built of multiple colors) that nevertheless incrementally resolve into a central portrait image.

For over twenty years Close has maintained concurrent practices of drawing, printmaking, and photography that not only parallel his practice as a painter but also explore the material potential of each respective medium. As he has said, “How an artist chooses to do something is often as important as what the artist chooses to do.” *Self-Portrait* exploits the process of silk-screening as an additive process and reflects Close’s increasing dissection of images in paint. The image is built up from seventy-two successive layers of individual color, rigorously broken down and organized not only by the grid but by the individual mark. Like other later works, this print relies on the overall optical effect of a pointillist-inflected technique of chromatic organization. Even from a distance the image vacillates between coherence and pictorial disintegration.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is your immediate reaction to this painting? What do you notice first? What do you notice upon closer inspection?
2. Describe the artist’s style in your own words.
3. Is the way the artist has handled the subject unusual in any way?
4. Would you want your own portrait painted in this way? Why or why not?
5. Discuss the work’s composition, specifically the relationship of the figure’s form to the background.
6. Close’s portraits are usually very large with his figures’ faces and features almost filling the picture. Discuss how the scale of an image affects the way we respond to it. How would Close’s image affect us differently if the work were small or if he portrayed the entire figure rather than just the face?
7. Chuck Close has said, “How an artist chooses to do something is often as important as what the artist chooses to do.” What do you think this means? How is this statement reflected in Close’s art?

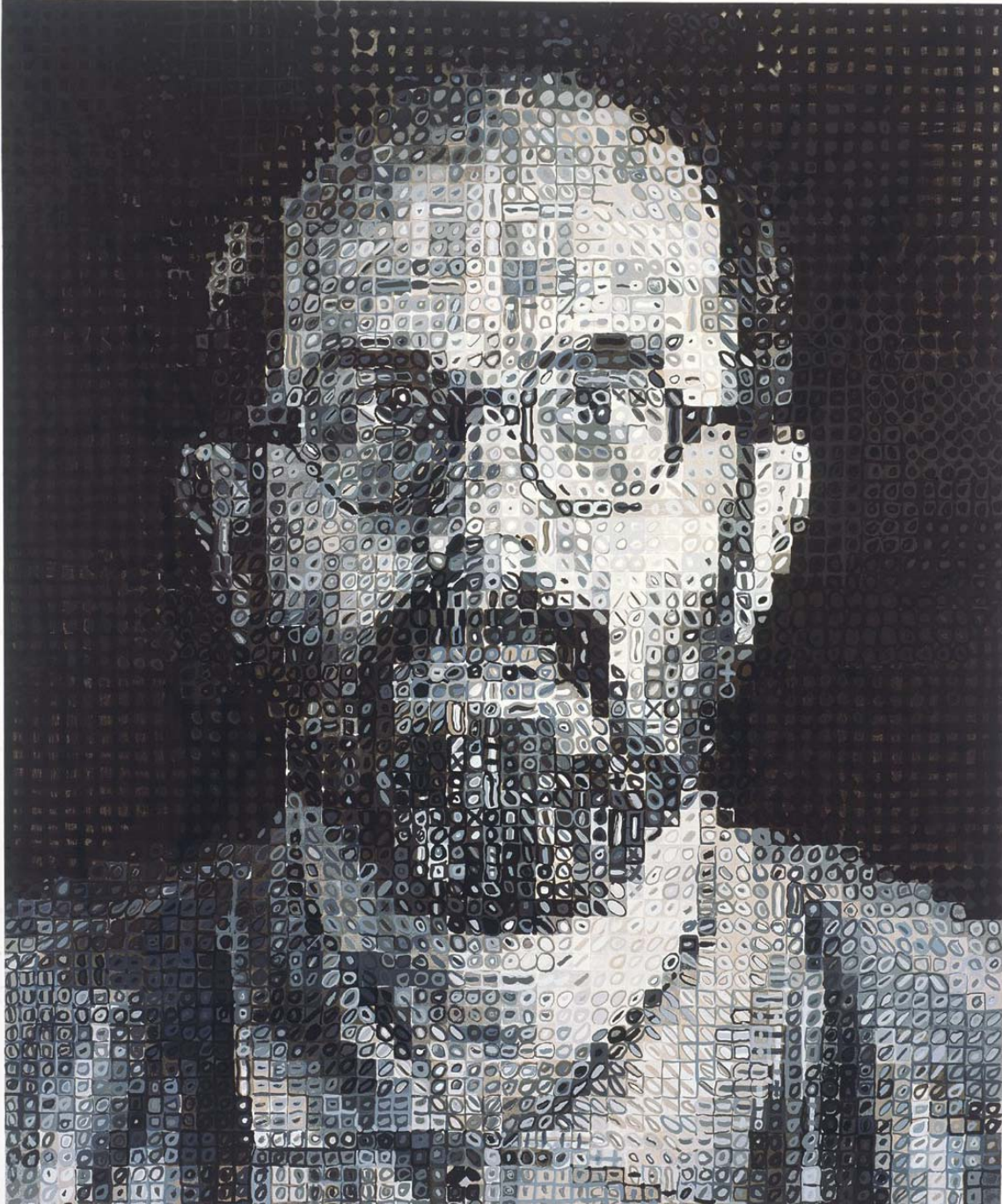
### **Activity: Creating Self-Portraits**

Aim: To create a self-portrait with a focus on the formal elements of the subject.

