

# Modern and Contemporary Art

## A Resource Guide for Visiting LACMA

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### About this Guide

This guide contains information and activities that will help you prepare for your students' visit to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This guide includes:

- **Information about your tour and about LACMA**
- **Selected works of art with information, questions, and prompts:** These examples represent the types of art, method of discussion, and activities that your students will experience in the galleries. The artworks profiled in this guide may not be on view in the galleries during your tour.
- **Pre-visit Activities:** In preparation for your trip, you may wish to use the featured works and discussion questions in conjunction with the activities listed in the "Before Your Visit to the Museum" section below.
- **Post-visit Activities:** After your trip, extend learning with the activities suggested in the section "After Your Visit to the Museum."
- **Related California Standards:** All LACMA tours for students address Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and other California state standards.
- **Further Resources:** Use these resources in your lesson planning or share them with your students, as appropriate, to provide additional information and background.

### About the Museum

LACMA is the largest encyclopedic museum in the western United States with more than 100,000 works of art. Through its extensive collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California. The collection includes artworks from various cultures from prehistoric to the present.

### About LACMA School Tours

Student experiences in the museum are grounded in close looking, inference, and inquiry. By closely examining works of art and inferring what is depicted based on observation, students construct their own understandings about works of art. LACMA docents are trained to facilitate discussion rather than lecture about facts and dates, allowing students the opportunity to share what they notice and therefore, what they are naturally interested in discussing. Docents will guide students to come to their own conclusions and use visual evidence to support their opinions. In this method of learning, rather than determining whether answers are "right" or "wrong," students discover the satisfaction of constructing meaning with their peers.

### Introduction to the Tour

Modern and contemporary artists often question the artistic movements that came before them, and in some cases, reject traditional materials, processes, and subject matter in favor of art that is based on ideas, grounded in a global world, or informed by modern technologies. As a result, some modern and contemporary works leave viewers scratching their heads, wondering why what they're looking at is considered art. The Modern and Contemporary Art tour explores common themes and individual approaches used by artists in the 20th and 21st centuries to create their work. This guide explores the following big idea question that relates to the tour theme—What is art and what does it mean to you?

This tour is aligned with California State Standards for Visual Arts for all grades, Common Core state standards for English Language arts for all grades, and History/Social Science for grade 11.

## Before Your Visit to the Museum

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To prepare students for the *Modern and Contemporary Art* tour, you may wish to complete the following activities:

### What is Art?

Ask students to share what they think of when they hear the word "art." Prompt them to state what types of media and subject matter come to mind first. Write students' responses on the board. Complete the activities below and then revisit this list. After discussing several modern and contemporary works, ask students if they would add any new words to the list.

### Art from the Unexpected

Inform students that many modern and contemporary artists often reject traditional artistic media such as paint and clay. They also might create art for entire spaces rather than just for a wall or pedestal. Artists such as El Anatsui and Barbara Kruger (featured in this guide) create works with and within the stuff of everyday life. Discuss a work of art that uses recycled materials, found objects, or spaces you wouldn't expect to find art. Have students imagine what the work would be like if it were created or displayed in traditional ways. How would the meaning of the work of art change?

### New Art, New Principles

Tell students that the elements and principles of art have been used to formally analyze artworks for decades. Some art education scholars believe that new "postmodern principles" should be used to adequately analyze contemporary works of art.

### Discuss the Following Postmodern Principles:

**appropriation:** recycling imagery

**juxtaposition:** placing imagery or ideas next to one another to suggest new meanings

**layering:** placing imagery on top of one another to suggest new meanings, and the interaction of text and image.

Have students view three to four contemporary works of art and select two to three traditional and postmodern principles that they feel is best represented in each work.

See the "Further Resources" for information on traditional formal analysis and the postmodern principles of art.

## After Your Visit to the Museum

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Extend your students' learning after their visit to the museum with the following activities:

### What is Art, Revisited

Have each student select their favorite work of art from their experience at LACMA. Tell them to select the postmodern principle they believe is most central to the work of art. Tell students to create an original work that is inspired by their favorite piece at LACMA. They should use the same postmodern principle in their own work.

Have students reflect on the works they created and those they discussed at LACMA. Revisit the list about art that was created before the class visit to the museum. Ask students if they would add any new words to the list. Finally, have each student write their own definition of art.



