

ART HISTORY

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Caravaggio and Bernini's Baroque drama, the Dutch Golden Age, Rococo and Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism and the arrival of photography, Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, early 20th-century Modernism, Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art to Postmodernism, and a capstone framework for contemporary art applied to Banksy's Love Is in the Bin.

10 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

CHAPTER 1: FROM RENAISSANCE TO BAROQUE: DRAMA AND MOVEMENT

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 1 · From Renaissance to Baroque: Drama and Movement

Course 1 closed on Botticelli's linear grace and the High Renaissance's own pursuit of calm, idealized balance. Within roughly a century, that calm gives way almost completely to raw drama — violent light, twisting bodies, and art deliberately engineered to overwhelm a viewer emotionally. This shift wasn't accidental: it was, in real part, a matter of institutional policy.

Caravaggio: Chiaroscuro as Drama

THE CALLING OF SAINT MATTHEW, SAN LUIGI DEI FRANCESI, ROME (1599–1600)

Formally, a single, near-theatrical shaft of light cuts diagonally across an otherwise dim tavern interior, picking Matthew's own face out of shadow at the exact moment Christ singles him out. This technique — extreme, dramatic contrast between light and dark, known as **chiaroscuro** when used generally and **tenebrism** in Caravaggio's own especially extreme version — replaces the Renaissance's evenly, generously lit compositions with something closer to a single spotlight in a dark room. The setting itself is radically ordinary: not an idealized biblical landscape, but a grubby, recognizable Roman tavern, populated by figures who look like real, unglamorous people rather than idealized saints.



A Reversed Quotation of Michelangelo

Christ's own extended hand in this painting closely echoes Adam's hand from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Course 1, Chapter 8) — but with the roles deliberately reversed. Where Adam's hand reaches out limply, passively receiving life from God's own active, energized gesture, Caravaggio gives that exact limp, receiving gesture to *Christ* himself, echoing the old theological idea of Christ as a "new Adam." Whether the connection carries that precise theological weight or

is simply a knowing visual reference to a famous, recognizable image is genuinely debated — but the formal quotation itself, gesture for gesture, is real and widely noted.

Bernini: Sculpture as Theater

ECSTASY OF SAINT TERESA, CORNARO CHAPEL, SANTA MARIA DELLA VITTORIA, ROME (1647–1652)

Formally, Teresa's own marble drapery churns and folds as if genuinely caught mid-motion by wind — a frozen instant of overwhelming spiritual experience, not a calm, static pose. Bernini engineers real, physical light into the composition itself: a hidden window above the sculpture illuminates gilded bronze rays behind the figures, actual sunlight standing in for divine light. Members of the Cornaro family who commissioned the chapel are sculpted into side niches resembling theater boxes, positioned as if watching Teresa's own vision unfold — the sculpture doesn't just depict a dramatic scene, it stages one, with a built-in audience.

Sculpture engaging real space — this is a genuine departure from every sculpture covered in Course 1. A Chola Nataraja or a Kritios Boy exists as a self-contained object to be viewed from outside; Bernini's Cornaro Chapel treats the entire architectural space — light, side-figures, framing — as part of the artwork itself, closer to a stage set than a freestanding statue.

The Counter-Reformation: Drama as Deliberate Policy

This dramatic shift wasn't purely a stylistic preference — it was substantially driven by the Catholic Church's own institutional response to the Protestant Reformation. The **Council of Trent** (meeting intermittently 1545–1563) addressed religious imagery directly in its final session, in December 1563, defending the continued use of sacred images against Protestant accusations of idolatry — and going further, actively arguing that "great profit is derived from sacred images," since believers are moved through them to "adore and love God, and to

cultivate piety." Artists were explicitly encouraged to produce work that was emotionally accessible and persuasive, not merely doctrinally accurate.

 An 800-Year-Old Argument, Revisited

Trent's own careful distinction — honoring a sacred image is not the same as worshipping the physical object itself — is almost exactly the same theological line the Second Council of Nicaea drew in 787 CE (Course 1, Chapter 4), resolving the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy. Two very different historical crises — Byzantine iconoclasm, and the Protestant Reformation roughly 800 years later — provoke the Catholic and Orthodox traditions into defending sacred images using strikingly similar reasoning.

Policy explains the demand, not the specific genius — Trent's own decree explains *why* the Church wanted emotionally overwhelming, persuasive religious art at this exact moment; it doesn't by itself explain why Caravaggio's tenebrism or Bernini's theatrical staging were the specific, brilliant solutions that emerged. Institutional demand and individual genius did real, separate work here, much as Chapter 7 of Course 1 argued for Florence's own guild system and Brunelleschi together.