Materials: Paper, pencil, and pastels

Procedure:

1. Compare Close's portrait to the one by Andy Warhol included in this resource. How are they similar? How are they different?
2. Create a self-portrait focusing on the visual information you observe—namely, line, color, and shape—in a photograph of yourself. Instead of concentrating on achieving an accurate likeness or on conveying an expression, allow color and shape to become the primary concern.



3. Chuck Close, *Self-Portrait*

#### 4. Olafur Eliasson

*Untitled (Iceland Series)*, 1999

Twelve color photographs

23 5/8 x 35 1/2 in. each

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery Fund (2000.13.a-l)

Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, NY



Olafur Eliasson takes natural phenomena as a starting point and creates palpable effects similar to those found in nature—rainbows, geysers, fog, rushing streams. The positioning of such natural elements inside the museum foregrounds the artificial in the image of the natural. Eliasson has stated that he is interested in refining differences in experience and in exposing the discrepancy between seeing and expectation.

Eliasson was born in Denmark, grew up primarily in Iceland, and studied art at the Royal Academy, Copenhagen. His early installations, beginning in 1993, were about the framing of preconception and expectation that accompanies all perceptions. Eliasson attempts to reduce these framing mechanisms by constructing an actual phenomenon to affect the viewer's self-awareness. His interest in working with the visitor's field of experience is explicitly announced in the titles of many of his works: *Your compound eye* (1996), *Your sun machine* (1997), *Seeing yourself sensing* (2001). Eliasson is concerned with the mental activity that is brought to bear in perceptual experience, including memories and learned histories. Specifically, he is interested in the viewer's individual consciousness and depth of engagement with the work of art. The presence of the viewer's consciousness in the experience of the work is the point, rather than specific interpretations.

Eliasson usually emphasizes the physical apparatus of his works—it is seen, heard, felt, or all three. He integrates his machinery perceptibly into his replications of natural phenomenon, implying that the experience of the work involves the productive process, not sensation alone. In *Beauty*, first installed in 1993, the mechanism—water raining from the holes in a perforated hose, and a light source creating a rainbow—is an important presence in the event. In 1997 Eliasson used electric lamps of an intense yellow for the installation. In *The curious garden*, at the Basel Kunsthalle; not only did the lamps' warm light bathe the viewers, but the yellow bleached other colors from vision, marking the event as artificial. In *Your now is my surroundings*, an installation at the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York in 2000, Eliasson cut away the glass of the room's skylight to let in light and weather, then built mirrored walls to fit the resulting opening. This had the effect of

confusing the line between the building and the open air, but also drew in the frame of the skylight as a kind of viewing grid. *Your natural denudation inverted*, at the *Carnegie International* in 1999, was seen from a distance as some kind of geyser, then revealed itself as the product of redirected steam vents. Eliasson's bracketing of natural occurrences and processes entwines physics and social theory; his events draw the viewer in, then reveal themselves as machines for seeing.

Eliasson has made photographs throughout his career, remarking that they function as research for him. *Untitled (Iceland Series)* is a group of aide-mémoire (memory aids) for sensations he absorbed while hiking in his native Iceland. The photographs are organized to operate as a means of analysis, serving as references in the planning of installations. Fully realized works in their own right, they also exist independently of the installations and are exhibited separately from them. They produce a different experience and a different set of meanings. The images are arranged in grids according to subject matter: caves, rocks, ice, storage containers, pipelines, pools. One distinction the artist does not make is that between the natural and the cultivated, supporting Eliasson's interest in collapsing that divide.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe Eliasson's photographs. What are his subjects?
2. What do his photographs communicate about his experience hiking in Iceland?
3. Discuss Eliasson's interest in natural forms such as caves, rocks, and ice, as well as in factory-made objects, such as pipe, pools, and storage containers. Discuss how he conflates the two types of imagery.
4. Think about how artists may use photography in different ways: documenting an artistic process, providing material for research, serving as memory aids, functioning as notations or references for planning installations, and existing as independent works of art.
5. Compare Eliasson's use of photographs to John Baldessari's.

### **Activity: Incorporating Nature into Art**

Aim: To create a proposal for an installation that incorporates natural elements.

Materials: Paper, pencil, and/or cameras

Procedure:

1. Discuss the definition of an installation.

2. Ask students to come up with a proposal for a work of art, specifically, an installation that incorporates natural elements. Ask them to see if they can find inspiration in their own experiences. If not, have them draw on their imagination for material.
3. Have students describe the work of art they propose first in writing and then through drawings or photographs.
4. Discuss each student's completed proposal with his or her classmates focusing on the elements each has incorporated and their anticipated effect on the viewer.



4. Olafur Eliasson, *Untitled (Iceland Series)*

## 5. Elizabeth Murray

*Don't Be Cruel*, 1985–86

Oil on canvas

9 ft. 7 in. x 9 ft. 8 1/2 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Henry L. Hillman Fund (86.20)



Elizabeth Murray came to critical attention in the late 1970s, at a time when the dominance of Minimal and Conceptual art was being challenged by a resuscitation of painting. While not a movement in any organized sense, the new generation of painters rejected the detachment and intellectualization of their predecessors in favor of immediacy and expression. Murray's style developed alongside this return to representation, arising out of the collision between her personal experiences and the world at large. Her turbulent pictures sustain an interplay between figurative subjects and abstract forms, dynamic compositions and the irregular frames that contain them, and personal narrative and the history of art.

