Art in Time

A World History of Styles and Movements
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Art styles and movements are created or identified in many different ways. Some are fashioned by groups of like-minded artists who share a similar way of thinking or looking. Others are created in retrospect, by historians who seek to understand art based on shared affinities of technique or theme. Yet others are born out of political causes or in reaction to social or cultural circumstances – an attempt to alter history or reinforce the status quo or reject both in a determination to start again.

Art in Time introduces some 150 of the most important and influential styles, schools and movements, spanning not just the Western tradition but also styles from India, China, Japan, Latin America and Africa. Beginning with the present day and moving back in time, the reader is encouraged to discover the way art plays with, and builds on, earlier ideas and beliefs – reconnecting the dots or, indeed, finding new dots to connect. Someone familiar with Young British Art of the 1990s and Neo-Geo creations of the 1980s, for example, will discover that Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst borrowed from the irreverent attitudes and Ready-mades of early twentieth-century Dada, glorifying and commercializing Duchamp’s anti-art gestures. Chinese artists of the mid-1980s, part of the ‘85 New Wave movement, directly referenced mid-twentieth century Socialist Realism from both China and Russia, stealing the signs and symbols of a state-enforced style to use ironically as protest art. Mid-twentieth century Abstract Expressionism had its roots in the nineteenth century, when Impressionism first loosened the painter’s brush, and the Italian Renaissance is largely responsible for how we think of Classical art today.

Art in Time examines each style or movement in the context of the times in which it arose, because an understanding of the society and culture in which artists live is crucial to understanding their art. For art history is cultural history, and all art is culturally specific. The visual syntax of Cubism, for example, inspired in part by Picasso’s fascination with the non-Western tradition of African masks, was taken up by artists worldwide but translated in different ways, especially among artists working outside the West, and the result was expressive of their own artistic climate.

Looking at the history of art from where we stand today reveals it to be diverse and often complex, moving freely across a wide range of disciplines and influences. A work such as Empirical Construction, Istanbul (1), by Julie Mehretu, an American artist born in Ethiopia, reflects the overstimulation of contemporary global society, and at the same time its inescapable links to the past. Straddling Europe and Asia, Istanbul was capital of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires. With its flags, Islamic motifs and ancient Hagia Sofia church/mosque/museum at the centre, this densely layered work explores themes of nationalism, religion, art, sport and politics in the context of a chaotic, exhilarating, modern metropolis.

The intersections between the political, religious, economic and cultural timelines of disparate societies and art practices show that art is not created in a vacuum, chronological or geographical. There is no right or wrong way to understand the history of art, and the ever-shifting modes of constructing and deconstructing the discipline defy stagnation. This book is an invitation to see art anew, adapting and reshaping the ways we interpret the world around us.
The Information Age: Twenty-first to Late Twentieth Century

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When the World Wide Web launched in the early 1990s it signified the start of a new era opening an epoch of globalized networks and computers, paralleling the emergence of a unipolar world after the recent collapse of the Soviet Bloc. As a developing network, the internet became a space for exploration and experimentation within which entirely new categories of community, interaction and creativity could be imagined. Internet art - also referred to as Digital art, net art or Web art – emerged as a direct response to this technology, with artists approaching the internet as an artistic medium to be explored, shaped and challenged. While the promise of an art that is universally accessible and infinitely expandable can be traced back to the aspirations of earlier twentieth century avant garde. Internet art is unique in that it uses and re appropriates the defining tool of the information age.

A key feature of this art is its examination of the technology itself, and the presence it has in daily life. Joan Heemskerk (b. 1968) and Dirk Paesmans (b. 1965) – the duo behind the artist collective IOS – create online projects and new media works that distort and repurpose familiar software, web browsers, search engines and various other online platforms in an effort to create new modes of interacting with the digital landscape. In GEO GOO (2008), the artists programmed glitches and malfunctions into Google Maps, transforming the symbols and icons of the online service into a semi abstract, decorative work of art. Purposefully disorientating and at the same time ornate, such a project inherits the anarchic history of collage (see pp.360-64), while at the same time it evokes the lushly ornamented maps of the Dutch Golden Age (pp.876-79).