***Jeannette I, Jeannette II,  
Jeannette III, Jeannette IV, Jeannette V***

HENRI MATISSE

(France, 1869–1954)

France, 1910–1913

Bronze, 23½ x 12 x 12 in.

Gift of the Art Museum Council in memory of Penelope Rigby (M.68.48.1)

© Succession H. Matisse, Paris / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/236315>

# ***Jeannette I, Jeannette II, Jeannette III, Jeannette IV, Jeannette V***

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## **About the Work of Art**

In this series of sculpture busts, French artist Henri Matisse depicts the head of his neighbor Jeanette Vaderin—in five different ways. Matisse began the series in 1910 with *Jeanette I*, a relatively naturalistic portrayal of the model. Over the next six years, Matisse works through his exploration of the human figure, becoming more and more abstract with each head. For example, the curly short hair of *Jeanette I* becomes four distinct forms in the sunken-eyed *Jeanette III*. By the time the artist completes *Jeanette V* in 1913, Matisse sculpts a non-symmetrical and hairless figure, stripped of any likeness to the original model and reduced to an inventive composite of bulging forms and irregular textures.

Although each sculpture is an independent work of art, the group as a whole can be interpreted as the manifestation of Matisse's artistic process. Indeed, he turned to sculpture initially when he was exploring paintings that depicted flattened forms and surface patterns. The artist turned to sculpture to work out—in tangible, three-dimensional form—the ideas that he explored in his paintings. He once stated: "I sculpted like a painter. I did not sculpt like a sculptor."

## **Sources**

Flam, Jack. *Henry Matisse: Sculpture*. New York: C & M Arts, 1998.

Monod-Fontaine, Isabelle. *The Sculpture of Henri Matisse*. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1984.

## **Discussion Questions and Prompts**

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at *Jeanette III*. What are your initial observations?
- What details do you notice?
- How would you describe the figure?
- How does the work compare to a traditional representation of a person's head?
- Compare *Jeanette III* to *Jeanette I* and *Jeanette V*. What do the three heads have in common?
- What makes each sculpture unique?
- Matisse created *Jeanette I* first, and then he created *Jeanette II* through *Jeanette V*. How did the heads evolve over time?
- Why might the artist make a sculpture bust more and more abstract?
- Which bust of *Jeanette* do you like best, and why?



***Cold Shoulder***

ROY LICHTENSTEIN

(United States, New York, New York City, 1923–1997)

United States, 1963, Oil and Magna on canvas, 68½ x 48 in.

Gift of Robert H. Halff through the Modern and Contemporary Art Council (M.2005.38.5).

© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/207376>

# Cold Shoulder

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## About the Work of Art

American artist Roy Lichtenstein is a pioneer in Pop art, a movement beginning in the 1950s that responded to the pervasiveness of reproductions—of billboards, advertising, and mass media—by using similar techniques of mass production or imagery from mass media. Essentially, Pop art can be characterized by its blatant copying of copies. Lichtenstein's copies of choice were children's stories, advertisements, product packaging, and—as in this painting *Cold Shoulder*—comic books.

In his comic-inspired works, Lichtenstein would select images from romance or war comic books. He would sketch and revise it until he was satisfied with the composition, and then use a projector to display the sketch at a larger scale so that he could transfer it onto canvas. At an enlarged scale, the drama of a particular comic panel is heightened. Next, he would add color and his trademark Benday dots, which is a printing process named after the printer Benjamin Day.

Benday dots were invented to create more colors than those available through the four-color printing process (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black). To create the appearance of new shades, two or more colors of Benday dots would be overlapped or spaced at a strategic distance from one another. For example, when magenta dots are spaced far apart on a white background, the illusion of pink is created. Lichtenstein originally replicated this mechanical production in his art by applying the dots using a dog brush with plastic bristles, but he would eventually use a metal stencil.

The result of this appropriation (the use of a preexisting image to create something new) is an image that emphasizes ideas and process rather than symbolism or individual expression. Stripped from its original narrative context, *Cold Shoulder* depicts a one-sided dialogue. It is up to the viewer to fill in the missing narrative, yet the woman in the painting is turned away from the viewer and therefore always unknowable.

## Sources

Rondeau, James, and Wagstaff, Sheena. *Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012.