Murray's paintings are physically present, powerful images that evidence an acute understanding of color and of the materiality of paint. Her treatment of the surface is deliberately varied, encompassing a multiplicity of painterly effects; from smooth fields of color to expressively impastoed forms, she attempts, she says, "to paint all the ways I can in one painting." Murray sets the interior action of the canvas against its perimeter. Rather than tailoring itself to the traditional rectilinear picture plane, each Murray painting literally creates its own boundaries as she constructs elaborate multipart stretchers, which redefine not only the edges of the canvas but also the work's sculpturally shaped surface. Image and its container act upon each other, multiplying the effects of movement and instability that either would achieve on its own. The resulting sense of motion acts upon the fractured household objects and bloated shapes that are Murray's subjects. For Murray the works imagine "a whole thing—dropped or fallen and then shattered—on the ground, in the air, or perhaps in the body or mind. The image inside is trying to form the pieces whole again."

Like many of Murray's paintings, *Don't Be Cruel* (exhibited in the 1988 *Carnegie International*) obliquely refers to an interior landscape. At the center is a dining table, rendered almost unrecognizable by the huge chasm that rips it into two parts. Pulled simultaneously in multiple directions, the table seems to be torqued by its own self-inflicted force. The table is a recurring theme in Murray's paintings, as are other domestic objects such as chairs, coffee cups, cutlery, and paintbrushes. Although significantly abstracted, the subjects reference an entire history of still-life paintings as exemplified by the nineteenth-century artist Paul Cézanne, whose work Murray

considered carefully as a student. On a personal level, the paintings are emotional and psychological vignettes that mark specific events in Murray's life or convey her response to the world around her.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. *Don't Be Cruel* is an oil painting on canvas. How would you describe the shape of the canvas? How is it different from a traditional painting? (Discuss Murray's use of multiple stretchers.)
2. Describe the imagery in Murray's work. (Note the table-like surface and the chasm in the center.)
3. How does Murray create movement in this piece?

### **Activity: Responding to a Still Life**

Aim: To respond to a still life painting in writing.

Materials: Paper, pencil, pastels, scraps of fabric or patterned paper, and glue

Procedure:

1. Look closely at Murray's painting and jot down the first thoughts that come to mind.
2. Write a narrative poem or story inspired by the painting.
3. Read the stories aloud in class. Discuss differences and similarities in the narratives.

### **Activity: Manipulating Still-Life Elements**

Aim: To create an abstract still life.

Materials: Paper, pencil, pastels, paint, brushes, scraps of fabric or patterned paper, and glue

Procedure:

1. Tables—along with chairs, coffee cups, cutlery, and paintbrushes—are recurring themes in Murray's art.
2. Draw, paint, or create a collage of a domestic interior incorporating these elements. Remember that the objects need not be recognizable. Feel free to distort or exaggerate their shapes.
3. Compare student work and discuss how each is unique.



5. Elizabeth Murray, *Don't Be Cruel*

## 6. Diana Thater

*The best space is the deep space*, 1998

Video installation: two video projectors, two video monitors, four laser-disc players, four CAV laser discs, and colored window film.

Ed. 2/2

8 x 12 feet installed (approx.)

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Second Century Acquisition Fund (1999.2a–j)

Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York



Diana Thater explores the creation of imagery as a theoretical activity as well as a practice. Videotaping the training of animals, Thater marks the intersection of nature and culture and explores spaces between them. Utilizing both projected imagery and video monitors, she displays the technology's cables, control decks, speakers, screens, scrims, and other equipment in large-scale constructions that are emphatically experiential. Her manipulated productions include the viewer in the work—a body that casts shadows, and activates the overlapping spaces in an attempt to construct meaning.

Thater began her work of restructuring narratives in 1989, following her study of art history: she constructed indices for books to make a living and she would insert fake entries. She then began creating her own indices as a means of relating her disparate interests among literature, theory, and art. When she began to work with video, she devised similar complex breaks and displacements in that medium. Early works, such as *OO Fiji—Five Days in Monet's Garden* (1992), consisted of projected, sequenced, and color-separated pictures that together produced a set of multiple images that no single spectator viewpoint could reconcile into a single coherent view. In *Bad Infinite* (1993) Thater created a disorienting, encompassing installation combining tapes of a Sequoia forest and tapes of the taping itself. In *Mollucan Cockatoo Molly Numbers 1–10* and *Scarlet Macaw Crayons* (both 1995) she further skewed the image of trained birds by projecting imagery and showing it on monitors, showing color separated and out of register, and altering the installation space with colored gels. In these works Thater began her work with animals, locating narratives in the intersection of nature and culture.

Thater started working in large scale in 1994–95, producing several installations establishing her key elements: highly manipulated imagery; altered projection speeds; skewed and out-of-register color; and the choreographed display of equipment. There is a great deal of repetition within images and across monitors. The moving camera, quick edited flashes of imagery, and reduced colors create an instability that attaches viscerally to the spectator's body. Finally, gels applied to the

windows in the primary colors of projected light—cyan, yellow, and magenta—integrate and incorporate the surrounding space. *China* (1995) features images of two wolves and of Thater’s crew filming them being trained to stand still. *Electric Mind* (1996) shows technicians taping chimpanzees; again the medium is treated materially, to focus on its persistent reality in competition with the illusions of its images.

