

Chapter 8: Art and Identity

Peggy Blood and Pamela J. Sachant

8.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Name and categorize ways that artists explore the concept of identity
- Understand how art serves as a commentary on society
- Analyze how politics and societal concerns may influence art
- Understand how art expresses individual and group identity
- Understand how art preserves national culture and personal identity

8.2 INTRODUCTION

One of the more important themes emerging from the last century has been the individual's search for identity. For example, genealogical websites have proliferated and special television programs are devoted to the subject. Since it first aired on PBS in 2012, Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Finding Your Roots* has been a popular program. The British version, *The Guardian*, has been successful since 2006.

Some anthropologists suggest that the deep-rooted interest in identity or ancestry is partly shaped by evolutionary forces dating back to early humans supporting each other in extended family groups. Anthropologist Dwight Read theorizes that the Neolithic people were the first to understand the concept of the family tree and the perception of self in a family unit and in society.¹ If connected through blood, people have the tendency to be more willing to care for each other; a common interest and support system is readily realized within a clan or a group.

Early humans created twoand three-dimensional likenesses of themselves in their environment to help understand who they were in relation to the other members of their group. Contemporary humans do the same; they make records of themselves with family members, most commonly in photographs and Selfies, and on Instagram. It is the same fundamental concept and placement in an environment that collectively identifies who we are in society, for example, in social gatherings, organizations, and religious settings. This means, above all, that we must place ourselves within the world in order to obtain identity. Children search for their identity at a very young age by observing and recognizing their parents and family members. Their markings within

¹ Ghose, Tia (Oct. 26, 2012). Why we care about our ancestry, Live Science.

a simple drawing of self and family—similar to those of early humans—help them to vindicate and confirm who they are and how they are perceived by their family group.

Like children, artists sometimes explore their identity through self-portraits and symbolically in works of art that relate to ancestry or culture. Doing so allows them to take a look inside their core and see how they fit within their contemporary culture; this investigation of self plays an important role in how artists understand their environment and the world.

Vincent van Gogh is known as a person who spent much of his time in solitude. He painted more than thirty self-portraits between the years 1886 and 1889, placing him among the most prolific self-portraitists of all time. Indeed, some of his most respected works are his self-portraits that trace his image throughout the last years of his life, the most crucial to his career. (Figures 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3) While Van Gogh used the study of his own image to help develop his skills as an artist, these self-portraits also give us insights into the artist's life and well being, how he fit in society, and his place among the groups with whom he associated.



Figure 8.1 | *Self-Portrait with Straw Hat*

Artist: Vincent van Gogh

Author: Met Museum

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

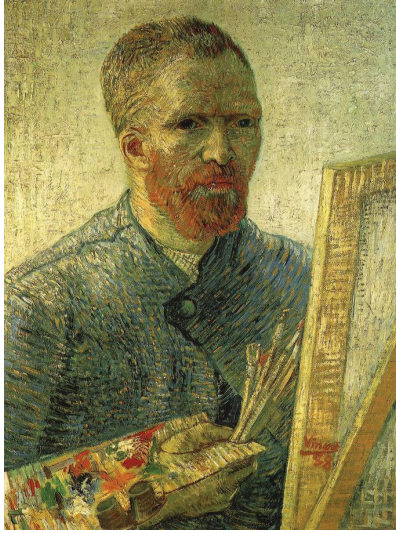


Figure 8.2 | *Self-portrait as a painter*

Artist: Vincent van Gogh

Author: Web Museum

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



Figure 8.3 | *Self-portrait with a bandaged ear*

Artist: Vincent van Gogh

Author: The Courtland Institute of Art

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Like Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso painted a number of self-portraits. Throughout his career, Picasso painted various likenesses that reflected changes in himself, his style, his artistic development, as well as in his life style and beliefs—all of which may be viewed closely from the content of his paintings. (Figures 8.4 and 8.5) The first self-portrait, painted in 1901 while he was

establishing himself as an artist in Paris, France, and still spending time in Barcelona, Spain, reflects the somber mode and tones of his Blue Period (1901-1904). The second, dated to 1906, at the very end of his Rose Period (1904-1906), Picasso depicts himself as the artist who by that time was moving in artistic circles, gaining respect, and acquiring patrons.

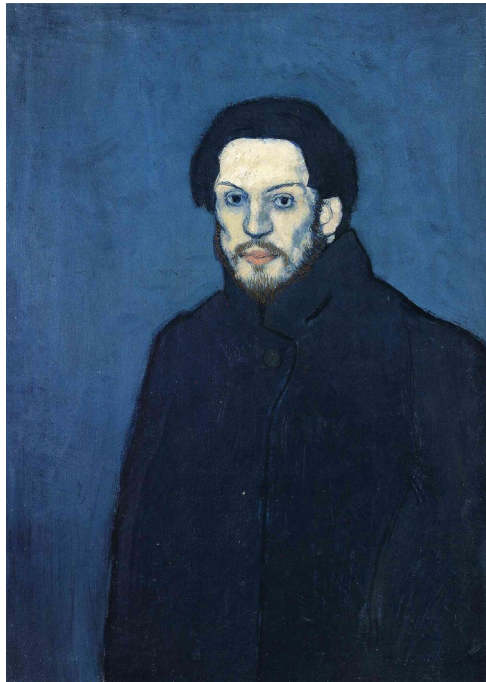


Figure 8.4 | *Self-portrait*

Artist: Pablo Picasso

Source: WikiArt

License: Public Domain



Figure 8.5 | Self-portrait

Artist: Pablo Picasso

Source: WikiArt

License: Public Domain

Frida Kahlo (1907-1954, Mexico) used the iconography of her Mexican heritage to paint herself and the pain that had become an integral part of her life following a bus accident at the age of 18 in which she suffered numerous injuries. She identified as a group member of her country, with Mexican culture and ancestry, and as belonging to the female gender. Kahlo's self-portraits are dramatic, bloody, brutal, and at times overtly political. ([Self-Portrait, Frida Kahlo](#)) In seeking her roots, she voiced concern for her country as it struggled for an independent cultural identity. She spoke to her country and people through her art. Kahlo's art was inspired by her public beliefs and personal sufferings; she wanted her art to speak from her consciousness.