Waldman, Diane. *Roy Lichtenstein*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1993.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at this work of art. What do you notice?
- What do you notice about the woman's clothing?
- What do you notice about her body language?
- How would viewers relate to the figure differently if she was depicted facing us?
- How is this painting similar to or different from a cartoon?
- Consider the shape of the speech bubble. How does it compare to a typical speech bubble?
- One could say the word "hello" in many different ways by changing one's tone. Take into consideration the shape of the speech bubble, and then say the word "hello" as if you are the woman in the painting.

Describe how Lichtenstein makes his comic-inspired paintings (see "About the Work of Art" section). Continue discussing the work using the following questions:

- How does this information impact your understanding or appreciation of the work of art?
- In what ways do you think Lichtenstein's painting is more or less "legitimate" as a work of art than paintings that were created entirely from an artist's imagination?
- Lichtenstein considered his art visualizations of ideas. What do you think this means?



**Untitled (Shafted)**

BARBARA KRUGER

(United States, New Jersey, Newark, active New York City and Los Angeles, born 1945)

Olson Visual, Inc. (United States, California, Hawthorne, founded 1954), 2008

Digital-print installation, Installation: 94 x 18 x 12 ft.

Gift of Carole Bayer Sager, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for the opening of the Broad Contemporary Art Museum (M.2012.20) © Barbara Kruger

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/215500>

# Untitled (Shafted)

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## About the Work of Art

An elevator is not a typical place for a work of art but Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Shafted)* relies on its location as much as its content. Kruger is known for displaying her art in untraditional ways, including on billboards, bus stops, ceilings, and in parks. *Untitled (Shafted)* is a large digital print comprised of text and images that spans three stories within the shaft of an elevator. As viewers enter and exit a space typically used simply for moving from point A to point B, they see an attention-grabbing list of consumer products such as "lipstick," "cars," "sunglasses," and "sneakers." But rather than encouraging viewers to buy these products, Kruger interrupts the stream of consumer products with the rhetorical question, "Plenty should be enough—right?"

Taking cues from the slick and commanding presence of advertisements, Kruger's work is big and bold with blocks of red, white, and black type juxtaposed with eye-catching images reminiscent of graphic design. This signature style is visible in her work produced over the past four decades. The trademark look of her work has its roots in a graphic design job Kruger landed at the magazine *Mademoiselle* after studying at Parson's School of Design in New York. As a designer of a popular magazine, she developed a strong understanding of how choices of fonts, colors, and graphics can capture and sustain a reader's attention.

Like effective magazine layouts, Kruger's work rejects subtlety, craftsmanship, and the obvious hand of an individual artist—qualities we typically associated with fine art—in favor of accessible imagery, straightforward text, and digitally-produced prints. By abandoning traditional techniques and formats of fine art, Kruger challenges viewers' assumptions of what art should be and who should have access to it.

The result is a critique of the industry whose language and imagery Kruger appropriates. In *Untitled (Shafted)*, Kruger places her critiques on the literal walls of an institution's interior architecture, encouraging viewers to look critically not just at the works of art within the museum's walls but also at the practices of the museum itself and, moreover, at the objects that we surround ourselves with in our daily lives.

## Source

Alberro, Alexander. *Barbara Kruger*. New York, Rizzoli, 2010.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Look at the different images of Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Shafted)* that are available on the LACMA website. What do you notice about the words and imagery on the walls of the elevator shaft?
- What do Barbara Kruger's words make you think about? What message do you think the artist is communicating by listing commercial products within an elevator of an art museum?
- What do you notice about the font, color, size, and placement of the words? How would your interpretation of the work be different if the artist made different choices (e.g., lower case, cursive, pastel colors)?
- Consider the images that Kruger selected to juxtapose with the text and how she chose to depict them (angle, size, location?). What is the impact of including a close-up image of eyes directly staring at the viewer? How does the scale of the eyes and the boots affect your understanding of the work?
- Consider the title of the work, *Untitled (Shafted)*. Why do you think the artist chose this for the title? What relevance does the word "shaft" have to the artwork? Based on Kruger's art, who do you think she feels is being shafted and why?