*The best space is the deep space* was presented along with *The best animals are the flat animals* (both 1998) in overlapping exhibitions in North America and Europe. Each work is divided into parts, totaling twenty-seven altogether, and each realization is its own installation, a finite work incorporating a different grouping of the components, including temporary screens and monitors calibrated to different single colors. The imagery consists of a herd of zebras and a single zebra that performs tricks while maintaining a position parallel to the picture plane (thus the “flat animal”), a trained Andalusian horse from a Medieval Times theme restaurant, and a nighttime Los Angeles forest. The segment *The best space . . .* shows only the horse and its trainer in a theatrically lit ring; they negotiate the arena, which, due to theatrical smoke, becomes a volume within the volume of the installation and its colored light. The viewer’s gaze is lost, retrieved, and, at the end, returned when the horse bows and creates a focal point to reconstitute the viewer.

Thater’s central concern—the constitution of self in relationship to the world and its phenomena—persists throughout her body of work. The slippages between dichotomies are extensive: projected and real, artificial and actual, cultural and natural, viewed and viewer, multiple and singular. Such tensions portray Thater’s intention: “When we look at landscape it is not to know nature but to know our bodies through our relationship to it.”

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Discuss how Thater incorporates the viewer into her work through the use of shadows and the manipulation of space.
2. What is the difference between seeing a video and experiencing Thater’s installation? (If students do not have the opportunity to see Thater’s work in the original, discuss the limitations of using a slide to capture the entirety of this experience.)
3. Discuss how Thater employs multiple viewpoints in her work.
4. Discuss how an artist may structure space using video monitors, cables, and projected light and shadows. Note how Thater manipulates her imagery using motion, repetition, and distortion.
5. Consider how Thater uses images that do not necessarily combine to create a coherent narrative.

**Activity: Understanding Diana Thater's Work**

Aim: To express, verbally and in writing, one's response to Thater's video installation.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Consider Thater's statement: "When we look at landscape it is not to know nature but to know our bodies through our relationship to it." What does this mean? How does Thater achieve this in her work?
2. If they have the opportunity to see the original, ask students to write about the experience of looking at Thater's work.

**Activity: Examining the Relationship Between Nature and Culture**

Aim: To design an installation incorporating natural elements and aspects of contemporary culture and to explore the relationship between the two realms.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. After discussing Thater's work and, specifically, its treatment of the connection between nature and culture, ask students to design a plan for a work of art that similarly examines this relationship.
2. Ask them to think of ways for their work to incorporate both technological elements that reflect our present-day culture as well as natural elements such as landscape or animals.
3. Have students execute drawings of their installation and write a brief description of their project.



6. Diana Thater, *The best space is the deep space*

## 7. Rirkrit Tiravanija

*Untitled (Cure)*, 1993

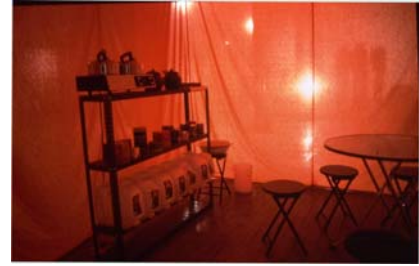
Cloth tent, table, stools, tea kettles, hot plate, teapots and cups, metal shelf, tea, and water

11 ft. 5 3/4 in. x 11 ft. 5 3/4 in. x 11 ft. 5 3/4 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; A. W. Mellon

Acquisition Endowment Fund (2001.12)

Courtesy Gavin Brown's Enterprise, Corp. New York



Rirkrit Tiravanija's work is meant not merely to be seen but, more important, to be used. The elements of his installations proclaim their identity as functional objects—touchable, reusable, and replaceable. Although the specific context of his works varies, they are often concerned with creating a temporary sense of home and fulfilling our basic human needs, be it shelter, food, or water. Tiravanija designs his working environments to support certain activities, including eating, sleeping, tea-drinking, and just hanging out. These in turn become the catalysts for incidental and indeterminate social exchanges that result from their performance. Created to promote social interaction, Tiravanija's spaces operate much like theatrical sets, but there is no imaginary wall separating actor from viewer—the artist invites everyone to participate in his performances. To reinforce the importance of interaction in his work, he often lists “lots of people” alongside more typical mediums such as metal and cloth.

Tiravanija emerged in the early 1990s as one of several young artists exploring the social potential of artistic practice. Using unconventional materials and locations, he and his contemporaries attempted further to erode the boundary between art and life. The resulting works are difficult to categorize as art experiences, because they become part of everyday life. Tiravanija's installations are often shown in traditional galleries and museums, inherently public places that produce communal experiences but rarely encourage interaction. He reconfigures the context of exhibition sites, reshaping them as venues for social exchange.

Tiravanija often instigates the action in his installations. *Untitled (Still)*, exhibited in the 1995 *Carnegie International*, involved the daily preparation of Thai curry, served free to museum visitors. Tiravanija cooked while on site, and after his departure a group of museum staff continued to cook and dish up the food. Tiravanija's impromptu canteen included tables and chairs for dining, and all of the necessary equipment and ingredients were exhibited as part of the installation. In contemporary society many recognizable rituals are associated with the preparation and consumption of food and drink for special occasions, holidays, and group gatherings. Food is the

perfect conduit for cultural understanding—a shared national cuisine reinforces group identity, while a foreign cuisine provides a literal introduction to a culture’s values and customs.

