

# How Artists Use Texture

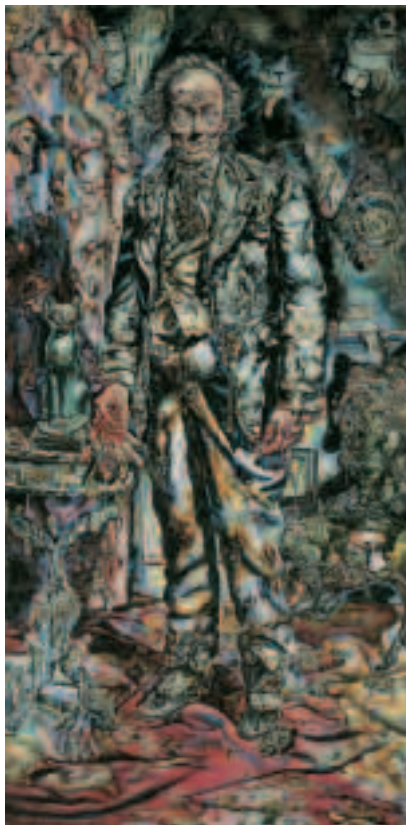
## Vocabulary

collage  
frottage  
grattage  
decalcomania

**T**he texture of surfaces is important in every form of visual art. Our minds are full of texture memories. Artists use both visual and real textures to make you remember those texture experiences.

Ivan Albright was a painter who loved to depict decaying, aging objects with meticulous precision. He painted the skin of the old gentleman in **Figure 7.6** to accent and exaggerate every tiny wrinkle. Look at the painting. How many different kinds of textures can you identify?

In contrast, Pierre-Auguste Renoir (ren-**wahr**) painted people with healthy, glowing complexions (**Figure 7.7**). How many different textures can you identify in this painting? Notice that both Albright and Renoir have imitated the texture of human skin. In each case, the artist has used texture to convey a feeling about the subject. In one painting the skin is appealing, in the other it is almost repulsive. Both artists have tried to control your reaction to the subject of the paintings through their use of visual texture.



▲ **FIGURE 7.6** Albright created this portrait for the movie called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The artist took over a year to create the textures that indicated extreme physical aging.

Ivan Albright. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 1943–44. Oil on canvas. 215.9 × 106.7 cm (85 × 42"). The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.



▲ **FIGURE 7.7** Renoir started his career as an artist in a porcelain factory. He copied famous portraits of beautiful women onto porcelain plates. Notice the skin texture of the sisters in this work. Compare and contrast this painting to Figure 7.6.

Pierre-Auguste Renoir. *Two Sisters (On the Terrace)*. 1881. Oil on canvas. 100.5 × 81 cm (39<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 31<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub>"). The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Larned Coburn Memorial Collection, 1933.455.

► **FIGURE 7.8** At times, van Gogh became so impatient with the progress of his work that he squeezed the paint directly from the tube onto the canvas. Then he used anything that was handy, including his fingers, to move and swirl the globs of paint around.

Vincent van Gogh. *Sunflowers*. 1888. Oil on canvas. 92 × 73 cm (36¼ × 28¾"). National Gallery, London, England.



Many painters use color and value patterns to produce the illusion of textures. Look, for instance, at the painting by Judith Leyster (Figure 10.4, page 257) or Rembrandt van Rijn (ryne) (Figure 5.36, page 124). These artists were experts at suggesting textures such as soft velvet, shiny satin, delicate lace, and fluffy feathers. When you look closely at their paintings, you discover that these artists do not paint every texture in photographic detail. They use a few brushstrokes to suggest the texture from a certain distance.

Instead of relying only on visual texture, many painters add real textures to their paintings. Vincent van Gogh (vahn **goh**) used such thick paint on his canvas that his swirling brushstrokes created a rough surface (**Figure 7.8**). The surface ridges of the thick paint actually make the paint look brighter. The ridges catch more light and reflect brighter colors to the viewer. If you were to touch a van Gogh painting you would feel the texture you see. Even today, artists feel that such textural qualities enhance their work.

