THE POWER OF ART

RICHARD LEWIS SUSAN I. LEWIS

HE POWER OF ART

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WADSWORTH
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WADSWORTH
THOMSON LEARNING

Publisher: Ted Buchholz
Acquisitions Editors: Barbara Rosenberg, Janet Wilhite
Developmental Editor: Terri House
Project Editor: Kay Kaylor
Production Manager: Ken Dunaway
Art Directors: Sue Hart, Pat Bracken
Photo Researcher: Susan Holtz

Part Captions: Part I Facade of the Louvre with I.M. Pei's pyramid entrance, Paris. **Part III** Mayan temple complex, Tulum, Mexico. **Part IV** Judy Pfaff, 3-D, 1983. Detail of installation using mixed materials, 22′ x 35′. Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Printed in the United States of America
20 19 18 17 16 15

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 93-78968

ISBN: 0-15-500320-8

Cover Image: Andy Warhol, *Mona Lisa*, 1963. Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 10′5 3/4″ x 6′ 10 1/8″. Courtesy Thomas Ammann. © 1993 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.
Compositor: Duo Design Group
Cover Printer: Coral Graphics
Printer: R.R. Donnelley, Roanoke

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PREFACE

As we wrote *The Power of Art*, a quote attributed to Albert Einstein neatly summed up our most important challenge. "Everything should be made as simple as possible — but no more so." We believe that an art *appreciation* textbook is not meant to impress scholars with the erudition of its authors, but to inspire in its readers a lifelong love of art. It has been our goal to write a clear, concise, coherent, yet enjoyable book that educates by pleasure.

A second challenge we faced was to select, from the astonishing treasures of visual art produced over the centuries, several hundred images that could represent the sweep of our Western art heritage in a global context. Many works of art that we love had to be sacrificed in order to present appropriate variety. It was a painful process, one shared by anyone who has ever taught an art appreciation course.

We wrote *The Power of Art* because we believe that current textbooks have become unbalanced—offering extensive coverage of artistic media and methods and limited coverage of the historical tradition of visual art. While information on the language and methods of art is, of course, necessary, we felt no more should be included than is absolutely essential for students beginning to understand art. Why dwell on the distinction between a conté crayon and pastel or between trusses and balloon framing? Such information is rarely retained, because it does not connect with students' other studies or interests. Therefore, in Part I, *The Language of Art*, and Part II, *The Artist's Materials and Tools*, we introduce the fundamental vocabulary of art, then go on to employ this language in discussions that focus on specific works of art.

What students really respond to is the *story* of art—a blend of visual, biographical, and cultural information that places art within the context of history and culture. *The Power of Art* sees the story of art as part of the accumulated experience of humankind, a connection between our contemporary world and the past. Part III, *A Global Heritage*, presents the historical tradition — with background information in religion, philosophy, science, and politics—making it possible for students to integrate their study of art with their other studies. Timelines and maps add to students' knowledge of history and geography and provide another way to make connections between art and other disciplines.

The Power of Art devotes the five chapters in Part IV, *The Modern Era*, to an explanation of modern and contemporary art. In many art appreciation courses, this exciting material is scattered throughout the term, or worse, squeezed into the end of the semester. Because modern and contemporary art require a serious effort at explanation, we believe that understanding the historical background is the way to illuminate art that may seem strange and obscure at first. Modern Artists made art with the history of art in mind; contemporary artists are continuing this tradition.

We often hear how the communication revolution has produced a truly global consciousness. Unfortunately, this consciousness has been slow to move into the teaching of art appreciation. While other textbooks limit non-Western art to a single chapter, often at the end of the book, *The Power of Art* chooses integration. For example, the art *and* beliefs of Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and African cultures are discussed together. In addition, boxes throughout the text called "A Global View" compare non-Western and Western art.

After students learn about the principles of design, media and techniques, our global heritage, and modern art, they are prepared for a final chapter on "Contemporary Issues in Art." The topics included there should stimulate exciting classroom discussion of some important current controversies facing the art world. Can art be obscene? Should public funds be spent on controversial art? What are the challenges faced by women artists in gaining recognition from museums and galleries? Boxes called "Art News" throughout the text also bring contemporary issues into historical perspective.