Although self-portraits of today may be slightly different from those of earlier decades, they still depict self-exploration and identity through society and groups that communicate who we are. Cai Guo-Qiang (b. 1958, China, lives USA) exploded small charges of gunpowder to create an image of himself. ([SelfPortrait: A Subjugated Soul, Cai Guo-Qiang](#)) Different from those by Van Gogh, Picasso, and Kahlo, Cai's self-portrait does not have any likeness or resemblance to his personal features, but it too sends a message about our society and how Cai relates to it. For example, the artist associates the lack of identifying information, rendering him anonymous, with contemporary society, and the fired gunpowder with both chaos and transformation.

Despite the distance in time that separates early and modern humans, the search for their place in society and who they are remains of fascination and a mystery to all humans regardless

of their time in history.

8.3 INDIVIDUAL VS CULTURAL GROUPS

Often when one thinks of an artist, the image is of someone doing solitary work in a studio. During the Romantic period of the late eighteenth century until around 1850, artists, writers, and composers were associated with individualism and with working alone; this trend continued to develop up until recent times. The Romantic period valued and celebrated individual originality with musical and literary geniuses such as Ludwig van Beethoven, Frédéric Chopin, Robert Schumann, John Keats, Edgar Allan Poe, and Mary Shelley. The visual arts boasted such geniuses as Francisco Goya, Eugène Delacroix, William Blake (1757-1827, England), and Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835, France). (Figures 8.6 and 8.7) Artists of the period exemplified the Romantic values of the expression of the artists' feelings, personal imagination, and creative experimentation as opposed to accepting tradition or popular mass opinion. Artists in the period broke traditional rules; indeed, they considered it desirable to break the rules and overthrow tradition.



Figure 8.6 | *Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing*

Artist: William Blake

Author: Tate Britain

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



Figure 8.7 | *The Battle of Abukir, 25 July 1799*

Artist: Antoine-Jean Gros

Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

From the Medieval to the Baroque periods, however, artists worked together in workshops and guilds, and schools were formed that stressed the importance of preserving heritage and history through rigorous and systematic artistic training. Large-scale commissions often required numerous hands to complete a work, emphasizing collaboration. Nevertheless, the artwork was expected to have a consistent style and quality of craftsmanship. To satisfy those various needs, artists often specialized in a particular type of subject matter. For example, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640, Germany, lived Flanders) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625, Flanders) collaborated on more than twenty paintings over twenty-five years. (Figure 8.8) In their *Madonna in a Garland of Roses*, Rubens's celebrated skill as a figurative painter can be seen in the serenely glowing face of the Virgin Mary and energetic cavorting of the cherubs surrounding the circular arrangement of flowers painted with accuracy and delicacy by Brueghel, who was known for his lively nature scenes.



Figure 8.8 | *Madonna in a Garland of Flowers*

Artist: Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder

Author: The Bridgeman Art Library

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

A recent study by a Yale University researcher found the perception of high quality art today is that it is produced by a single individual. If produced by two or three people, as in a mural or public work projects, the value of the art drops. For creative works, perceptions of quality therefore appear to be based on perceptions of individual, rather than total effort. Nevertheless, a new trend across the world in general suggests that this tradition, which first arose in the West during the Renaissance, is not the norm around the globe; that is, the value of art as located in the single artist who produces art individually and alone may be more specifically based in certain cultures. Artists in the twenty-first century are collaborating with others through social media and/or face-to-face encounters. It is interesting to remember that the word “art” derives from a root that means to “join” or fit together. A whole constellation of ideas and practices can be accomplished through networking and collaboration as artists participate in group residencies and apprenticeships similar to workshop traditions of centuries ago to learn the customary methods and advanced techniques of their art.

8.3.1 Nation

The Kingdom of Benin, located in the southern region of modern Nigeria and home to the Edo people, was ruled by a succession of **obas**, or divine kings. It grew from a city-state into an empire during the reign of Oba Ewuare the Great (r. 1440-1473). From 1440, obas ruled the

kingdom until it was taken over by the British in 1897. Remarkably, the obas and people of Benin remained in control of their trading relations with Europeans and without interference from the rulers of the nations they traded with until the second half of the nineteenth century, prior to foreign rule. The city of Benin prospered and grew through trade with the Portuguese, Dutch, and British.

One of the benefits of dealing with merchants-sailors who traveled the seas was the variety of goods they brought with them and were eager to trade for foodstuff grown or refined by the Edo people. In particular, the Edo treasured brass and coral, along with the ivory they acquired through elephant hunts. Those materials were reserved for the oba and his court, and were used in abundance in the wide array of ceremonial and sacred objects created under each ruler. Kingship was passed from father to firstborn son, and, upon ascending to the throne, the new oba was expected to create an altar made of brass for his father, as well as one for his mother, generally in ivory, if she had attained the status of queen mother. The new oba also created a brass head to honor his predecessor. (Figure 8.9) Over time, objects such as plaques, bells, masks, chests, and additional altars made of brass or ivory, some adorned with coral, were added. Some were used to commemorate momentous events and honor heroes, but the majority of royal objects were used in ceremonial and symbolic support of the oba, his ancestors and subjects, and the kingship itself.



Figure 8.9 | Head of an Oba

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

This nineteenth-century brass head of an oba, for example, is not meant to be a portrait of an individual king so much as a representation of the divine nature and power of being king. The oba derives his power from his interactions with and control over supernatural forces. He is allied with and assisted by his deified ancestors, whom he honors through rituals, offerings, and sacrifices. In stressing this continuity of kingship and his rightful place in that unbroken chain, the oba strengthens his own power and that of his people and nation.