Joan Mitchell is one contemporary painter who brushes on paint and does not try to smooth out the brushstrokes (**Figure 7.9**).

Some painters add real textures to their work by attaching various materials to the work's surface. Some artists add sand and other materials to the

paint. In some cases, artists create what is called a **collage** (kul-lahzh), or *an artwork created by pasting cut or torn materials such as paper, photographs, and fabric to a flat surface*. Although folk artists have used this technique for centuries, fine artists only began using collage in the last century. (The word wasn't even



◀ **FIGURE 7.9** Joan Mitchell remained an Abstract Expressionist throughout her entire painting career. This work refers to the snow and cold of her Chicago childhood. Notice how she has used the brushstrokes to show the excitement and tension of a snowy day in the city. What kinds of lines do you find in the brushstrokes?

Joan Mitchell. *Dirty Snow (Sale Neige)*. 1980. Oil on canvas. 219 × 180 cm (86¼ × 70⅞"). National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C. Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay.

► **FIGURE 7.10** Schapiro used pieces of embroidered, appliquéd, and crocheted fabrics that were created by women to add real textures to her work. In this way, she connected her work to the traditional women's arts of the past.

Miriam Schapiro. *In Her Own Image*. 1983. Acrylic and fabric on canvas. 152.4 × 254 cm (60 × 100"). Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Benwood Foundation and the 1983 Collectors' Group.



▲ **FIGURE 7.11** John Hoover is an Aleut sculptor. He uses the folklore of his people as subject matter, but he has developed a personal style that is not traditional. This work represents a female shaman. The circle around her face is made up of ravens that are escorting her on her journey.

John Hoover. *Shaman's Journey*. 2000. Cedar. Diameter: 81.3 cm (32"). Collection of the Artist.

invented until 1919.) Miriam Schapiro, an artist who uses collage, added bits of fabric, lace, and thread to her paintings to enrich the surface and to convey a message (**Figure 7.10**).

Sculptors must also be aware of texture because the tactile texture of each surface must fit the whole. Some sculptors imitate the tactile texture of skin, hair, and cloth; others create new textures to fit new forms. In **Figure 7.11**, the artist lets the texture of the cedar wood show through the natural pigments. In contrast, the sculptor of **Figure 7.12**, Edgar Degas, imitated tactile textures. He even added fabrics (a gauze skirt and a satin ribbon) to the figure to make it more realistic.

## MEET THE ARTIST

### EDGAR DEGAS



*French, 1834–1917*

Edgar Degas. *Self-Portrait*. c. 1862. Oil on canvas. 81 × 64.5 cm (31<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 25<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" ). Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

Edgar Degas (day-**gah**) was born in Paris in 1834. His family, wealthy bankers, supported his ambition to become an artist. He was educated at the *École des Beaux-Arts* by a French Classicist who trained him in classical drafting. This expertise in drawing is a main element in Degas' work.

Around 1865, Degas fell under the influence of the Impressionist movement and abandoned academic, classical subject matter. He began painting contemporary subjects such as music halls, theatres, and cafés. Unlike the Impressionists with whom he is often associated, however, Degas was not interested in the use of light or in depicting nature on canvas. He worked in a studio and tried to capture his models in natural and spontaneous movements. He preferred women as his subjects and is best known for his studies of ballet dancers, although he also painted milliners (hatmakers) and laundresses.

In the 1860s, he began experimenting with unusual methods of composition, such as alternate perspectives, odd visual angles, asymmetrical balance, and accidental cut-offs. These methods of composition would inspire many modern artists. As he grew older, his eyesight began to fail and he turned to a new process: sculpture. In his sculpture, as in his painting, he tried to capture spontaneous movement and realistic poses.



► **FIGURE 7.12** What an unusual combination of textures! The figure of the young dancer is cast in bronze. Even the vest and the ballet shoes she wears are bronze. To that Degas added a skirt made of gauzelike fabric and a satin hair ribbon. Why do you think he added real textures to the metal figure?