*Untitled (Cure)* also finds meaning through its use as a vehicle for “nomadic transference, cultural overlaps, and basic structures for survival.” The tent, folding chairs and tables, kettles, and cups are accessories for a tea party of sorts. Like eating, tea-drinking carries its own ritualistic associations, from the formality of Japanese tea ceremonies to the collegial repose of afternoon tea to the restorative powers implied by the title.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Identify the objects in Tiravanija’s installation.
2. Discuss the idea of an installation that encourages hands-on participation. What sort of barriers and/or assumptions does Tiravanija’s work challenge?
3. How is this installation any different than someone inviting a group of people over for tea in their home?

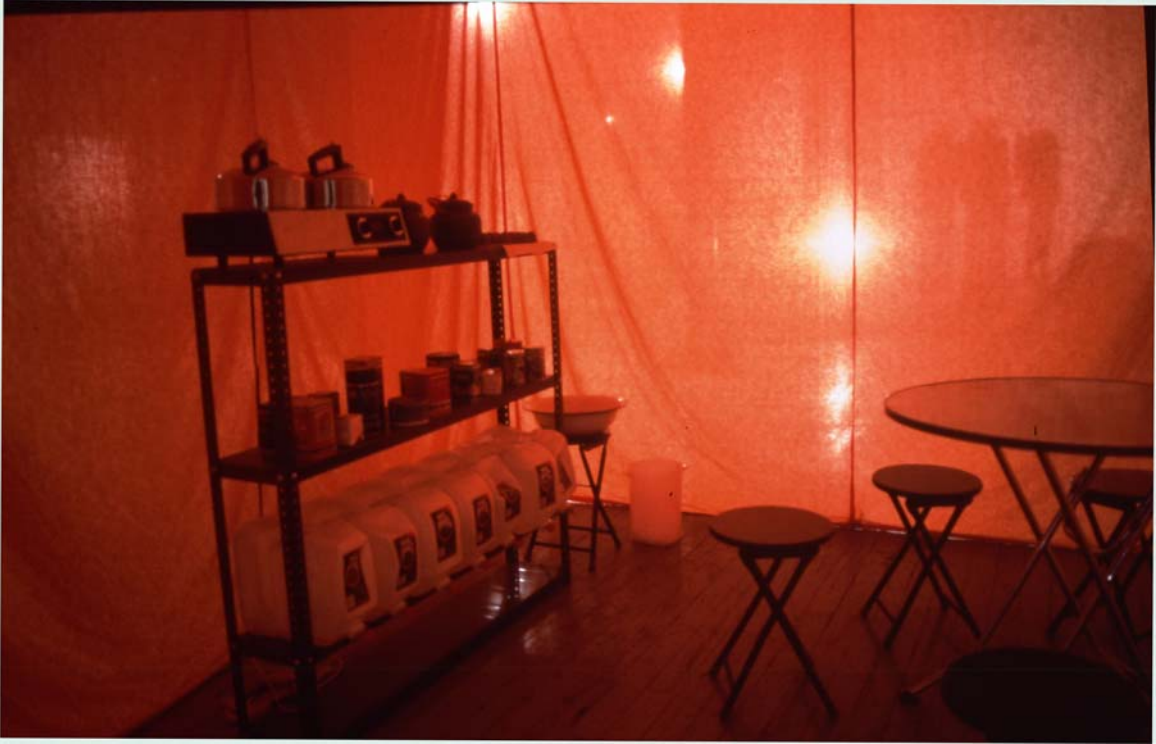
### **Activity: Installation and Performance**

Aim: To understand the concept of an installation/performance piece through the creation of one.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Have students plan an installation/performance.
2. Ask them to think about an activity they would like to frame as an installation. Where will this activity take place? In a gallery? In their home? Outdoors? What sort of props and supplies will they need? What are some of the themes or ideas that they will explore in their installation?
3. Have students write a detailed account of the plans for the installation as well as a description of how they imagine the performance aspect of the installation will take place.



7. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Untitled (Cure)*

## 8. Andy Warhol

*Self Portrait*, 1986

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas

6 ft. 8 in. x 6 ft. 8 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Fellows Fund (86.47)

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Beginning with his first show of paintings of Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, in 1962, Andy Warhol served as a recording machine of the American collective unconscious while also transforming contemporary art and the definition of the artist. In these early icons of Pop art, which he referred to as "no-comment" paintings, Warhol condensed an entire American ideal of convenience and conformity into images of mass-produced items. At the same time, his silk-screens challenged the idea of originality in art and of privileging process over reproduction, a stance that flew in the face of reigning Abstract Expressionist models that trumpeted uniqueness, authorship, and painterly craft. Warhol is primarily associated with the Pop artists, such as Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg, with whom he shared an interest in popular subjects and commercial techniques, but his work presaged an important strategy of Minimalism. Although its content was based in highly charged, sensational images from contemporary culture, ranging from iconic celebrity snapshots to photographs of disaster and death, aspects of his forms and processes reflect the Minimalist strategies of serial repetition and the removal of emotion and painterly touch through the use of mechanical processes. Warhol felt that the reduction and repetition of images diffused their actual content, evacuating them of emotion and rendering them "boring," a word that for him connoted praise.

