

forms across a variety of media. Postmodern works tend to reintroduce traditional elements or to exaggerate modernist techniques by using them to the extreme. Postmodern works often return to earlier styles, periods, and references and often question the mores and beliefs of contemporary society. A leading proponent of Postmodernism in architecture is Philip Johnson (1906–2005), who at one time was known as one of the leading modern architects of the International Style. For decades, architecture had largely been dominated by the Bauhaus idea of form following function, and sleek towers of steel sheathed in glass were the standard for large buildings. But, in 1970, Johnson suggested the radical idea that one of the functions of art was decoration, and with the AT&T (now Sony) Building (1984), he added a finial to the top of the standard office tower.

Today, artists around the world work in an endless variety of media and styles. One can no longer say that any particular city, country, or even continent is the “center” of the art world. The next section of this guide provides a brief overview of “nonwestern” art, but we should note that the categories of Western and nonwestern in the world of contemporary art are becoming obsolete with the emergence of transnational artists in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world.

Brief Overview of Nonwestern Art

The story of art that we have been studying thus far has been a traditional one and has been told over and over again by countless writers since Giorgio Vasari’s time. It chronicles a history of Western European ideas that grew out of the concepts put forth by early Greek philosophers. These ideas experienced a revival during the Renaissance and were further refined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Atomic power, the increasing pace of technological inventions, and the electronic age further expanded and changed the realm of art in the twentieth century.

We should keep in mind that the history we have chronicled thus far, though valuable, has clear limitations. In recent decades, art history, like many other academic disciplines, has been challenged to include artists and works that were previously marginalized. The influence of feminist critics in

particular has led to major revisions, and there has also been an increasing inclusion of the histories of art of other cultures. At this point, we will look at the arts of Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Americas, and the art of Islam throughout the world. The art histories of these cultures are increasingly central to the development of the discipline of art history. Of course, this brief survey covers only a tiny fraction of the rich world of art beyond the boundaries of the Western world. The works considered here might be categorized as “traditional”; contemporary art from Asia and Africa, thoroughly immersed in the global art scene, is beyond the scope of this discussion, for example. Illustrations of the works of art discussed here can be found through basic Internet searches and in standard art historical textbooks.

Asian Art

CHINESE ART

Civilization and art have been present in China for thousands of years, and some archaeological finds in China rival those in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Remains of painted wares have been found that date back to the fourth millennium BCE. Perhaps the most famous work of ancient Chinese art is the Great Wall, which was constructed over the course of centuries and covers thousands of miles. Of course this wall, now considered an enduring work of art and admired both for its engineering and aesthetic appeal, originally had a utilitarian function. This is an example of how meaning and function can change over time. In fact, many of the works we will examine here were created for a specific purpose but are now seen as works of art in a different context.

The dynasties or kingdoms that ruled for long periods of time had an impact on the history of art in China. In many cases, these rulers left elaborate tombs that contained many objects that have become great treasures of art. One of the most amazing works from the early period of Chinese art history is the monument to the first emperor to unite the kingdom—the Emperor of Qin (c.210 BCE). He had a full army of soldiers and their equipment, including their horses, created life-size in clay and buried as part of his tomb. The technical ability demonstrated in these sculptures and the life-like detail of the soldiers and their horses are quite astonishing. The dynasties succeeding Qin built grand walled cities with huge palaces and tombs. These dynasties are