In the chaotic and politicized public space of the internet, it is not surprising that artists have sought to address and protect its democratic autonomy. The Yes Men (1998-), a project created by the collaborative group I/O/D, offered users an alternative web browser that revealed the inner workings – the HTML coding – of any visited website. The Yes Men were famously able to disrupt and satirize the World Trade Organization by cloning and altering the WTO’s official website, with a member of the group eventually appearing on television as a ‘representative’ of the international body. Projects like these blur the line between artwork and political activism and recall the history of such online action as early 1990s protest movements such as ConfrontArt (1998) – a site initiated by the collective CALL, together with Johanna Gerz. ConfrontArt is an online project that invites participants to submit their own images, which are then quilted together to form a visual whole. Collaborative, self sustaining and ongoing, the work continues to grow and change shape. ConfrontArt offers a space for collective creation, allowing participants to visualise the potential of the internet as a democratic, unified whole.

The World Wide Web

The internet is a collaborative and creative space allowing participants to visualize the potential of the internet as a democratic, unified whole.

World War II came to an end to Allied forces, bringing Empire formally surrenders Hiroshima; the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and The US drops atomic the US Security Treaty with Japan signs a including Okinawa ends; US retains several US occupation of Japan


The US drops atomic bombs, US retains several islands for military use, including Okinawa


In 1953 Jikken Kōbō began to work with a film. In their ‘Fifth Presentation’, Tales of an Uncanny World (2) and three other autoslide works were presented, each incorporating futuristic imagery and a variety of sounds from music to poetry to documentary narration, and purportedly including Japan’s first instance of musique concrète. The collaborative image-making of the autoslide works led to a series of interventions from 1953 to 1955 in the Asahi Picture News section of the major weekly magazine Asahi Graph. Each week the APN title page featured a photograph of a construction by a different member of Jikken Kōbō, with each successive image playing off the previous one. Jikken Kōbō’s The Future Eve (1) was a bal- let based on a French novel about a robotic woman and a human man. Inspired by the increasing alienation engendered by Japan’s rapid post-war industrialization, Jikken Kōbō’s iteration of the story ends with the lawful killing of Adam for his love of the robot Eve. In spite of a fascination with science fiction, the group’s distrust of modern industrial production explains why Jikken Kōbō never incorporated into a Bauhauslike artists’ production company, electing to remain independent and experimental until unofficially disbanding after 1957. Many of its members participated in experimental events at Sōgetsu Art Center and Osaka’s Expo ’70, and set the tone for rebellions against the art establishment that led to the development of anti art by groups such as Tokyo Fluxus, Hi Red Center and Neo-Dada (pp.197–210).
Their idealized and reassuring depictions of the American Midwest and its rural way of life had much in common with his own experience and his vision of the future America. 

**1934**

**The documentary The City at the World’s Fair in New York, contrasting the industrialized city with the unhampered growth of small-town America.**

**1935**

**Charles Lindbergh’s infant son in New Jersey.**

**1935**

**The Chrysler Building in New York, briefly becoming the tallest structure in the world; it is surpassed by the Empire State Building 11 months later.**

**1936**

**Deans and other architects design the auditorium at the New School for Social Research in New York.**

**1937**

**CBS stages the first color TV broadcast.**

**1939**

**Thornton Wilder’s play Our Town debuts.**

**1940**

**Earhart disappears while flying over the Pacific Ocean to Howland Island.**

**1942**

**Aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart debuts Town.**

**1943**

**The documentary The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley is inspired by a well-known folk song, shows figures unnaturally contorted, almost grotesque, but the image itself is bold and brimming with movement, action and emotion. This bias towards dramatic storytelling is also seen in the work of John Steuart Curry, who was more preoccupied with the struggles of the archetypal rural family against violent forces of nature. Tornado Over Kansas (4) depicts the patriarchal, square-jawed father leading the family to safety and standing firm amidst the twisting structures of the homestead. Curry had previously been employed as an illustrator and offers little in the way of ambiguity. The work of Grant Wood, who often told journalists he returned to Iowa because “I realized my best ideas came to me whilst I was mowing corn”, is far more eloquent.**

