Understanding Ant

Rois Fichner-Rathus

Understanding Art

THIRD EDITION

LOIS FICHNER-RATHUS

Trenton State College

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Preface

It is incredible to me that *Understanding Art* is now in its third edition. In terms of textbook lifetimes, that makes it time-tested and venerable; yet to me *Understanding Art* is still an exuberant, maturing child, having come into being (like my flesh-and-blood children) only in the 1980s.

The acceptance of earlier editions confirmed the value of our unique approach to the teaching of art appreciation, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue to "fine tune" the text and provide additional works and features to help it complete its mission. Let me then begin with the new.

WHAT'S NEW IN THIS EDITION

There are four major changes in the third edition of *Understanding Art:*

1. A new feature: "Compare and Contrast . . ." Many instructors use slide comparisons as a pedagogical device for helping students center on the stylistic and technical aspects of works of art. In the third edition of *Understanding Art*, we have set up 16 similar comparisons right in the text. Students

are asked to consider two works regarding which we raise pertinent questions that focus on their stylistic and technical similarities and differences. In some cases the works are shown twice—once where they are discussed in the text and again in a "Compare and Contrast . . ." feature. This visual advantage enables students to compare works without flipping pages.

2. Scores of new works by women artists and artists of color. These additions allow instructors to demonstrate the impact of cultural diversity on the visual arts. At the outset of Chapter 1, for example, students have the opportunity to compare Western standards for beauty, as epitomized by Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, with those of an African culture. In the first chapter alone, we have 21 new works by women and artists of color, in addition to a new Mapplethorpe self-portrait. The media used by these artists range from traditional drawings, paintings, and sculptures to fabric collage, video, multimedia installations, and performance.

3. Full color predominates. To afford students a greater opportunity to appreciate the works we illustrate, most of the works are reproduced in full color.

4. A new supplement, *Thinking and Writing About Art,*" is available for qualified adoptions of the third edition at no cost to students. (Your Prentice Hall representative can help you obtain this supplement.)

"Thinking and Writing About Art" is intended to encourage (a) critical thinking and (b) writing across the curriculum as they apply to the visual arts. "Thinking and Writing About Art" contains two features to meet these objectives. The first relates to the "Compare and Contrast . . " features that appear in the text. Works to be compared and contrasted are duplicated in the supplement, and students are given space to write their answers.

The second feature in "Thinking and Writing About Art" is the raising of issues in critical thinking as they pertain to art. Again, students are provided with space to answer. Because pages are perforated and there are places for students to write in their names and the date, these thinking and writing exercises can also be handed in as assignments.

WHAT REMAINS

The third edition, like the first and second, remains a book that is intended to work both for students and for professors. *Understanding Art* continues to serve as a tool to help organize and enlighten this demanding, often whirlwind-like course. My goal has been to write a book that would do it all: to edify and inform students, at the same time keeping them engaged, animated, inspired; to meet the desire of instructors for comprehensive exposition; and to satisfy my own needs through eloquent metaphor.

The third edition retains most of the features, topics, and coverage that worked well in the first two editions. The text continues to balance the discussions of media and methods with the comprehensive coverage of art history—a balancing act that set the first two editions apart from other art appreciation textbooks. The third edition

continues to focus on both contemporary art and the celebrated monuments from the history of art. Let me be more specific:

COVERAGE

Understanding Art is comprehensive and balanced in coverage. It communicates the excitement, relevance, and beauty of art by combining stimulating discussions of the language and elements of art with a comprehensive treatment of the history of art. The elements of art—media, methods, content, composition, style—and its purposes constitute the first part of the book. Chapters 1-9 focus on what we respond to in a work of art and how artists go about their work. It was my intention to show that our lives are enriched not only by drawing, painting, sculpture and architecture, but also by photography, cinematography, video art, crafts, even advertising design.

We are affected not only by the art we view in the world's famous museums. The carpeting we tread upon, the furniture on which we sit, even the logos on our business stationery can all have an aesthetic influence on our daily lives. I felt that I must open students' eyes to all this; I must help them to understand and appreciate the beauty all about them.

But to understand where we are, we must also understand where we have been. To provide such insight, the history of art is covered chronologically in the second part of the book. It was my goal to demonstrate that artists from all periods and all cultures have used the same elements and language of art in order to commemorate their experiences, express religious values, protest the social order, decorate their communities, or persuade their audiences. Their works, of course, have taken very different forms. Yet each, when understood, may be seen to have a certain integrity-indeed, a certain necessity-that expresses the artist's time, place, and personality.

PEDAGOGY AND STYLE

It is not sufficient for textbooks to be comprehensive in coverage. They must also meet the students' needs by presenting the subject in an accessible form.

Most students who take art appreciation or introduction to art history courses are nonmajors. Some are fulfilling a distributional requirement in the humanities. As such, many of them begin their studies with little or no idea of what art is about. This textbook uses a number of pedagogical and stylistic features to stimulate and enlighten the contemporary broad-based college population:

- INTRODUCTION: An introductory chapter called "What Is Art?" discusses the meanings, purposes, and styles of art.
- "A CLOSER LOOK" AND "COMPARE AND CONTRAST" BOXES: Boxed highlights in each chapter contain discussions of the methodology of art history, insights into artists' personalities, artrelated news items, and comparisons that show two works and phrase questions about them to help students focus on their stylistic and technical similarities and differences.
- LINE DRAWINGS: Pertinent and clearly labeled diagrams, maps, architectural plans, and explanatory drawings for complex artistic processes are interspersed throughout the chapters on media and methods.
- GLOSSARY: Key terms are boldfaced in the text and defined in an end-of-book glossary.
- STYLE: The style of writing and the explanations of concepts are tailored to communicate to the students without compromising the complexity of the subject matter. As I wrote *Understanding Art*, I tried to remain keenly aware of what had come before and what would come ahead, so that I could build concepts logically and gradually. I avoided using difficult technical terms arbitrarily; and, when I did use them, I attempted to explain them clearly.

Whatever else good writing does, it must also communicate, and I did not subordinate communication to the subject matter; instead, I made every effort to integrate style and subject.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I consider myself fortunate to have studied with a fine group of artists, art historians, and art professionals who helped shape my love of art and my thinking about art throughout my career. Without the broad knowledge, skills, and dedication of these individuals, Understanding Art would not have taken its present form and might not have come into being. They include: James S. Ackerman, Wayne V. Andersen, Stanford Anderson, Whitney Chadwick, Judy Chicago, Mojmir Frinta, Michael Graves, George Heard Hamilton, Ann Sutherland Harris, Julius S. Held, Henry A. Millon, Sam Hunter, Konrad Oberhuber, John C. Overbeck, Michael Rinehart, Andrew C. Ritchie, Mark W. Roskill, Theodore Roszak. Miriam Schapiro, George Segal, Joan Snyder, Bernice Steinbaum, and Jack Tworkov.

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photo graphs. Suzanne Behnke designed the "Compare and Contrast . . ." feature, and Karen Noferi did the page layouts.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Spence, for his patience and help in certain aspects of preparing the manuscript. Writing a textbook can be an engulfing experience, and during the past several years he learned what it means to be "Mr. Mom."

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