Ultimately, we hope *The Power or Art* is a textbook teachers will enjoy teaching from and students will enjoy reading and learning from. It is meant to open doors for students, making

available a rich, marvelous new world to be enjoyed and discovered for a lifetime. There are galleries and museums all over the world with little or no admission charges. The wealth of visual art is not meant to be hoarded, but to be shared. We hope that after this course, students will go to museums with friends and, later, with their children. And, if inspiration strikes, perhaps they will make art themselves. There can never be too much art in our world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the product of years of teaching our own as well as that we received as students. We would like to acknowledge the excellence, dedication, and influence of Abe Ajay, Rudolf Arnheim, George Bayliss, Antonio Frasconi, Al Hinton, Gerome Kamrowski, Leonard Stokes, and Donald Suggs, as well as Paul Berry, Dorothea Fisher, Eugenia Janis, Kenworth Moffet, and Clara Tucker. The following colleagues at Marist College were especially helpful with the development of *The Power of Art*: Richard Atkins, Linda Cool, Jeptha Lanning, James Luciana, John McGinty, Rosemary and Andrew Molloy, Vincent Toscano, and Marc vanderHeyden. The unfailing support, encouragement, and inspiration provided by Warren Roberts of the State University of New York at Albany were always appreciated.

During the development of the manuscript, many readers offered perceptive comments and analysis that aided us immensely. We are indebted to Michelle Rowe-Shields of the Evanston Art Center, and the following reviewers:

Clark V. Britto, Jr.,Wichita State University; Pamela A. Lee, Washington State University; Jean E. Loy-Swanson, North Hennepin Community College; David E. Pactor, Broward Community College; David Raizman, Drexel University; Jim Rocha, University of San Diego; Bruce Walters, Teikyo Marycrest University.

One of the pleasures of writing a textbook is the opportunity to work with many talented individuals. We want to thank our acquisition editors at Harcourt Brace, Julia Berrisford and Cynthia Kumagawa, who were both pleasures to work and negotiate with; our developmental editor, Terri House, who pleasantly but firmly kept us on track; our project editor, Kay Kaylor, who always kept her end of the bargain and was willing to go the extra mile; our copyeditor, Jan Ross Duffala, who saved us more than once from ridicule and knows how to turn a phrase, our designers, Sue Hart and Pat Bracken, who translated a thick pile of manuscript into an example of the power of art, Bill Maize, for his brilliant layout, our production manager, Ken Dunaway, who masterfully handled this beautiful production, and our knowledgeable and resourceful picture editor, Susan Holtz, who was able to bring together the extensive collection of illustrations.

Finally, we would like to thank our students, many of whom brought us articles and catalogs, but more importantly who showed us the way to create a book that could transmit the power of art. The enthusiastic love for art of Anthony Alberico, Debbie Amato, Michele Bassett, Lauren Brooks, Tricia Burger, Joe Concra, Matt Daly, Beth Fogarty, Brian Goldsborough, Reggie Ho, Christie Ingrassia, Lori Iversen, Jonathan Kiselik, Kevin McKiernan, Joe Molloy, Amy Pavlovsky, Amy Rogers, Richard Santiago, Lori Stella, Joanne Witpen, Helen Zarouhliotis, and many more students like them, is what encouraged us in the many years it took to bring this text to completion.