The welfare of the kingdom rests on the oba's head, a heavy burden, which is emphasized in representations of him using a proliferation of objects weighing upon him ([Oba Erediauwa](#)). But, he does not bear the weight of ruling alone; he works with and relies on his advisors and subjects as they support him. That support is shown literally when the oba is in full ceremonial regalia. In this photograph of the current oba, Erediauwa, the King is shown in his royal garb, heavily beaded in coral with ivory bracelets and plaques at his waist; an attendant, supporting his right arm, is helping Oba Erediauwa bear the weight of kingship on behalf of the nation of Edo people.

Following George Washington's celebratory visit to Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1791, the Charleston City Council voted to celebrate the national hero by having John Trumbull (1756-1843, USA) paint a life-size portrait of the President and hero of the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) to "hand down to posterity the remembrance of the man to whom they are so much indebted for the blessings of peace, liberty and independence."² Having been Washington's aide-de-camp during the War of Independence, Trumbull chose to portray Washington as the steadfast and majestic general at the start of the Battle of Trenton, a pivotal engagement for colonial troops discouraged in the aftermath of several recent defeats. (Figure 8.10) The painting depicts clouds in a dark, overcast sky turning pink with the rising sun juxtaposed with the general's horse, frightened by the ongoing battle, held tightly by his aide. Washington stands with confidence, one glove off to hold a spyglass in his right hand, looking in the distance as if heeding a faraway call for victory.

² *George and Martha Washington: Portraits from the Presidential Years*, exhibition, National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC, 1999, accessed July 6, 2015, <http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/gw/trenton.htm>



Figure 8.10 | General George Washington at Trenton

Artist: John Trumbull

Source: Art Gallery at Yale

License: Public Domain

Trumbull was pleased with “the lofty expression of his animated expression, the high resolve to conquer or to perish” that he captured in *George Washington before the Battle of Trenton*.³ His patrons in South Carolina were not, though, and rejected the portrait when he presented it to them in 1792. Speaking on behalf of the people of Charleston, South Carolina Congressman William Loughton Smith “thought the city would be better satisfied with a more matter-of-fact likeness, such as they had recently seen him calm, tranquil, peaceful.”⁴ This was not an isolated occurrence: the question of how a statesman and military hero should be represented had not been resolved to the satisfaction of artists or patrons in the eighteenth century, in the years both before and after the founding of the United States. As a representative democracy, the country’s leaders should be depicted as a commander-in-chief who is also one of the people, many argued. But American artists unfortunately had no clear model for a “matter-of-fact likeness” in the portraits of European royalty and heads of state that they used as examples. Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641, Flanders), who was court painter to the King of England, around 1635 painted *Charles I at the Hunt*. (Figure 8.11) The informal yet dignified stance van Dyck adopted for his image of the sovereign, a gentleman out in nature, quickly became the favorite pose for aristocrats and other dignitaries sitting for a non-ceremonial portrait. The pose still remained a standard at the time

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Trumbull painted *George Washington before the Battle of Trenton*, but, as indicated by the painting's reception, it was not considered appropriate in a representation of the leader of a democratic nation. In addition, as the portrait was to commemorate Washington's visit to Charleston, townspeople thought the battle setting should be replaced with a view of that city.



Figure 8.11 | *Charles I at the Hunt*

Artist: Anthony van Dyck

Author: User "Tetraktys"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Trumbull took note of his patrons' wishes and painted another version. ([*General George Washington at Trenton, John Trumbull*](#)) While Washington's pose remains virtually unchanged, Trumbull lightened the sky and inserted a view of Charleston Bay with the city on the far shore. Charleston leaders were satisfied and Trumbull promised delivery of the painting after some minor additions. The addition turned out to be the General's horse, but reversed from the original painting, with its hindquarters prominently displayed in the space between Washington's canary yellow breeches and his walking stick, and the distant city visible between the horse's legs. The painting still hangs in the Historic Council Chamber of Charleston City Hall.

8.3.2 Cultural Heritage and Ethnic Identity

One important aspect of cultural and ethnic identity is shared histories or common memories. Such histories are our heritage. However, heritage is not the full history. It connects to culture and ethnicity in order to convey the full story about who we were and who we have become as a society or individual. Self or national identity is built on its foundation. Defining terms will

help in understanding how each interplay to identify who we are as an individual or nation.

Christian Ellers, a popular contemporary writer on cultures, defines identity as whatever a person may distinguish themselves by, whether it be a particular country, ethnicity, religion, organization, or other position. Identity is one way among many to define oneself. Ellers defines ethnicity as a group that normally has some connections or common traits, such as a common language, common heritage, and or cultural similarities. *The American Dictionary* defines culture as the way of life of a particular people, especially as shown in ordinary behavior, habits, and attitudes toward each other or one's moral and religious beliefs ("Culture"). We will look at these terms as they relate to artists, the visual documentarians of society.

Kimsooja (b. 1957, South Korea), a multi-disciplinary conceptual, reflects on her group identity by exploring the roots of her Korean culture. She draws upon tradition and history by selecting familiar everyday items such as fabric to communicate her message. Fabric wrapped into a bundle known as a "bottari" is commonly used to transport, carry, or store everyday objects in Korean culture. What is different is Kimsooja's use of fabric as an art form. Since 1991, Kimsooja has used fabric, sometimes in the form of a bottari, in an on-going series, *Deductive Objects*, exploring Korean folk customs, daily and common activities, and her cultural background and heritage in relation to her life and experience. ([*Bottari Truck-Migrateurs*](#), "[Je Reviendrai](#)", [Thierry Depagne and Jaeho Chong](#)) In this example, she photographed figures draped in Korean printed fabric that conceals their ethnicity, culture, and identity. Their identity is left to the viewer's imagination, and their culture is left for the viewer to consider, using the print of the fabric as a clue.

