

**Vocabulary**

folk artists

artists

action painting

# Why Do Artists Create?

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

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

► **FIGURE 1.7** Identify the door named in the title. Look at the dark shape near the center of the painting. How many figures are standing in the door? What part of this work tells you about the destructive force of the hurricane?

Leo F. Twiggs. *East Wind Suite: Door*. Hugo Series. 1989. Batik: Dyes and wax resist on cotton. 61 × 51 cm (24 × 20"). Private Collection.





◀ **FIGURE 1.8** This painting depicts the same event as shown in Figure 1.7. The two artists represent the hurricane in very different ways. What does this painting remind you of? Does it resemble an advertisement or a postcard? Why do you think the artist chose humor to present such a devastating event?

Roger Brown. *Hurricane Hugo*. 1990. Oil on canvas. 121.9 × 182.9 cm (48 × 72"). Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Georgia.

## Where Do Artists Get Ideas?

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

### Nature

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



◀ **FIGURE 1.9** This painting celebrates nature and industry, although the two are not necessarily compatible. If you look carefully, you can see the town of Scranton, Pennsylvania, accurately depicted in the distance. Why do you think the artist has included all the tree stumps in this painting? What symbols of industrialization has he used?

George Inness. *The Lackawanna Valley*. c. 1856. Oil on canvas. 86 × 127.6 cm (33<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 50<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. © 1998 Board of Trustees. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Hutton Rogers.

## MEET THE ARTIST

### GRANT WOOD

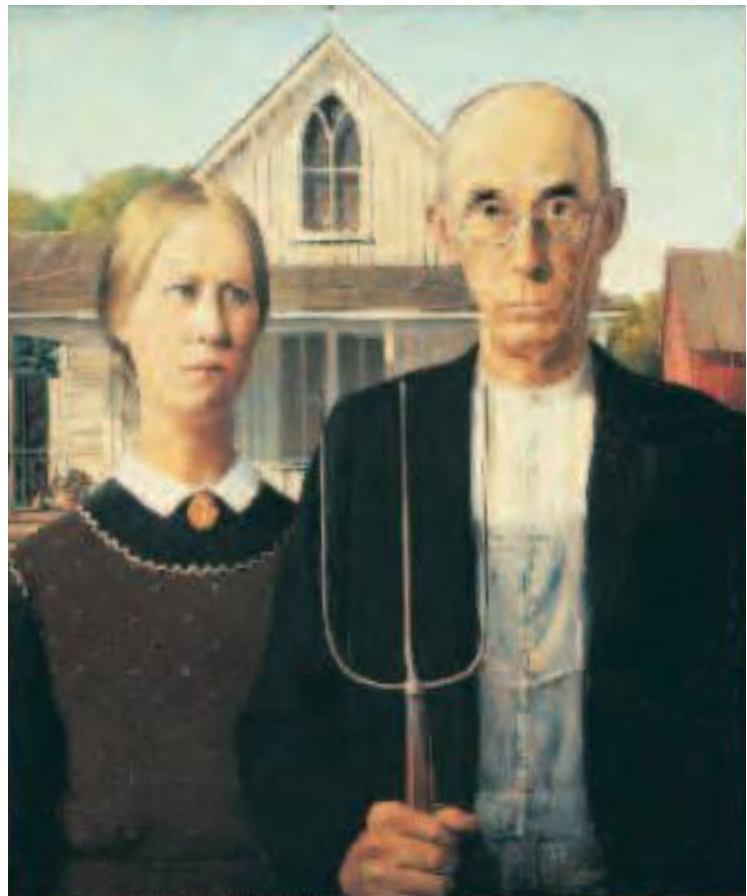


*American, 1892–1942*

Grant Wood. *Self-Portrait*. 1932. Oil on Masonite panel. 37.5 × 31.4 cm (14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"). Collection of The Davenport Museum of Art, Davenport, Iowa. © Grant Wood/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

► **FIGURE 1.10** This painting has been used and parodied countless times. Because of this, it can be easy to overlook the message Wood intended. Symbols tell a story: the Gothic window represents the couple's European heritage, and the pitchfork stands for their determination. Can you identify other symbols in the painting and tell what they might mean?

Grant Wood. *American Gothic*. 1930. Oil on beaverboard. 74.3 × 62.2 cm (29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 24<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"). Friends of the American Art Collection. All rights reserved by the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois and VAGA, New York, New York. (1930.934).