Richard and Susan Lewis

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PART

I

THE LANGUAGE OF ART

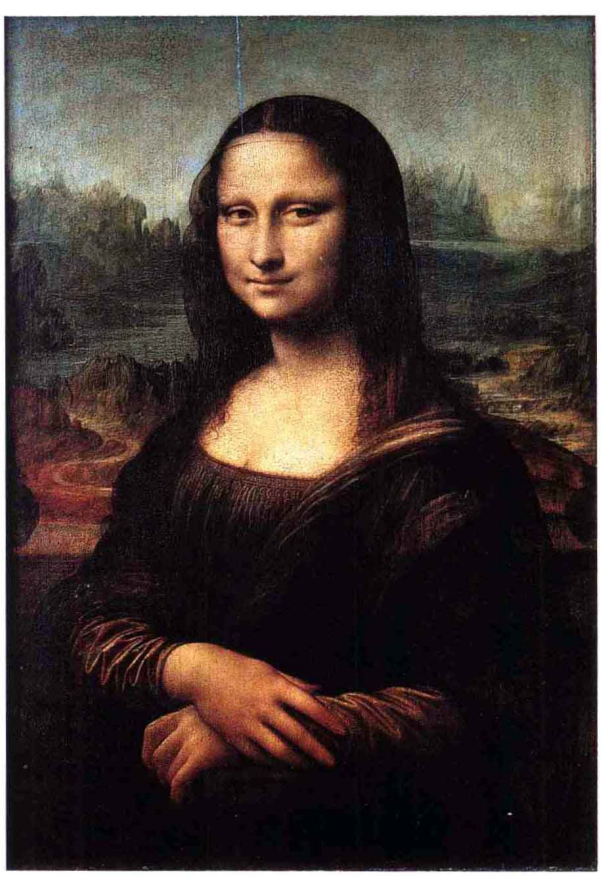
CHAPTER

THE POWER OF ART

Among the treasures of the Louvre Museum in Paris is probably the best known work of art in the Western world, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (1-1). Signs are posted throughout the vast museum, marking the way to its most famous masterpiece. In the gallery where it hangs, the walls are covered with paintings by some of the most talented artists in history, but viewers surround only one, jostling each other to get better views. Tourists treat the painting like a famous landmark, posing for their pictures beside it. Guards are always nearby; velvet ropes keep viewers at a distance. Deep within a grand, velvet-covered case of bullet-proof glass that dwarfs the small painting, the same elegant woman who has captivated generations of art lovers regards them with her inscrutable smile.

Painted at the height of the Italian Renaissance, this fascinating portrait of a woman has attracted attention for hundreds of years. Poems and songs have been written, essays and scholarly works composed, about an oil painting that measures less than 2 feet x 3 feet. Even in our contemporary world of space travel and video images, the power of da Vinci's portrait continues to transcend time. Legends have grown up around the picture—for instance, that the *Mona Lisa*'s eyes follow one around the room. Another legend suggests that the painting on display is no longer the genuine *Mona Lisa* (see "Art News").

What is it about this painting that has elevated it, not simply to the height of a masterpiece but to the symbolic pinnacle of Western art? How can a work of art become so valuable that it is seen as "priceless"? What gives the *Mona Lisa* its power over people from different centuries and cultures? While many have often spoken of the air of mystery that surrounds the picture of the woman with the haunting smile, on first viewing it is common to find the picture a disappointment. The glass



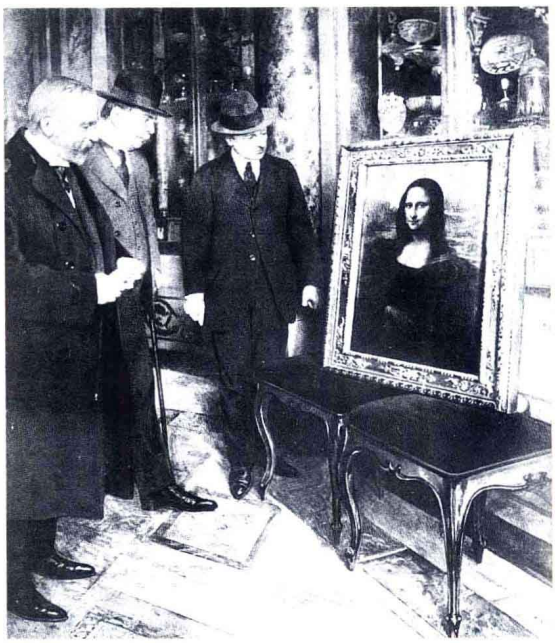
1-1 Leonardo da Vinci—*Mona Lisa*, *c.* 1503–1505. Oil on wood, approximately 30" x 21". Louvre, Paris.