A number of artists such as Kimsooja choose to communicate through their art who they are in relation to their culture and ethnicity. Their art becomes a means of validating their self-identity. Her Korean heritage represents a treasury of symbols that commemorates who they are as a people and a distinct culture with a common artistic sensibility. Their national self-image is, on one level, unambiguously defined by the convergence of territorial, ethnic, and cultural identities. The geographical conditions of the Korean Peninsula provide a self-contained nautical and continental environment with plenty of resources with which to create and be innovative. These conditions have given the people since prehistoric times a rich and unique culture to draw from and make contributions to humanity. Koreans take great pride in their homogeneous culture, and in their heritage.

Russia, similarly self-contained, for many centuries developed cultural characteristics and ethnic identities distinctly their own, as well. Russia's rich cultural heritage is visually stunning, from its vivid folk costumes to its elaborate religious symbols and churches. (Figure 8.12) Most Russians identify with the Eastern Orthodox (Christian) religion, but Judaism, Islam, and

Buddhism are also practiced in Russia, making it a rich land of diverse ethnic groups and cultures. St. Basil's Cathedral, located on the grounds of the Kremlin in Moscow, and hundreds of other orthodox churches symbolize Russia's heritage; indeed, citizens proudly place pictures of the cathedrals in their homes and offices. The churches in Russia are astonishingly beautiful and very much a part of Russia's heritage.

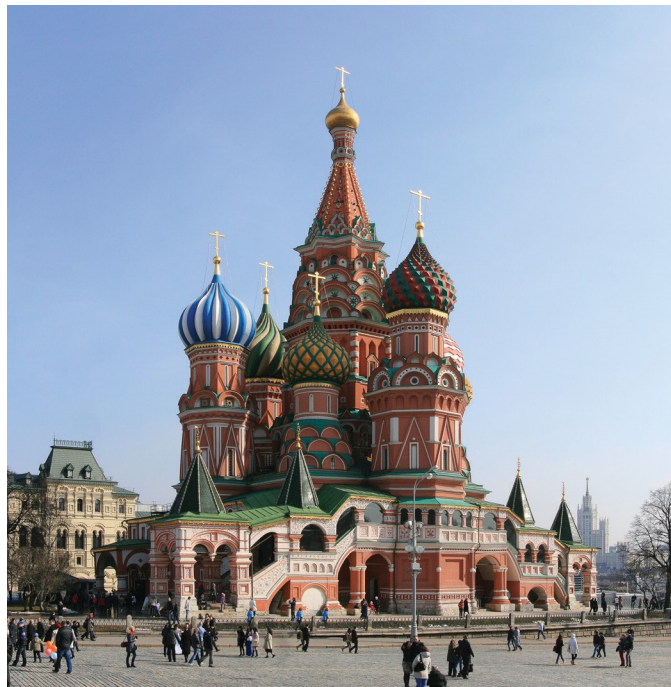


Figure 8.12 | St. Basil Cathedral, Moscow

Author: User "Ludvig14"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Ironically, then, in light of such a rich internal history, why did Russia's rulers look to western European artists and artistic traditions to develop a new artistic identity in eighteenth century?

Carlo Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1675-1744, Italy, lived Russia), an Italian sculptor who moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1716, is associated with the formation of Russia's "new" culture. As a young artist, Rastrelli moved from his native Florence during an economic downturn to Paris in search of greater opportunities. The lavish and majestic works he created there in the late Baroque style did not earn him the success he sought, but did bring him to the attention of Tsar (and later Emperor) Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725), who lured him and his son Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli (1700-1771, France, lived Russia) to the Russia court.

Peter the Great co-ruled with his brother, Ivan V, and other family members until 1696,

when he was twenty-four years old. At that time, Russia was still very much tied to its internal religious, political, social, and cultural traditions. Peter the Great set out to modernize all aspects of his country, from the structure of the military to education for children of the nobility. The Tsar traveled widely in Western Europe, implementing governmental reforms and adopting cultural norms he saw there. France was the model for sweeping changes he had carried out in court life, fashion, literature, music, art, architecture, and even language, with French becoming the language spoken at court over the course of the eighteenth century.

Carlo Bartolomeo Rastrelli and his son Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli were among the painters, sculptors, and architects, then, who were instrumental in introducing to Russia the new conventions and styles that supplanted Russia's cultural heritage and identity. For example, Carlo Rastrelli's portrait bust of Peter the Great bears a striking stylistic resemblance to a portrait bust of French King Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) by sculptor and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680, Italy). (Figures 8.13 and 8.14) Bernini's bust, created during a visit to Paris in 1665, shows Louis XIV as a visionary and majestic leader who is literally above vagaries of human existence such as the wind that billows his drapery. Carlo Rastrelli's portrait of Peter the Great, completed posthumously in 1729, draws upon the same traditions—dating back to images of Roman emperors such as Augustus (see Figure 3.23)—of showing absolute authority through such devices as the lift of the head, eyes scanning the distance, and wearing of military armor.



Figure 8.13 | Peter I

Author: User "shakko"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0



Figure 8.14 | Bust of Louis XIV of France

Artist: Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Author: User "Coyau"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

His son Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli was an architect who also worked in the Baroque style. He received his first royal commission in 1721, at the age of twenty-one, but he is mainly known for opulent and imposing buildings he designed after Peter the Great's death in 1725. Continuing the modernization and transformation of St. Petersburg, Francesco Rastrelli's structures are associated with luxurious exuberance of the Baroque, and Russia's Romanov rulers of the eighteenth century. One of Francesco Rastrelli's most famous buildings is the Winter Palace, also bears a striking stylistic resemblance to a French palace: Versailles, built for Louis XIV by architects Louis Le Vau (1612-1670, France) and Jules-Hardouin Mansart (1746-1708, France). (Figures 8.15 and 8.16)



Figure 8.15 | Winter Palace, St. Petersburg

Author: User "Florstein"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 4.0



Figure 8.16 | Versailles

Author: Marc Vassal

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 3.0

8.3.3 Sex/Gender Identity

Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977, USA) is a contemporary portrait painter. In his work, he refers back to poses and other compositional elements used by earlier masters in much the same way that Trumbull did in his portrait of George Washington. Wiley means for his viewers to recognize the earlier work he has borrowed from in creating his painting, to make comparisons between the two, and to layer meaning from the earlier work into his own. Due to the strong contrasts between the sitters in Wiley's paintings and those who posed for the earlier portraitists, however, this comparison often makes for a complex interweaving of meanings.