## People and Real World Events

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

## Myths and Legends

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





◀ **FIGURE 1.11** This print is the last in a series of serigraphs illustrating the story of Ulysses, a legendary Greek hero. Bearden has simplified shapes and used unusual colors but you can still recognize people and objects in the work. Describe three things you recognize in this scene.

Romare Bearden. *Return of Ulysses*. 1976. Serigraph on paper. 47 × 57.1 cm (18½ × 22½"). Copyright restricted. National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Brandywine Graphic Workshop. © Romare Bearden Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

## Spiritual and Religious Beliefs

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



▲ **FIGURE 1.12** This bird mask was created for a dance ceremony. Notice how the artist has used natural earth pigments to color the wood, plus natural materials like feathers and sinew to decorate it.

Yup’ik. *Bird Mask*. 1988. Wood, feathers. Height: 64.7 cm (25½"). Robert H. Lowie Museum, University of California, Berkeley, California.

## Creative Techniques

Many artists founded new art movements and developed new techniques to create art. Jackson Pollock was a leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement. He studied painting in the 1930s with Thomas Hart Benton as his teacher. Benton was an American regionalist who painted realistic paintings and murals that celebrated American life (Figure 13.29, page 376). Pollock’s earliest works were in the realistic style of his teacher. After 1947, he developed

**action painting**, the technique of dripping and splashing paint onto a canvas stretched on the floor (**Figure 1.13** on page 14). The idea for this style of painting, which influenced many who came after him, came from within himself.

► **FIGURE 1.13** Pollock wanted to express his personal feelings when he created his art. He allowed his feelings to influence his choice of colors and the manner in which he applied them to the canvas.

Jackson Pollock, *Cathedral*. 1947. Enamel and aluminum paint on canvas. 181.6 × 89.1 cm (71½ × 35¼"). Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard J. Reis. © 2003 Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



## Artists of the Past

Art is not made in a vacuum. Artists of a particular time period often influence each other. Artists also learn from and build on the work of artists who came before them. Pablo Picasso based his 1957 painting, *Las Meninas* (after Velázquez) (**Figure 1.14**), on *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) by Diego Velázquez (**Figure 1.15**), which was painted in 1656. Although Picasso changed the colors and used his own Cubist style, you can recognize some of the figures and objects that are in the realistic Velázquez painting. How many figures and objects can you find that appear in both works?



▲ **FIGURE 1.14** This painting is based on Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*) (**Figure 1.15**). Similar figures and objects are present in both paintings—the artist, the easel with the unfinished painting, the child who appears to be the subject of the artwork in progress, the dog, and the figure in the door. Compare these objects with the ones depicted in Velázquez's work. What has Picasso done to make the work uniquely his own? Do you think he was exhibiting a sense of humor?

Pablo Picasso, *Las Meninas* (after Velázquez). 1957. Oil on canvas. 2 × 2.6 m (6' 6¾" × 8' 6¾"). Museo Picasso, Barcelona, Spain. © 2003 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



► **FIGURE 1.15** This painting was interpreted by Picasso, another Spanish artist, three centuries after Velázquez completed it. Explain what is happening in the painting. The princess, in white, has a regal bearing. She is clearly the center of attention. Do you see the king and queen in the picture? Who is the person in the doorway? Can you describe the roles of the other people in the painting?

Diego Velázquez. *Las Meninas* (*The Maids of Honor*). 1656. Oil on canvas. 3.18 × 2.8 m (10'5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" × 9'3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"). Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.

## Ideas Commissioned by Employers

Many artists are hired by individuals or companies to create works of art. Graphic designers create corporate logos, brochures, and many other print materials. They may also design menus for restaurants. Fine artists, like sculptors and painters, are often commissioned to create artworks for display in public spaces and buildings.

## Ideas for Your Own Artwork

In the coming chapters, you will need to come up with ideas of your own for original works of art. Like all other artists, you may at times find yourself at a loss for ideas. You can look to the sources listed in this lesson for inspiration. The work of your peers can also inspire you. See the Student Art Portfolio features in Chapters 4–11 of this book for a showcase of student artworks and visual art journal ideas. You will find that keeping a visual art journal or sketchbook can be an enormous help. In addition to recording images, you may jot down ideas that come to you after participating in other art events such as concerts, movies, and theatre productions. You will also find that a sketchbook can be used to practice skills and techniques you learn in class.



### Activity

### Keeping a Sketchbook

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



### Check Your Understanding

1. Define the word *artist*.
2. Identify four different sources for artistic ideas.
3. Why do artists keep sketchbooks?