Warhol is strongly identified with the semiautomated process of silk-screening, which he adapted from his early days as a commercial artist in New York. From his images of Elvis Presley and Marilyn Monroe and his "Disasters" and "Electric Chairs" series of the early 1960s to later commissioned portraits of wealthy patrons, each image was equalized through the medium of photomechanical reproduction, which conferred the same status on all of these images, regardless of their status in the world.

In 1986, in response to a dealer's request for works that were "unforgettable, tragic, romantic and direct, which would be essentially of the moment," Warhol executed twenty-two self-portraits in various sizes, including this example. Like other portraits of the period, it was based on a Polaroid photograph, a medium whose technical limitations he favored because they "dissolved

wrinkles and imperfections.” He presents himself dramatically backlit against a solid ground, his gaunt face framed by a shock of his hair, which stands up as if electrified. Critics have likened the silver-and-black image to a “death mask,” and it accentuates the ghostly quality of his visage. Warhol made many portraits of himself over the course of his career, but the 1986 group of works recall, more strongly than the rest, his celebrity portraits of iconic figures such as Monroe, Jackie Kennedy, and Elizabeth Taylor. Like the celebrities he so admired, Warhol harnessed the mass media to define his image, crafting a public persona of pure artifice. This painting reflects his recognition of his status as the most recognizable artist of the 1980s, and as such it functions less like a telling self-portrait and more like a projection of the world’s perception of him.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is your response to Warhol’s self-portrait? What sort of message do you think this image conveys about Warhol? Does the image convey any emotion?
2. Discuss the role of color in the work. What effect does Warhol’s use of color have on the image?

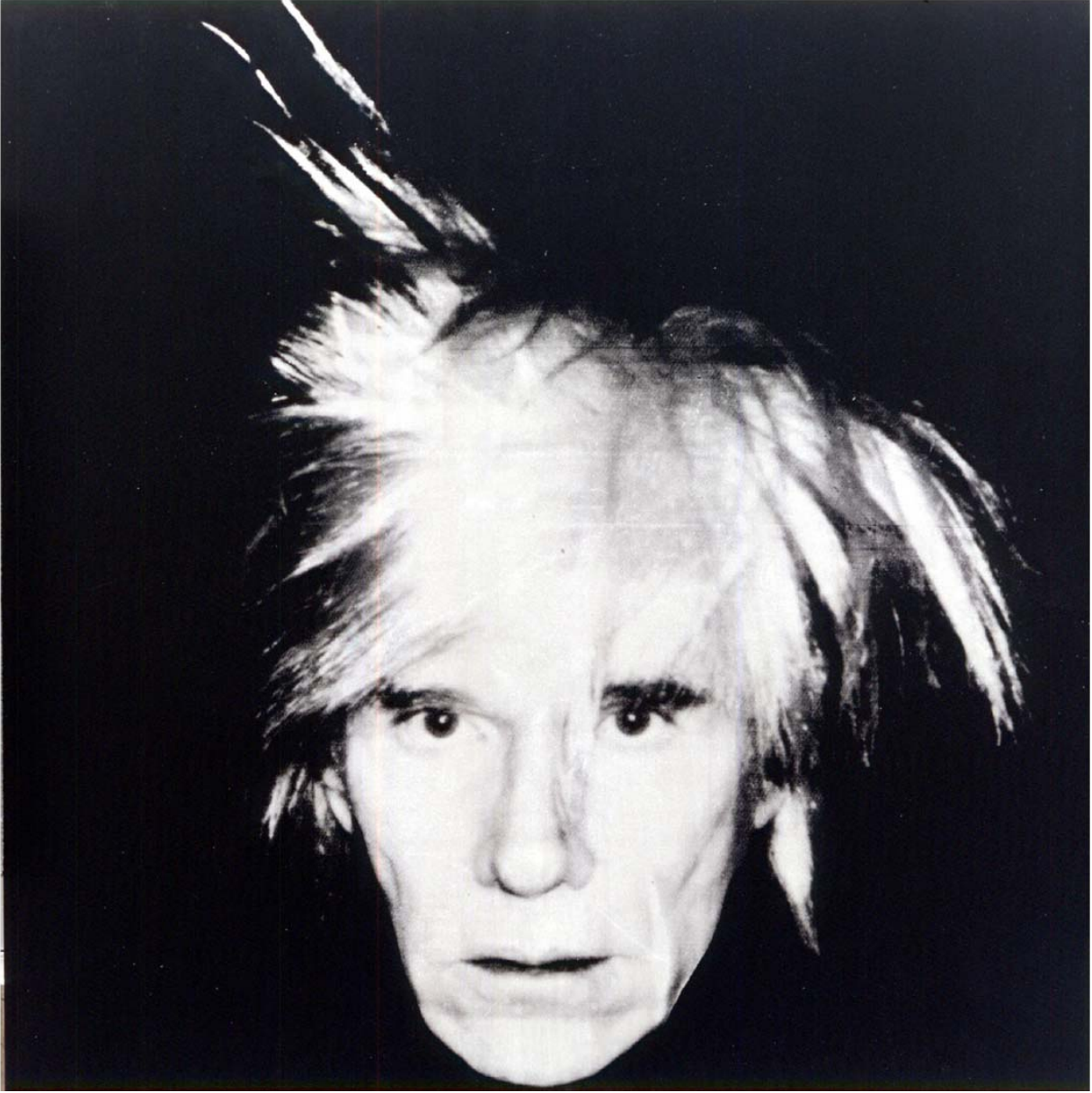
### **Activity: Art and Popular Culture**

Aim: To create a work of art incorporating elements of today’s popular culture.