Wiley's 2008 painting *Femme piquée par un serpent*, or *Woman bitten by a serpent*, ([Femme Piquée par un Serpent, Kehinde Wiley](#)) is based upon an 1847 marble work of the same name by French sculptor Auguste Clésinger (1814-1883, France). (Figure 8.17) When Clésinger's flagrantly sensual nude was exhibited, the public and critics alike were scandalized, and fascinated. It was not uncommon in European and American art of the nineteenth century to use the subject of the work as justification for depicting the female nude. For example, if the subject was a moral tale or a scene from classical mythology, that was an acceptable reason for showing a nude figure. In Clésinger's sculpture, the pretext for the woman's indecent writhing was the snake bite, which, coupled with the roses surrounding the woman, was meant to suggest an allegory of love or beauty lost in its prime rather than simply a salacious depiction of a nude. Unfortunately, the model was

easily recognized as a real person, Apollonie Sabatier, a courtesan who was the writer Charles Baudelaire's mistress and well known among artists and writers of the day. Clésinger defended his sculpture as an artful study of the human form but, having used the features and body of a contemporary woman, his sculpture's viewers objected to the image as too real. Wiley's painting is the opposite: it is clearly intended to be a portrait of one individual, but he is clothed and inexplicably lying with his back to the viewer while turning to look over his shoulder. In his painting, Wiley retains the extended arms, and twisted legs and torso of Clésinger's figure, but the sculpted woman's thrown back head and closed eyes are replaced by the man's turned head and mildly quizzical gaze.



Figure 8.17 | *Femme Piquée par un Serpent*

Artist: Auguste Clésinger

Author: User "Arnaud 25"

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

Wiley takes that pose and its meanings—indecent, exposure, vulnerability, powerlessness— and uses them in a context that seemingly makes no sense when the subject is a fully clothed black male. Or does it? By using the conventions for depicting the female nude, Wiley asks us to examine the following: what happens when the figure is clothed—with a suggestion of eroticism in the glimpse of brown skin and white briefs above his low-riding jeans; what happens when a young man gazes at the viewer with an unguarded expression of open inquisitiveness; and what happens when a black male presents his body in a posture of weakness, potentially open to attack? The artist uses these juxtapositions of meaning to challenge our notions of identity and masculinity. By expanding his visual vocabulary to include traditions in portraiture going back

hundreds of years, Wiley paints a young black man at odds with contemporary conventions of (male) physicality and sexuality.

Ideas about gender identity, that is, the gender one identifies with regardless of biological sex, have developed scientifically and socially, and have in recent years become both more complex and more fluid in numerous cultures. Within other cultures, however, in addition to male or female, there has traditionally been a third gender, and gender fluidity has been part of the fabric of society for thousands of years. Among the ancient Greeks, for example, a hermaphrodite, an individual who has both male and female sex characteristics, was considered “a higher, more powerful form” that created “a third, transcendent gender.”⁵ In Samoa, there is a strong emphasis on one’s role in the extended family, or *aiga*. Traditionally, if there are not enough females within an *aiga* to properly run the household or if there is a male child who is particularly drawn to domestic life, he is raised as *fa’afafine* or “in the manner of a woman.” Thus, *fa’afafine* are male at birth but are raised as a third gender, taking on masculine and feminine behavioral traits.

In India, those of a third gender are known as *hijra*, which includes individuals who are eunuchs (men who have been castrated), hermaphrodites, and transgender (when gender identity does not match assigned sex). The role of *hijras* is traditionally related to spirituality, and they are often devotees of a god or goddess. For example, the *hijras* or devotees of the Hindu goddess Bahuchara Maja are often eunuchs, having had themselves castrated voluntarily to offer their manhood to the deity. Other *hijras* live as part of the mainstream community and dress as women to perform only during religious celebrations, such as a birth or wedding, where they are invited to participate and bestow blessings.

Although *hijras* had been a respected third gender in much of Southeast Asia for thousands of years, their status changed in late nineteenth-century India while under British rule. During the twentieth century, many *hijras* formed their own communities, with the protection of a guru, or mentor, to provide some financial security and safekeeping from the harassment and discrimination under which they lived. In 2014, the supreme court of India ruled that *hijras* should be officially recognized as a third gender, dramatically changing for the better the educational and occupational opportunities for what is estimated to be half a million to two million individuals.⁶

Tejal Shah (b. 1979, India) is a multi-media artist who often works in photography, video, and installation pieces. She began the *Hijra Fantasy Series* in 2006, ([Southern Siren Maheshwari](#)

⁵ Aileen Ajootian, “The Only Happy Couple: Hermaphrodites and Gender” in *Naked Truth: Women, Sexuality and Gender in Classical Art and Architecture*, ed. Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons (New York: Routledge, 1997), 228.