ART NEWS

THE *MONA LISA* HAS BEEN STOLEN!

The *Mona Lisa was* actually stolen from the Louvre in 1911, causing a national scandal. While the complete story will never be known, it is believed that the theft was an attempt not only to sell the *Mona Lisa* but also many forged copies. The forger's plan was that upon the shocking announcement of the painting's theft, unscrupulous wealthy collectors around the world could be easily duped into buying his or her forgeries of the masterpiece.

The forger contacted a former employee of the Louvre, Vincenzo Peruggia, to arrange the theft. Peruggia and his accomplices, dressed as staff, entered the museum as it closed Sunday afternoon, August 20, 1911. The museum would not open again until Tuesday. The thieves slept overnight in the museum. Early the next morning, they carried the painting through the many galleries, planning to tell anyone who saw them that they were bringing the *Mona Lisa* to the staff photography lab. The only one who did see them was a plumber who helped them open a stuck exit door.



1-2 French officials examine the *Mona Lisa* after its return.

It wasn't until the next day anyone knew it was missing and it took two years for it to reappear in Italy. Vincenzo Peruggia had tried to sell it and was turned over to the authorities. At the trial, the thief, who was born in Italy, claimed that he had stolen Leonardo's masterpiece to return it to its rightful place in his own country. A sympathetic Italian jury sentenced Peruggia to only a few months in jail. After the trial, the *Mona Lisa* was displayed briefly in Florence (where Leonardo had begun it in 1503) and then was returned to its home in the Louvre (1-2).

makes it difficult to see, and what we see is not exactly what Leonardo painted. The art historian Kenneth Clark described the *Mona Lisa* as "the submarine goddess of the Louvre," a phrase that accurately reflects the dominant greenish tone of the painting as well as its aquarium-like casing. Yet the earliest known description of the portrait raves about the warmth of the colors, the rosy nostrils and red lips, as well as the overall tone of the face that "seemed not to be colored but to be living flesh." Not only has the color faded, but also at some point in its history the painting was made smaller, probably to fit into a frame, with portions of its left and right sides sliced off.