**Even the title of his masterpiece, American Gothic (2), is ambiguous. While it seems to refer to the building behind the main figures, it also has connotations with Edgar Allan Poe and the prejudice prevalent in big American cities towards supposedly inbreed country folk. The piece could be read as both sincere and satirical in its portrayal of nineteenth-century Midwestern values. Edward Hopper (1882–1967) is similarly perplexing in Nighthawks (3). Like Wood, Hopper contrasts to earlier Regionalists such as Benton, whose work he thought “caricatured America”. Yet Nighthawks does not offer a hopeful view of the American heartland, but a melancholy vision of the urban isolation and incipient violence that became more visible and prevalent during the Depression.**

**Regionalism**

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**1. Edward Hopper, Nighthawks, 1942 Oil on canvas, 84 x 105 cm / 33 x 41 in Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois**

**2. Grant Wood, American Gothic, 1930 Oil on canvas, 86 x 75.5 cm / 33 x 30 in Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois**

**3. Thomas Hart Benton, The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley, 1937 Oil on canvass, 117 x 153 cm / 46 x 60 in Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas**

**4. John Steuart Curry, Tornado Over Kansas, 1932 Oil on canvas, 127 x 152 cm / 49 x 60 in Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee**

**5. Thomas Hart Benton, The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley, 1937 Oil on canvas, 117 x 153 cm / 46 x 60 in Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas**

**6. Grant Wood, American Gothic, 1930 Oil on canvas, 86 x 75.5 cm / 33 x 30 in Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois**

**7. Edward Hopper, Nighthawks, 1942 Oil on canvas, 84 x 105 cm / 33 x 41 in Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois**
Dada

‘Dada means nothing’, wrote Tristan Tzara in the 1919 Dada Manifesto. Indeed, Dada is definable more easily by what it was not than by what it was. It was not a cohesive movement, but a mentality that was taken up in a variety of ways: chaotic, experimental performance in Zurich from 1916; satirical collage and painting in Berlin and Cologne; playful poetry and ‘ready-mades’ in Paris and New York. It was not about formal aesthetics or skill, unlike even such movements as Cubism (pp.180–83) or Futurism (pp.196–98). It was not about conforming: class, religion, war and art itself were all under scrutiny and attack by often humorous and always incisive artists who sought to break down barriers between art and everyday life.

For post-war Germany, everyday life was wrought with anxiety and a sense of wounded loss: both Car with the Dada Kitchen Knife (1), by Hannah Höch (1889–1978), and The Hörer Picture (2), by Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), speak to this with painful eloquence. Höch used photos from newspapers and magazines to create a montage in which the placement of image and text is telling. Kaiser Wilhelm’s face appears surrounding the word ‘anti’, and Höch’s own face is next to a map of countries with ‘anti’ interspersed with puns. Schwitters’ The Worker Picture (3), by Kurt Schwitters, consists of fragments of wood, wire and newspapers, seeming to stutter and grind; both picture and worker are vulnerable and struggling. The Dada work produced in Paris and New York may appear whimsical in comparison, but it has an important legacy in Surrealism (pp.192–97). Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) used an upturned urinal in Fountain (2) – signed with the pseudonym ‘R. Mutt’ – transforming it into a ‘ready-made’, an existing object, manipulated subtly if at all, and claimed as ‘art’. It was rejected from the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York, despite the promise that all works submitted would be shown. 

Fountain was dismissed as ‘immoral’ and ‘pure plumbing’, but the repetition in a New York publication of the Blühenson clear: ‘Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under a new title and point of view.’ Duchamp thus questions what art should be, defying the importance of originality and transforming the everyday into something inherently dysfunctional and yet far from decorative. Dada’s place within art history is the subject of Dada Movement (10), by Francis Picabia (1889–1973): the image of a battery-operated clock mechanism marks the end-point in a succession of attempts to define what modern art should be, from Ingres to Kandinsky. Dada acts as a transformer, redefining both art and the measurement of life itself: the clock face contains the names of several key Dadaists, and the pendulum weight is labelled ‘391’, after his New York Dada publication.