⁶ <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/04/18/304548675/a-journey-of-pain-and-beauty-on-becoming-transgender-in-india>

[from Hijra Fantasy Series, Tejal Shah](#)) creating “tableaux in which [three *hijras*] enact their own personal fantasies of themselves.”⁷ Shah was interested in how each woman—they all had transitioned from male to female—envisioned her own sexuality, separate from the perceptions and projections of others. As described by Shah, “In *Southern Siren—Maheshwari*, the protagonist envisions herself as a classic heroine from South Indian cinema in the throes of a passionate romantic encounter with a typical male hero.”⁸

In the **tableau**, or staged scene, Maheshwari sees herself as resplendently dressed in a blue sari, a traditional Indian draped gown, an object of admiration and desire. In this photograph and the others in the series, Shah found it noteworthy that each *hijra*, participating fully in the creative process, expressed feelings about herself by using visual cues and types from mainstream sources such as, in this example, Indian popular culture. How each *hijra* represented herself was the stuff of universal human fantasies, Shah found, regardless of sexual or gender identity: “being beautiful, glamorous and powerful, having a family, giving love and being loved in return.”⁹

8.3.4 Class

Maria Luisa of Parma was a member of the highest circles of European royalty. Born in 1751, she was the youngest daughter of Phillip, Duke of Parma, Italy, and his wife, Princess Louise-Élisabeth of France, the eldest daughter of King Louis XV. In 1765, she married Charles IV, Prince of Asturias. She was the Queen consort of Spain from 1788, when her husband ascended to the throne, until 1808, when King Charles IV abdicated his throne under pressure from Napoleon.

Royal marriages were intended to foster allegiances and cement alliances. The bride and groom generally did not meet one another until after lengthy negotiations were completed and the wedding date was near. It was not uncommon for portraits of the prospective couple to be exchanged; in addition to the descriptions by the negotiators and others, an artist’s representation was the only way to learn what one’s possible spouse looked like at a time when journeys were not easily or quickly undertaken. At the time of their engagement, Laurent Pécheux (1729-1821, French) painted this portrait of Maria Luisa (Figure 8.18) in 1765 for Princess Maria Luisa fiancé’s family.

⁷ Tejal Shah, Artist Statement, *Hijra Fantasy Series*, accessed July 7, 2015, <http://tejalshah.in/project/what-are-you/hijrafantasy-series/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.



Figure 8.18 | Maria Luisa of Parma

Artist: Laurent Pêcheux

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

Maria Luisa of Parma depicts the fourteen-year-old bride-to-be holding a snuffbox in her right hand containing a miniature portrait of her future husband inside its lid. This detail was a formula in formal engagement portraits: the sitter holds a gift such as this finely made and costly trinket to express appreciation and budding affection for one's betrothed. Additionally, to demonstrate her wealthy and cultured family background, Maria Luisa is posed within an interior setting displayed in a silk brocade gown trimmed with lengths of delicate, handmade lace, a medallion of the Order of the Starry Cross suspended from a diamond-encrusted bow on her breast, and diamond stars in her powdered hair. While this is indeed a likeness of the princess, the portrait is meant to convey far more than the color of her eyes or shape of her nose. This portrait is a statement about the prestige and power she will bring to the marriage, and a congratulatory note to the groom's family on the beauty and worth of the mutually beneficial asset they are gaining.

Maria Luisa's dress is the exclamation point to that visual statement. She is wearing a style known as a mantua or robe *a la française* (in the French style), a dress for formal court occasions,

of silk brocade woven into alternating bands of gold thread and pink flowers on a cream field. This very costly fabric, probably made in France, is stretched over panniers, or fan-shaped hoops made of cane, metal or whalebone extending side-to-side. The panniers create a horizontal but flattened silhouette that allowed the tremendous quantity of magnificent fabric required to be fully displayed. To wear such a gown was a pronouncement of one's wealth and status, a sign of which was one's comportment, that is, one's bearing and behavior. And, it was indeed a challenge to stand or move with the grace expected of a highborn woman in eighteenth-century society while wearing such cumbersome, restrictive, and heavy clothing. Maria Luisa, however, is depicted as poised and charming, the perfect consort for a king.

Twenty-four years after her portrait by Pécheux, Maria Luisa was thirty-eight years old and had borne ten children, five of whom were still alive, when Francisco Goya created this portrait, *Maria Luisa Wearing Panniers*. (Figure 8.19) , Francisco Goya was named painter to the court of Charles IV and Maria Luisa in 1789, and in celebration of Charles IV's ascension to the throne, created a portrait of the King, to go along with the Queen's portrait. Neither the years nor Goya were kind to Maria Luisa. (Between 1771 and 1799, she would have fourteen living children, six of whom grew to adulthood, and ten miscarriages.)



Figure 8.19 | *Maria Luisa of Parma Wearing Panniers*

Artist: Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Author: Prado Museum

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

In Goya's depiction, she is even more richly dressed than in her earlier portrait, but her elaborate and sumptuous costume serves only to provide an unflattering contrast with the Queen's demeanor. Goya depicts Maria Luisa with her arms awkwardly held to each side to accommodate her rigid, box-like tontillo (the Spanish variation of panniers); her plain, expressionless face is almost comically topped by a complexly constructed hat of lace, silk, and jewels. The hat represents one extravagant trend in women's fashion of the 1780s, and Goya did paint its proliferation of textures and surfaces with great skill and sensitivity, but the contrast between the Queen's hat and her features makes them appear even more coarse and unrefined, regardless of her wealth and class.

What explanation could there have been for the court painter to create such an unflattering representation of Maria Luisa, Queen consort of Spain? In her years of living in her adopted country, she had not endeared herself to members of court or her subjects. Considering that the King preferred to hunt, running the country fell largely on the shoulders of Maria Luisa, who was vain and bad-tempered. Goya's presentation does not, in fact, contradict that assessment. The emphasis on her luxurious and elegant attire and on the robe and crown to Maria Luisa's right—signaling her status as Queen consort—represent that she is the individual who is literally in touch with the robes of state. This work and her engagement portrait of nearly twenty-five years earlier were not so much depictions of her as a person as they were means to communicate the power and prestige of her place and her role.

Honoré Daumier (1808-1879, France) in 1864 painted a different sign of prestige, or lack thereof, in *The Third-Class Carriage*; it was one of three paintings in a series commissioned by William Thomas Walters. (Figure 8.20) The other two paintings were *The First-Class Carriage* and *The Second-Class Carriage*, the only one in the series thought to be finished. (Figures 8.21 and 8.22) Walters, an American businessman and art collector, would later found the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, with work from his collection, including these three paintings.