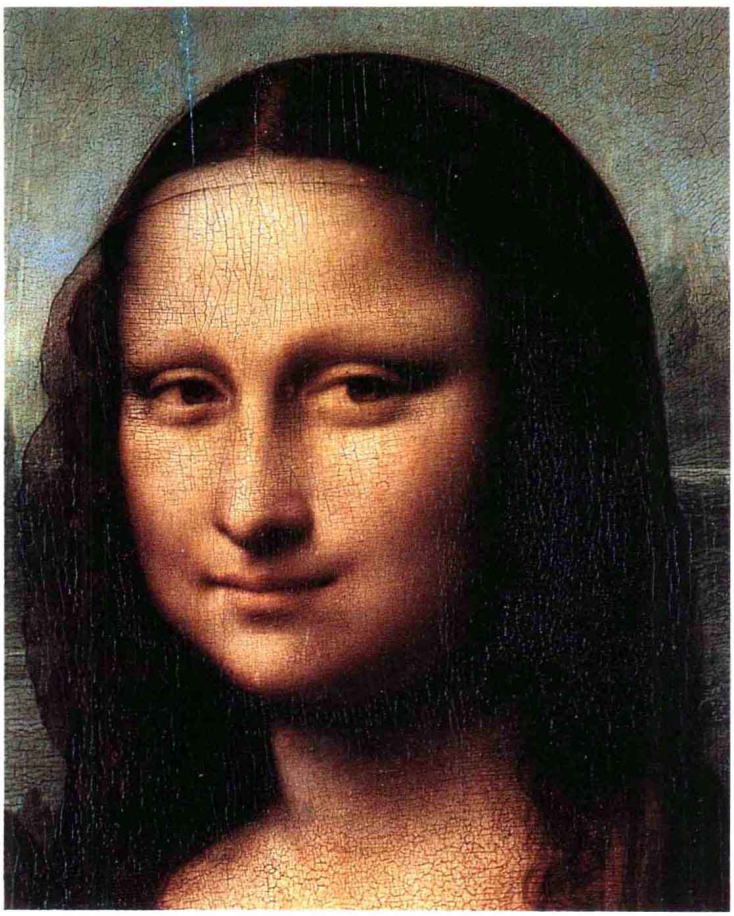
LOOKING AT ART

LEARNING HOW TO SEE

Still, despite these ravages of time, it is possible to consider what makes the *Mona Lisa* a masterpiece. Whatever the type of art in question, the first step in learning to appreciate art is simply learning to *look*. This is more challenging than is usually believed. Often we think of looking as a passive act, as in watching TV or flipping through pictures in a magazine. But studying the visual arts requires more than empty viewing; seeing can be *active* rather than passive. When primitive people looked at the

world, they had to *observe* nature because they were hunters and gatherers; they depended on their eyes for survival. In their world everything was natural and real; very little was made by man. We, on the other hand, live among literally millions of images, not only in books or on a screen but also on almost everything we touch—from cereal boxes to printed T-shirts. And, as opposed to primitive cultures, most of what we see and interact with is human-made. This bombardment by literally millions of printed and video images has made us visually sophisticated, but can also leave our eyes "numb."

Artists often say that someone can really "see" as if most people cannot. What an artist means by "seeing" is hard to explain, but it is something like the totally involved gaze of a newborn child, hungrily looking at everything as if it had never been seen before, not blinded by preconceptions. All of us like to see new things, but in the midst of a busy life our seeing becomes stale, our eyes jaded. Art can renew the pleasure of seeing and help us feel more alive. Many people have had the exhilarating experience after leaving a museum of noticing that the world outside looks much more interesting and beautiful.



1-3 Detail of figure 1-1

Let's return to the *Mona Lisa* and look at her carefully. First, the image is beautiful. It is not simply that this is the portrait of a beautiful woman—in fact, *La Gioconda* (Lisa del Giocondo) looks less than ideal to contemporary eyes. Although it is safe to assume that she was considered attractive by the standards of the 16th century, Leonardo did not give her face (see detail, 1-3) the same perfect beauty he gave to his drawings of angels, for example. But what makes a work of art famous is less the quality of the subject than the way it is interpreted by the artist. The *Mona Lisa* is beautifully and gracefully painted. Viewers are attracted to da Vinci's work through the power of his skill as a draftsman and painter and his remarkable ability to bring his subject to life.

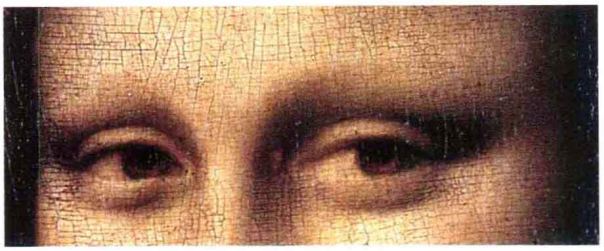
It was this lifelike quality that made the *Mona Lisa* famous in its own time. According to Giorgio Vasari, another Renaissance painter:

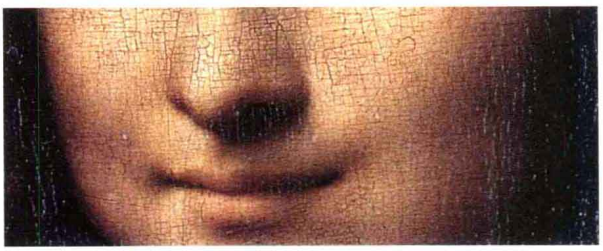
> Altogether this picture was painted in a manner to make the most confident artists—no matter who—despair and lose heart. . . in this painting of Leonardo's there was a smile so pleasing that it seemed divine rather than human; and those who saw it were amazed to find that it was as alive as the original.