***Fading Scroll***

EL ANATSUI

(Ghana, active Nigeria, born 1944), 2007

Aluminum liquor bottle caps and copper wire, 136 x 472 in. (345.44 x 1198.88 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Fowler Museum, UCLA

Purchased jointly with funds provided by The Broad Art Foundation,  
Phil Berg, Mary and Robert Looker, and Margaret Pexton Murray (M.2008.110)

© El Anatsui

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/215505>

# Fading Scroll

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## About the Work of Art

Ghanian-born artist El Anatsui transforms the refuse of everyday life in Nigeria into beautiful large-scale sheets of metal that drape and fold like a glittering tapestry. *Fading Scroll* is made of thousands of flattened liquor bottle caps stitched together in complicated patterns with copper wire. The result is a sumptuous sculptural panel that references traditional African textiles. Red, blue, yellow, and black bottle tops are woven together in patterns that evoke kente cloth, a woven textile in Ghana.

Due to the nature of the sculptures' flexible construction, Anatsui's metal works are never installed exactly the same. A portion of *Fading Scroll* appears to slide down the wall until it lies in a colorful heap on the floor. The colors gradually fade to a silvery white as the work transitions from a limp mass on the floor to a smoother, undulating surface on the wall.

Although the artist's use of bottle caps can be traced to his discovery of a bag of bottles outside of town in 1998, he began purchasing bottle tops from a distillery that can refill used bottles but sells its unusable caps as scrap aluminum. The artist is less concerned with notions of recycling than with the artistic process and with the transformation of materials into works that investigate history and culture. Bottle caps, for example, represent an important but sobering part of African history because alcohol was exchanged to African traders for slaves. One day of tedious labor by several assistants will yield about one square foot of material for Anatsui's sculptural works. Through a time-intensive, meticulous process, bottle caps that are usually tossed aside are elevated to comprise a work of art to be contemplated and admired.

## Sources

Binder, Lisa M. "Anatsui, El." *Grove Art Online*. Oxford Art Online. Oxford University Press, accessed August 26, 2013, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T2086250>.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art. "LACMA and the Fowler Acquire Key Contemporary African Sculpture, El Anatsui's *Fading Scroll*." Press Release. October 28, 2008. <http://www.lacma.org/sites/default/files/elanatsui.pdf>

Mullin Vogel, Susan. *El Anatsui: Art and Life*. Munich, London, and New York: Prestel, 2012.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at this work of art. Be sure to look at it from left to right and from top to bottom. What do you notice?
- What words would you use to describe this work of art?
- What do you notice about the colors in the work of art?
- Look closely at the details. How was this work made?
- This work was made by stitching together thousands of repurposed bottle caps with copper wire in an intricate pattern. Where do you see pattern in the work?
- When you think of bottle caps, what words come to mind?
- For Anatsui, bottle caps represent an important part of African history. Europeans brought alcohol to Africa in exchange for goods; and later, alcohol was traded to African traders for slaves. How does this information impact your understanding of this work?
- What qualities of sculpture does this work of art have?
- This work has been compared to a textile called kente, a cloth made in Ghana that was originally used to make festive attire for special occasions. How is it similar to and different from a textile?
- Think about the title *Fading Scroll*. Why do you think the artist chose to title his work this way?
- Does the work remind you of anything in your own life? What title would you give this piece?

## Related California State Standards

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### California State Content Standards for Visual Arts

#### Grade 6

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value).
- Artistic Perception 1.2: Discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea, and differences in media.
- Artistic Perception 1.3: Describe how artists can show the same theme by using different media and styles.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

#### Grade 7

- Historical and Cultural Context 3.2: Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and cultures and explain how those works reflect the society in which they were made.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Explain the intent of a personal work of art and draw possible parallels between it and the work of a recognized artist.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Take an active part in a small-group discussion about the artistic value of specific works of art, with a wide range of the viewpoints of peers being considered.

#### Grade 8

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

#### Grades 9–12

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
- Artistic Perception 1.5: Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.3: Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

### Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts—Grades 6–12

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Speaking and Listening

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## **California State Standards for History/Social Studies —Grade 11**

11.8.8. Discuss forms of popular culture, with emphasis on their origins and geographic diffusion (e.g., jazz and other forms of popular music, professional sports, architectural and artistic styles).

### **Further Resources**

Gude, Olivia. "Postmodern Principles: In Search of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Art Education." National Art Education Association Web site.  
[https://naea.digication.com/omg/Postmodern\\_Principles](https://naea.digication.com/omg/Postmodern_Principles)

J. Paul Getty Museum. *Understanding Formal Analysis*.  
[http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building\\_lessons/formal\\_analysis.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html)

MoMA Learning.  
[http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning)

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. *Contemporary Art Start* Curriculum Guide.  
<http://edu.moca.org/education/curric>

### **Credits**

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