Figure 8.20 | *The Third Class Carriage*

Artist: Honoré Daumier

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC



Figure 8.21 | *The First Class Carriage*

Artist: Honoré Daumier

Author: Walters Art Museum

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



Figure 8.22 | *The Second Class Carriage*

Artist: Honoré Daumier

Author: Walters Art Museum

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain

When Daumier created the works, he had been working prolifically as a painter, printmaker, and sculptor for forty years. In his lifetime, he would create approximately 5,000 prints, 500 paintings, and 100 sculptures. From the beginning of his career, he was interested in the impact of industrialization on modern urban life, the plight of the poor, the quest for social equality, and the struggle for justice. He was especially known for his biting satire of politics and political figures, and his less stinging, ironic commentary on current society and events. Because of the subject matter he chose—everyday people, contemporary life—and the straightforward, truthful, and sincere manner in which he depicted them, Daumier is considered to be part of the Realist movement or style in art.

In *The Third-Class Carriage*, the artist presents four figures in the foreground, bathed in light, with numerous, less individualized figures crowded in the background. The young mother nursing her baby, an elderly woman sitting with folded hands, and a boy sleeping with his hands in his pockets encompass four generations, as well as different stages of life. Although the passengers sit near one another, they appear isolated from each other. They, including the boy, are probably traveling to or from work in the city, and both their body postures and facial expressions convey the toll of hard labor and long hours. Daumier shows compassion for these workers whose lives hold nothing but repetitious drudgery.

Forever changing the mainly agricultural society that existed in much of Europe and the United States prior to the second half of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution is the start of the mechanization and manufacturing that would lead to people shifting from country to

city life, and from farms to factories. While the shift to an industrial, money-based society improved the lives of many and created the middle class as we know it today, Daumier was well aware that others were being left behind and were essentially trapped in a cycle of little education, unskilled labor, and low wages.

The artist represents different life expectations based on class through the way he paints the windows and through his use of light in each of the three paintings. In *The Third-Class Carriage*, the figures in the foreground have light shining on them from a window to the left, outside the picture plane. There are windows in the background, as well, but nothing can be seen outside of them. Daumier is implying there is nothing to be seen, especially in the case of the literally non-existent window. In *The Second-Class Carriage*, a landscape can be seen through the window, and one of the figures looks out intently. The other three, paying no attention to the world outside, are cocooned in their winter clothes in an attempt to fend off the cold in their unheated train car. But the man who leans forward to observe the passing scenery appears to be younger and is perhaps more eager and capable of adapting to and moving upward in the world of business—suggested by the bowler hat he is wearing, which at the time was associated in city life with civil servants and clerks. In *First-Class Carriage*, the passengers are all alert, each attending to their own business. One young woman looks out at a green landscape; considering her lightweight outerwear, it appears this is a springtime scene, which is suggested, as well, by the colorful ribbons on the two women's fashionable bonnets. With their relaxed postures and placid, composed expressions, these first-class passengers give the impression of confidence. They are more secure in themselves and their places in the world than either the second-class or third-class passengers.

8.3.5 Group Affiliation

History suggests that the quality of human survival is best when humans function as a group, allowing for collective support and interaction. Social psychological research indicates that people who are affiliated with groups are psychologically and physically stronger and better able to cope when faced with stressful situations. Gregory Walton, a social psychologist who studies group interaction, has concluded that one benefit individuals receive is the satisfaction of belonging (to a group, culture, nation or) to a greater community that shares some common interests and aspirations. The unity of groups is achieved through members' similarities or their having experiences based on the history that brought them together.

Artists throughout history have been associated with groups, movements, and organizations that protect their interests, forward their cause, or promote them as a group or as

individuals. The most visible groups during the Renaissance period in Italy, for example, were people belonging to the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, wealthy merchant families, civic and government groups, and guilds, including artists' guilds. (Figures 8.23 and 8.24)



Figure 8.23 | *The Syndics of the Amsterdam Drapers' Guild, known as the "Sampling Officials"*

Artist: Rembrandt

Author: Google Cultural Institute

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



Figure 8.24 | *Officers of the St. George Civic Guard, Haarlem*

Artist: Frans Hals

Source: Wikimedia Commons

8.3.6 Personal Identity

The city of Palmyra, in modern Syria, had long been at the crossroads of Western and Eastern political, religious, and cultural influences, as it was a caravan stop for traders traveling the Silk Road between the Mediterranean and the Far East. In the first century CE, the city came under Roman rule and under the Romans, the city prospered, and the arts flourished. Following a rebellion by Queen Zenobia of Palmyra in 273 CE, Roman Emperor Aurelian destroyed the city, ending the period of Roman control.

The Palmyrenes, or people of Palmyra, built three types of elaborate, large-scale monuments for their dead called houses of eternity. The first was a **tower tomb**, some as high as four stories. The second was a **hypogeum**, or underground tomb, and the third was a tomb built in the shape of a temple or house. All were used by many generations of the same extended family and were located in a necropolis, a city of the dead, what we today call a cemetery. Inside the tombs were **loculi**, or small, separate spaces, each of which formed an individual sarcophagus, or stone coffin. Inside the opening to the tomb, the first sarcophagus held the remains of the clan's founder; it was often faced with a stone relief sculpture depicting him as if attending a banquet and inviting others to join him. Surrounding the founder in the *loculi*, on the face of each family member's sarcophagus would be a relief portrait of each person interred there. ([Loculi](#))

This stele, a portrait of a father, his son, and two daughters, dates to between 100 and 300 CE, sometime during the era of Roman rule. (Figure 8.25) The man is reclining on a couch decorated with flower motifs within circles and diamonds. He holds a bunch of grapes in his right hand and, in his left, a wine cup decorated with flowers similar to those on the couch. His two daughters flank his son in the background; the son holding grapes and a bird. The son and daughters all wear necklaces. Additionally, the daughters wear pendant earrings and brooches holding the drapery at their left shoulders. The chiton, or tunic, and himation, or cloak, that each daughter wears has some affinities with Greco-Roman types of clothing, but the style of the ornamented veil covering their heads is a local type of garment, based on Parthian, or Persian, styles. Also wearing local garments, the two males wear a loose fitting tunic and trousers, each with a decorative border. The fine fabrics indicated by the embellished borders of both men and women's clothing indicate goods and wealth amassed from trade, as does the abundant use of precious metals and gems in the variety of jewelry adorned by the Palmyrenes. Thus, the stele is a blend of Greco-Roman and Palmyrene (and larger Parthian) styles and cultural influences.