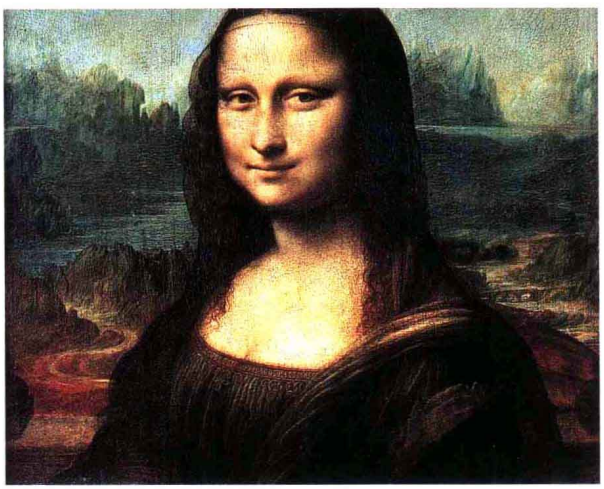
As Vasari recognized, the *Mona Lisa* revolutionized the art of portraiture, adding movement and life to what had previously been a static exercise in realism.

Methods and Materials

Leonardo wrote in his notebooks, "moderated light will add charm to every face," as anyone who has been with a date in a candle-lit restaurant knows. Leonardo used oil paint to recreate this effect, which he called **sfumato lighting** (in Italian, "the soft mist of a fountain"), a soft light that dissolved edges and made details unclear. The *Mona Lisa*'s eyes (1-4) and mouth (1-5) were bathed in sfumato light by Leonardo because he knew those are the two most important areas we look at on a face. Because they are left unclear, our imagination fills them in; the lack of definite edges makes her eyes and







1-4 (top), 1-5 (middle), 1-6 (bottom) Details of figure 1-1: eyes, mouth, and background of *Mona Lisa*

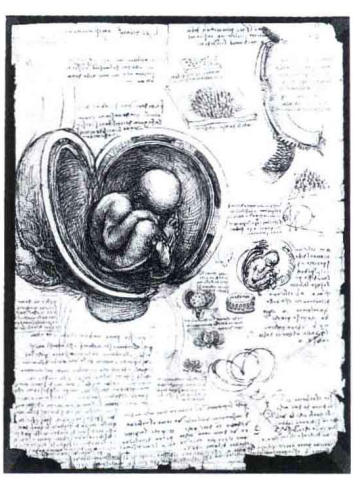
lips seem to move and gives the *Mona Lisa* life. So it is Leonardo's use of sfumato lighting that is responsible for the legends surrounding this painting—her inscrutable smile, the eyes that look at you and then away.

Leonardo generated a sense of movement in another way. Notice how the background (1-6) does not line up on either side of the *Mona Lisa*'s shoulders. Leonardo wanted to create the illusion that his subject has shifted her shoulder while we are looking at her. Leonardo understood how people *see*, perhaps better than anyone who had ever lived, and he used this knowledge in subtle ways to create the illusion that his *Mona Lisa* was a real person. In fact, this is how viewers have always responded to her.

PLACING ART AND ARTIST IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Great art reveals the spirit of the age that produced it. Therefore, we need to know when and who made a work of art so we can begin to consider how this affected its form. The grace and beauty of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, for example, reflects the value placed on these qualities during the Italian Renaissance. She also illustrates the highly prized attribute of aloofness—what the Italians called "sprezzatura," a kind of aristocratic refinement and calm.

The life of Leonardo da Vinci represents many other Renaissance values as well. Leonardo was an independent thinker, a scientific observer of nature, an imaginative inventor, and a delightful conversationalist, as well as a talented artist. He filled vast notebooks (1-7) with his observations, drawings, poems, and philosophical theories. Above all, he exemplifies a crucial Renaissance idea credited with giving birth to the modern age—*individualism*. Renaissance thinkers conceived of human beings as potentially godlike creatures with immense physical, intellectual, and creative powers. Part of the mystique of Leonardo's art is that it was done by one of the first individuals to be considered a creative genius in the modern sense.



1-7 Leonardo da Vinci, *Animals in Motion* and *Embryological Study* from the notebooks, *c.* 1510. Pen and ink, each approximately 11¾" x 8½". Royal collection, Windsor Castle. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Not to be reproduced without written permission from Royal Collection Enterprises.