Edgar Degas. *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer*. Model c. 1880, cast 1922. Bronze, slightly tinted, with gauze skirt and satin hair ribbon. Height: 104.5 cm (41<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" ). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929. (29.100.370).

Architects are also aware of the importance of texture. They use stucco, brick, wood, stone, concrete, metal, and glass to create texture. Frank Lloyd Wright, one of the most influential architects of the twentieth century, believed that a building should develop out of its natural surroundings (**Figure 7.13**). Because of this, he selected textures that related to the local environment. Interior designers select textures for rugs, drapes, furniture, and artworks that complement different wall surfaces. This gives a sense of cohesiveness, or unity, to a design.

In crafts, textures are essential. Potters manipulate textures by pressing different objects into wet clay. They can also change surfaces by applying glazes. Some glazes are shiny, while others are matte.

Some glazes result in a crackle finish that gives a rough texture to a piece of pottery. Weavers control texture through the use of fibers and weaving techniques. For example, rough wool fibers have a different texture than smooth cotton fibers. In addition, weavers use different techniques to create texture. By twisting fibers as they weave, they can create a rough texture. Other artisans also use texture. Jewelry makers work with different kinds of metal to create various textures. They might emboss or press a raised design into metal or facet a stone to give its surfaces a smooth, shiny appearance. Feathers, seashells, seeds, bones, and teeth have been used to make jewelry and hair ornaments, and decorate clothing and masks (**Figure 7.14**).



▲ **FIGURE 7.13** The colors, forms, and textures of this building were planned so that Taliesin West would blend into the colors, forms, and textures of its desert setting. Wright believed that a building should be in harmony with its environment.

Frank Lloyd Wright. *Taliesin West*. Near Phoenix, Arizona.



▲ **FIGURE 7.14** Giant feathered masks like this one are worn by Tapirapé men as they run through the village in pairs shouting and causing a commotion. The other men of the village participate in a mock battle with the masqueraders.

Tapirapé People, Mato Grosso, Brazil. *Mask*. c. 1970. Glued and tied feather work, tropical bird feathers, mother-of-pearl, wood. 102.9 × 106.7 cm (40½ × 42"). Museum of International Folk Art, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Artists also invent textures to enrich their works. Max Ernst used three unusual techniques—*frottage*, *grattage*, and *decalcomania*—to create his Surrealist fantasy paintings. In **frottage** (froh-tahzh), designs and textural effects are created by placing paper over objects that have raised surfaces and rubbing the paper with graphite, wax, or crayon. In **Figure 7.15**, Ernst combines frottage with painting techniques. The texture rubbings you made earlier in this chapter are another form of frottage. To create **grattage** (grah-tahzh) effects, wet paint is scratched with a variety of tools, such as forks, razors, and combs. In **decalcomania**, paint is forced into random textured patterns. Paint is placed between two canvas surfaces. The canvases are then pulled apart.



▲ **FIGURE 7.15** Compare and contrast the kind of texture used in this painting with the textures in Figure 7.14.

Max Ernst. *Age of Forests*. 1926. Oil on canvas. 91.8 × 59.7 cm (36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>”). Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. A. Conger Goodyear Fund, 1964. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

## Activity

## Imagining Textures

### Creating Visual Solutions Using

**Imagination.** On a small piece of white paper, draw nine shapes of different sizes with a pencil or felt-tip pen. Some shapes should touch the edges of the paper. Fill each shape with sketches of a different texture. The textures should be imaginary. For instance, you could put lines of writing close together in one shape, or you could try repeating small shapes in another. Try line patterns, stippling, or smooth shadow.

**Computer Option.** Explore textures and effects that can be made with the Brush tool or other tools on the computer. Menus provide choices from thick, opaque oils to wet, transparent paint. Experiment. Save your results by applying your discoveries to objects, shapes, or scenes.



## Check Your Understanding

1. Define *collage*.
2. Describe a form of frottage.
3. What is a grattage effect?
4. Select and analyze two artworks from this lesson to form a conclusion about the meaning of the textures used.