Figure 8.25 | Funerary Relief

Source: Met Museum

License: OASC

Coupled upon many Palmyrenes grave steles are inscriptions of text in both Aramaic and Latin that give the person's name and genealogy, markers of distinctive individual and family traits. While many of the depictions of the frontal-facing, wide-eyed figures—a defining feature of Palmyrene art—show little individualization of features, the coupling with such inscriptions are evident signs that each stele was intended to denote the characteristics of the person entombed within. The figures actively engage the viewer, and provide the reminder that personal identity is an amalgamate of individual, socio-cultural, spiritual, and historical influences.

In July 2015, the city of Palmyra, its people, and its art were again in danger. In April of 2015, Islamic State (ISIS) forces overtook the 3,000-year-old Assyrian city of Nimrud and destroyed its buildings and art. On May 21, 2015, ISIS overtook the city of Palmyra, inducing fear that they would destroy buildings and art there as they did in Nimrud. On July 2, 2015, ISIS was reported to have destroyed grave markers similar to the one discussed here. ([Grave Marker Reliefs](#)) They lined up six bust-length reliefs of people who lived in Palmyra nearly 2,000 years ago, and smashed them, obliterating the visual and written record of each person. So many have had their portraits made for posterity with the hopes of staying alive, against the odds. And, this is why we need art: it gives us memories of ourselves and our deeds, who we identify with, and how we identify others.

8.4 BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Key Concepts

National and personal identities do not magically happen; they are built on and influenced by immediate and past events, environments, traditions, and cultural legacies. Artists capture and document not only the physical conditions of a society but also the emotional and mental conditions. They construct a sense of who we were and are as a person and as a nation. Society's identity is always fluid. When we see identity as static, we record people with stereotypes and do not see them for who they are. Art is one way to challenge static notions of identity by engaging the viewer in visual narratives that are unfamiliar to them, and that educate and challenge their previously held notions.

Since the 1970s, postmodern theories have challenged historical and traditional notions of ethnic and cultural identity by developing a model that views identity as being multifaceted, fluid, and socially constructed. Some scholars contend that we are in a period of post-identity and post-ethnicity, repudiating the old essentialist view of identity. Globalization of people, the Internet, and travel have all brought about fluid cultures—which may have contributed to people's more fluid sense of identity, and also to their interest in researching their heritage, culture, and ethnic identity. Heritage is the treasure and symbols of pride for an individual, country, and nation. Many works of art are seen as part of national heritage because they help citizens appreciate their past. Art provides life to the past, something that can be visualized, touched, walk through, and identified as being part of a legacy and culture.

Test Yourself

1. On the surface Kim Sooja's art seems simple, but underneath it is an enigma of traditions that make a metaphoric identity statement; for example, her use of fabric as an art form evokes intimacy and honor of her culture and history. Discuss and identify at-least two artists whose work makes a personal and historical statement. Be specific as you reference each image associated with your essay. (minimum of 500 words).
2. A number of circumstances throughout history have compelled artists to confront the context of social issues, select at-least two works of art that best describe an event or issue. Discuss the problems associated with the issue, and how the event and art shaped the legacy or identity of the country or nation. Describe the power the work communicates, discuss the significance of the work and how it convey a message, and identity of the people in that period of time. At the end of your essay make

commentary on why you selected the art works what you think about the art. (Attach selected work with captions.) Answer to the question is located throughout the chapter)

3. Throughout history building were constructed in a manner to symbolize power; spirituality; and godlessness. Structures house institutions that guide, influence and shape a society's morals, values, politics, religious and social conditioning. Select 4 structures that best symbolize the identity or culture of a society. Describe its impact on influencing a nation, significance to the nation and how the structure contributes to national or individual identity. At the end of your essay discuss why you selected the structures and the aesthetics of the building. (Attach selected structures with captions.)
4. Compare and contrast four works of art that best describe a personal or national identity. Discuss with specifics how the artist is able to capture the character of the person or nation. At the end of your essay add a commentary why you selected the works and their significance. (Attach selected works with captions.)

8.9 KEY TERMS

Baroque: a style of architecture and art that originating in Italy in the early seventeenth century

Bottari: Cloth wrapped and tied around clothes , fabric, or/and items into a bundle for carry

Grave stele: is a stone or wooden slab, generally taller than it is wide, erected usually in Greek cemeteries as a monument, for funerary or commemorative purposes.

Hypogeum: an underground prehistoric burial site

Impressionism: is a nineteenth-century art movement that developed in France during the late nineteenth century by a group of artists called the Anonymous Society of Painters, Sculptors

Impressionist: A painter whose painting have characteristics of the impressionism movement, emphasizing accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities, uses small, thin, yet visible brush strokes, open composition,

Individualism: emphasizes potential of man and self development own beliefs. The Individualism during the Renaissance period became a prominent theme in Italy

Industrial Revolution: period during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in western Europe and the United States when industry quickly developed due to the invention of steampowered engines and the growth of factories. Fundamental changes occurred in agriculture, textile and metal manufacture, transportation, economic and policies, and had a major impact on how people lived

Obas: The title of “oba,” or king, is passed on to the firstborn son of each successive king of Benin, Africa at the time of his death

Renaissance Period: a period of time from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century in Europe. The era bridged the time between the Middle Ages and modern

Tableau: is an incidental scene, as of a group of people

Tower tomb: are mausoleums, built in 1067 and 1093