No one can really be sure why Leonardo painted this portrait of twenty-four-year-old Lisa del Giocondo, the wife of an important Florentine merchant, at the same time the artist was refusing paid commissions from more notable persons. We do know that Leonardo worked on the *Mona Lisa* for decades and never considered it finished. Since he reworked the image over and over, carrying it with him on his travels, the painting must have exerted the same endless fascination over the artist himself as it has over its viewers. Because Leonardo died in France, the guest of King Francis I (who moved his mother and sisters out of a chateau so da Vinci could take up residence there), the *Mona Lisa* became part of the royal art collection. That is how it came to be in the Louvre Museum in Paris, and why it eventually became identified as not only a part of Italian culture but French culture as well.

1-8 Jocho, *Amida Buddha* (from the interior of the Ho-o-do or Phoenix Hall), 1053. Gilded wood, 9′4″ high. Byodo-in Temple at Uji, Japan.

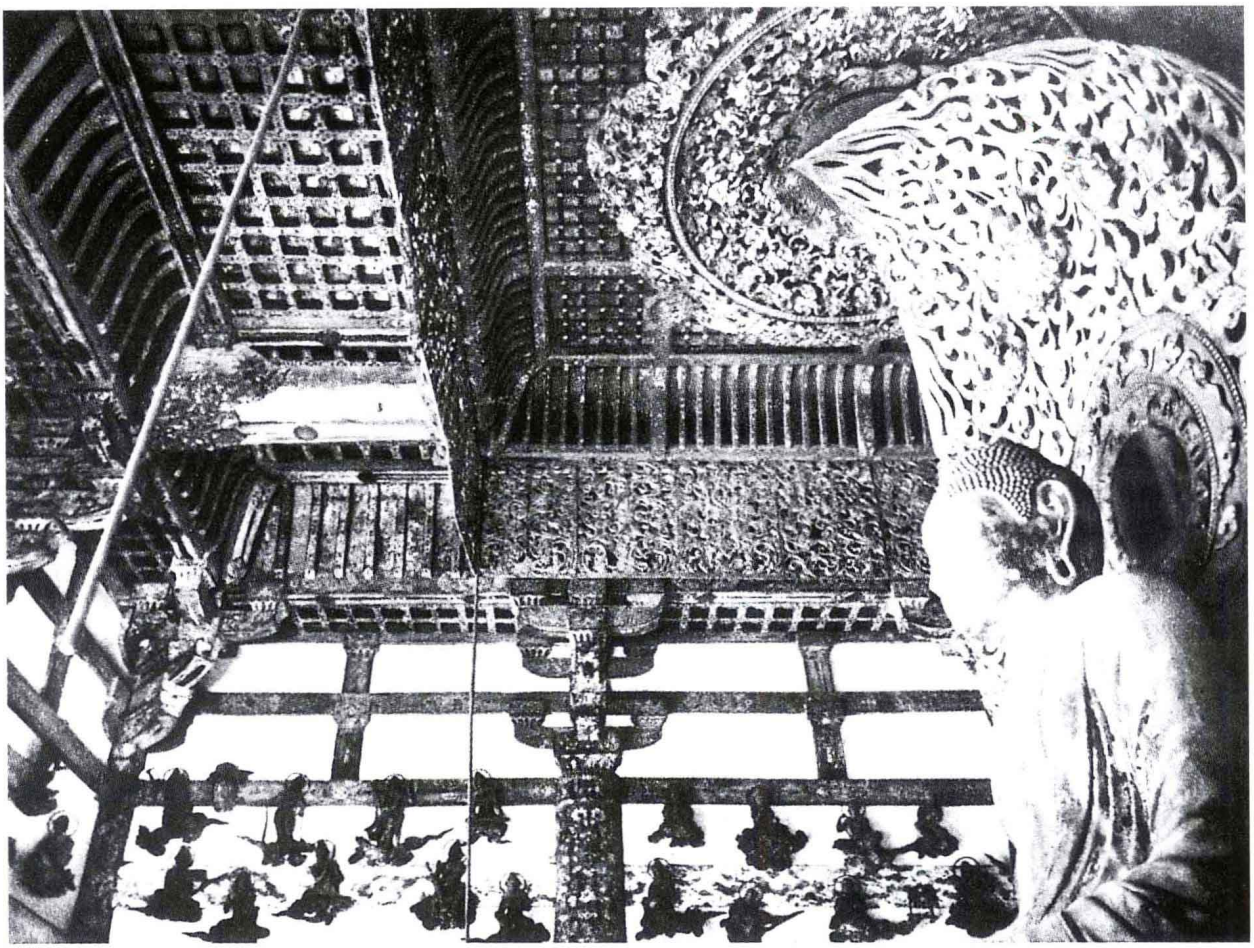
Art and Culture

Western cultures are not the only ones to see works of art as priceless. The Japanese, for example, have an elaborate system of rating works of art and their value to national heritage. The most valuable artworks are designated as Japanese "National Treasures," while other significant works of art are categorized as "Important Cultural Properties." Because of their historic and aesthetic importance, National Treasures (ranging from huge statues and painted screens to fragile decorated boxes and ceramic vessels, such as teacups) cannot be sold or taken out of the country. In Japan, even people—such as the most famous and accomplished living artists—can be given the official title of National Treasure.

One of the works of art designated as a Japanese National Treasure is the wooden statue of the *Amida Buddha* (the Buddha of the West, 1-8) carved by the sculptor Jocho in the eleventh century. This statue is just part of an entire sculptured environment, a grouping of many gilded wooden figures, that decorate the central hall of a Buddhist temple designed for an aristocratic family of the period. Because of their great age and the high quality of their design and carving, all of the figures in this sculptural group qualify as National Treasures—considered as valuable to Japanese heritage as the Statue of Liberty is to Americans.