Materials: Paper, paint, paint brushes, popular magazines, scissors, glue, and books with reproductions of artworks by Warhol

Procedure:

1. Warhol self-portraits were as much icons of popular culture as those of the celebrities he painted and the commercial products he pictured.
2. Ask students to find images of works by Warhol in books.
3. Have them make a list of the kinds of objects he painted.
4. Discuss some of the commercial products that might be considered icons of today’s popular culture. Look for ideas in magazines, on billboards, or on television. Who are today’s cultural icons?
5. Have students create a work of art using the image or images they have selected. They may either create a collage, paint an object or person, or use an actual commercial product to create a sculpture.



8. Andy Warhol, *Self Portrait*

## 9. Rachel Whiteread

*Untitled (Yellow Bath)*, 1996

Rubber and polystyrene

31 1/2 in. x 6 ft. 9 1/2 in. x 45 5/16 in.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Henry L. Hillman Fund (1996.38)

Courtesy the artist and Lühring Augustine, New York



Rachel Whiteread has consistently investigated the sculptural qualities of domestic objects and the spaces they inhabit. Her subjects—wardrobes, bathtubs, chairs, mattresses, and even entire houses—are objects that support or house the human frame. Whiteread's work alludes to the human body, although the body itself is absent. Most often casting negative impressions of an object, Whiteread inverts the traditional relationship between sculptural mold and final casting. In another sculptor's hands the mold or impression would serve as the intermediary between the original object and the final product, and would finally be destroyed or dispensed with, but Whiteread makes it the work in and of itself. Although from a distance these sculptures can appear severely formal, they eschew the cold surfaces and clean edges of hard-core Minimalism. The substances of their creation—concrete, resin, rubber, dental plaster—record all the dents or scratches that mark the memory of an object's use on its surface.

For her largest-scale work to date, *House* (1993–94), Whiteread cast the interior of an entire three-story Victorian row house in East London. She sprayed concrete in the interior of the empty house, then had the exterior brick frame removed, leaving behind a monumental volume that carried on its surface the negative impression of all of the house's interior architectural details—floorboards, fireplaces, window frames, moldings, electrical outlets. The literal inversion of private space to public monument sparked incredible controversy, initiating debates ranging from the function of public art to historic preservation.

For *Untitled (Yellow Bath)*, Whiteread built a frame around an inverted tub in order to cast the space surrounding the object rather than the space inside it. The resulting sculpture, reoriented, elevates the negative space of the tub, distancing it from its original functional placement. This contextual removal causes a visual disorientation, compelling the viewer to sculpt a mental image of an object defined only by its abstracted impression. With this placement Whiteread underscores the ritualistic implications of the tub's form, suggesting allusions to baptism and purification, as well as to devices of entombment such as sarcophagi and coffins. The surfaces of the tub's solid volumes

function doubly, both carrying specific traces of meaning and memory and remaining blank enough to trigger the projection of personal associations.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Observe Whiteread's *Untitled (Yellow Bath)*. Make a list of words describing the work.
2. Does her work have narrative associations? In other words, do her forms remind you of anything familiar?
3. Discuss how the simple forms of everyday objects may inspire works of art.

### **Activity: Observing Negative Space**

Aim: To understand the concept of negative space in a three-dimensional sculpture.

Materials: Paper and pencil

Procedure:

1. Discuss Whiteread's process of casting her materials to explore the spaces around them.
2. Ask students to think about the space around the objects in your classroom.
3. Have them select an object and sketch its negative space.
4. Observe the shapes they have created. Ask students to think about the object they have drawn and of the shape's narrative associations.



9. Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Yellow Bath)*

## Glossary

**Abstract:** Distorted, either simplified and reduced to an elemental form, or exaggerated in some way.

**Abstract Expressionism:** A style of nonrepresentational painting that combines gestural abstraction and expressionist content. The Abstract Expressionists, also known as members of the New York School, developed their respective styles in New York City during the 1940s and became fully established during the 1950s. The group's most prominent artists were Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

**Airbrush:** A small mechanical paint sprayer used to create smooth gradations of tone and color, often used for commercial arts. The method was later adopted by practitioners of fine arts, especially those affiliated with Pop art and Super Realism.

**Avant-garde:** Venturing away from the current mainstream, often experimental in nature. May be applied to art or artists who are producing this type of work.

**Composition:** The arrangement of forms in a work of art.

**Conceptual art:** The name given to a type of art in which the idea or concept expressed by the artist is primary and the physical properties of the work secondary. Mostly a phenomenon of the 1960s, the term Conceptual art embraces a wide variety of styles, forms, and ideas, including happenings and performance art. Among the artists associated with Conceptual art are Lawrence Weiner, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, and Bruce Nauman.

**Conté crayon:** A widely known, long established trade name of a brand of French crayons in the form of square sticks and wood-encased pencils. Conté crayons are made of a unique compressed compound of pigments and a binder. Available in black, sanguine, and sepia.

**Figurative:** Art that portrays imagery of the human form by means of figure, symbol, or likeness.

**Form:** Refers to the elements of a work of art's compositional structure. The formal elements of a work of art include line, composition, shape, and color.

**Gesso:** A fluid or plastic coating material made by mixing chalk or whiting with a glue solution or, occasionally, casein. Gesso is used both as a ground for tempera paint, some types of oil painting and gilding, and modeled decoration on furniture and picture frames.