Even if we know little about Buddhism, we can be impressed by the elaborate carving and huge scale of this sculptural group. The *Amida Buddha* on his throne is almost twelve feet high, and the music-making angels (1-9) that hang on the walls number in the dozens. One is also impressed by the excellent preservation of statues that will soon be a thousand years old. But imagine how powerful this vision of paradise must have seemed to the followers of the Pure Land Buddhist sect, who believed that when they died their God would descend and lead their souls to a blissful paradise. It is this very descent, the floating of the Amida to earth, and the celestial paradise of dancing and music-making angels, that Jocho brought to life in the Phoenix Hall.

Just as the *Mona Lisa* reflects the ideals of Renaissance Italy, this Japanese sculptural group reflects the taste and beliefs of the world in which it was created. Eleventh-century



1-9 Interior of the Ho-o-do or Phoenix Hall, 1053. Byodo-in Temple at Uji, Japan.

Japan was dominated by a ruling class that valued elegance and courtly manners above all. The Amida cult appealed particularly to the upper classes because its promised paradise resembled a continuation of the luxurious life of beauty and ease they knew on earth. The Buddha, as seen by Jocho, is as refined and aloof as a prince who looks down graciously at his worshippers; the dancing angels are like so many well-bred royal attendants. The slimness and delicacy of the carvings, the richness of the shimmering gold with which they were painted (now somewhat worn), were perfectly in tune with both the subject they represented and the patrons for whom they were made. Yet even today, in a completely changed world, embracing different religious beliefs, brought up in a different culture, we can appreciate the skill and genius that make Jocho's sculptural grouping a great work of art.

THE POWERS OF ART: BRINGING FAITH TO LIFE

Through art, the deepest and most intangible beliefs of a culture can be translated into powerful images, images that communicate specific spiritual messages to the people who view them as part of their religious rituals. From the beginning of humanity, people have expressed their beliefs in material form. They pictured their gods and goddesses in statues and paintings; they built places for worship and religious rites. The *Amida Buddha* is an excellent example of how art brings religious beliefs to life. In some periods, such as the Middle Ages in the Western world, *all* art was religious in character. So much visual art is related to human beliefs and rituals of worship that it would be easy to fill an entire library