**Gestural:** Describes the marks on a canvas that reveal the artist's hand, such as brushstrokes.

**Installation:** A form of art that combines three-dimensional objects to create an indoor or outdoor environment. Installations may include found objects and/or elements painted, carved, or modeled by the artist.

**Impasto:** Paint applied in heavy layers or strokes. Also the texture produced by the thickness of pigment in a painting.

**Mannerist:** An artistic style prevalent especially in Italy between 1525 and 1600. Mannerism developed in reaction to the classical balance and austere harmony of the High Renaissance and was characterized by a subjective portrayal of subject matter through elongated or otherwise distorted forms and exaggerated perspective. El Greco and Tintoretto are considered Mannerists.

**Materiality:** Emphasizing the material or physical properties of an object.

**Medium:** The materials used by an artist, such as oil paint and canvas. Also the mode of expression employed by an artist such as sculpture, painting, or photography.

**Minimalist:** A term adopted in the late 1960s to describe art that abandoned expressiveness and illusion and focused on simple formal elements and geometric structure. The individuality and originality traditionally associated with creativity is minimized to such an extent that the artist is frequently able to have a work executed by assistants. The artist's own role in its creation is that of originator, designer, and technical supervisor.

**Modernist:** A term introduced during the twentieth century, that refers to a work in which the artist focuses more on formal qualities such as shape, form, line, and color, as opposed to iconographical, historical, or biographical content.

**Neo-Expressionism:** During the late 1970s, a term used to characterize works which are typically large scale, rapidly executed, and display a raw, expressive approach to their materials. Neo-Expressionist art is usually figurative and infused with a spirit of violence or pessimism. The style, which manifested itself in the United States, Italy, and especially West Germany, was seen as a revival of German Expressionist forms. Among the artists associated with Neo-Expressionism are Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer (Germany), Julian Schnabel (United States), and Sandro Chia (Italy).

**Painterly:** Characterized by visible paint and brushwork.

**Perspective:** A system for representing three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, making objects in the distance appear smaller, and those closest to the viewer in the foreground appear larger.

**Photorealist:** A term applied to art of the 1960s, including painting and sculpture, which is characterized by emphasis on the most minute detail. In painting, often based on the direct copying of photographs; in sculpture, involves the use of direct casts from the human figure. Also called superrealism.

**Pictorial space:** The illusion of space, whether two- or three-dimensional, created by an artist on the two-dimensional surface of canvas, paper, or panel.

**Picture plane:** In perspective, the flat surface used by an artist as the starting point for building a three-dimensional illusion on a two-dimensional surface. The picture plane is not the medium itself, such as the paper or canvas, but an imaginary surface, almost like a sheet of glass or an invisible field, on which elements such as spatial illusion and forms are created by the artist.

**Pointillist:** A technique employed by George Seurat, Paul Signac, and other Neo-Impressionists during the nineteenth century consisting of the placement and organization of small dots of pure color in order to achieve certain optical effects. Also referred to as divisionism.

**Polystyrene:** A polymer of styrene; especially a rigid transparent thermoplastic that has good physical and electrical insulating properties and is used in molded products, foams, and sheet materials.

**Pop art:** Art which makes use of the imagery of consumerism and mass culture (e.g. comic strips, pin-ups, and packaging), with a finely balanced mixture of irony and celebration. Pop art emerged in the 1950s with various investigations into the nature of urban popular culture, notably by members of the Independent Group at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. Among its leading exponents in Britain were Richard Hamilton, Allen Jones, and Peter Phillips, and in the United States Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, and Claes Oldenburg.

**Representational:** Depicting recognizable objects, figures, or elements in nature, as opposed to being nonobjective or abstract.

**Resin:** An amorphous, transparent, or translucent solid organic material, soluble in a volatile solvent. The resultant solution is used in varnishes and other coating materials.

**Silk-screen:** A printmaking technique based on stenciling that is widely used commercially. Ink or paint is forced with a squeegee through a fine screen made of silk, on which nonprinting areas have been blocked out, onto the printing surface below.

**Stretcher:** The wooden framework on which a painter's canvas is stretched.

**Scrim:** A piece of heavy fabric used for reinforcing cast sculpture; also any strong, coarse cloth used for reinforcement, for example, cloth glued to a surface to prevent warping or shrinking. A scrim for plaster may be made of a coarse cotton or linen canvas.

\*Terms for this Glossary are drawn from the following texts: *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Terms and Techniques*, Ralph Mayer, New York: Harper Perennial, 1969; *The Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art Terms*, Edward Lucie-Smith, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984.

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## **Web Resources**

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[www.chinati.org/english2/collection/andre.htm](http://www.chinati.org/english2/collection/andre.htm)

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### **Chuck Close**

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[www.carnegieinternational.org/html/art/eliasson.htm](http://www.carnegieinternational.org/html/art/eliasson.htm)

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[www.davidzwirner.com/artists/Diana\\_Thater/](http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/Diana_Thater/)

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**Rirkrit Tiravanija**

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**Andy Warhol**

[www.warhol.org/](http://www.warhol.org/)

**Rachel Whiteread**

[www.bbc.co.uk/arts/news\\_comment/artistsinprofile/whiteread.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/news_comment/artistsinprofile/whiteread.shtml)

[www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/cinema/whiteread.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/cinema/whiteread.htm)