Renaissance Calm vs. Baroque Drama

ASPECT	RENAISSANCE (COURSE 1)	BAROQUE
Light	Even, generously distributed	Extreme, theatrical contrast (chiaroscuro/tenebrism)
Pose/composition	Calm, balanced, idealized	Twisting, dynamic, caught mid-motion
Setting	Idealized or mythological	Often ordinary, recognizable, even grubby
Goal	Harmony and idealized beauty	Emotional overwhelm and persuasion

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Caravaggio painted sacred figures using ordinary, unidealized people and settings. Does that choice make the religious subject more relatable, less dignified, or something else entirely?

REFLECTION 2

Bernini's Cornaro Chapel includes sculpted spectators watching the main scene, inside the artwork itself. What effect does knowing an "audience" is built into the piece have on how you'd experience it as a real visitor?

REFLECTION 3

The Council of Trent explicitly wanted art to persuade emotionally, not just depict accurately. Is art commissioned for a specific persuasive purpose like this less "authentic" than art made for its own sake — or is that distinction not a meaningful one?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 1

- Caravaggio's chiaroscuro/tenebrism — extreme light-dark contrast, ordinary settings and people
- *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599-1600) — Christ's hand echoes (and reverses) Adam's from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*
- Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-1652) — sculpture staged as theater, engaging real architectural light and space
- Council of Trent (1545-1563, sacred images addressed Dec. 1563) — reaffirmed images, explicitly demanded emotional persuasion
- Trent's veneration-vs-worship distinction echoes the Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE, Course 1 Ch.4)

What's Next

Next chapter: **The Dutch Golden Age & the Birth of an Open Art Market** — Rembrandt, Vermeer, and genre/still-life painting emerging directly from a newly wealthy merchant class buying art for their own homes rather than the church or court.

CHAPTER 2: THE DUTCH GOLDEN AGE & THE BIRTH OF AN OPEN ART MARKET

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 2 · The Dutch Golden Age & the Birth of an Open Art Market

At the exact same moment Catholic Rome was commissioning Caravaggio and Bernini's overwhelming religious drama (Chapter 1), the Protestant Dutch Republic was producing something almost entirely different — small, intimate paintings of ordinary rooms, ordinary objects, and ordinary faces. The reason isn't a difference in talent. It's a difference in who was buying art, and why.

Calvinism Empties the Church Commission Market

Dutch Calvinism rejected devotional imagery in churches outright — the entire category of commission that had driven Chapter 1's own Counter-Reformation drama simply didn't exist in the Dutch Republic. Rather than ending Dutch painting, this had the opposite effect: freed from religious commission work, painters turned to an entirely new customer base — a newly prosperous merchant and civic class buying paintings directly, for their own homes, on a genuinely open market rather than through advance commission.

A genuinely different economic structure — Chapter 7 of Course 1 traced Florentine innovation to competitive guild-funded commissions; Chapter 1 of this course traced Baroque drama to concentrated Church patronage. The Dutch Golden Age adds a third, genuinely distinct model: paintings made speculatively, in advance, for sale to whoever wanted to buy one — closer to a modern retail art market than either of the two patronage systems covered so far.

New Buyers, New Genres

An open civilian market rewards different subject matter than a church or court ever would. Four genres flourish in this specific economic environment:

Genre painting

Scenes of ordinary domestic and everyday life — a woman reading a letter, a kitchen interior — rather than religious or mythological narrative.

Still life

Carefully arranged objects — flowers, food, tableware — often carrying quiet symbolic reminders of mortality or wealth's own impermanence.

Landscape

Recognizable Dutch scenery, celebrating a genuinely new national pride and prosperity.

Portraiture

Individual and group portraits for civic and merchant clients, not royal or ecclesiastical ones.

Rembrandt: A Group Portrait, Reinvented

THE NIGHT WATCH (COMMISSIONED 1640, COMPLETED 1642)

Formally a militia company portrait — a genre with an established, static convention: rows of officers posed calmly, evenly lit, easily identifiable. Rembrandt breaks that convention almost entirely: the company is caught mid-action, weapons being raised and loaded, a drummer mid-beat, figures overlapping and partially obscuring each other, all under a dramatic, unevenly distributed light recognizably descended from Chapter 1's own Caravaggio (transmitted north via painters who had studied his work directly in Italy). The painting is enormous — roughly 3.8 by 4.5 meters — a scale matching its own dramatic ambition.



Chiaroscuro, Traveling

Rembrandt never studied under Caravaggio directly, but Caravaggio's own dramatic light-dark technique spread north through a real chain of influence and imitation — proof that a formal innovation from Chapter 1 didn't stay confined to Rome, even as the religious and economic conditions producing Dutch art were genuinely different from Italy's own.

Rembrandt also produced an extraordinary number of self-portraits — roughly forty across his lifetime — tracking his own face, and by extension his own fortunes, from confident young success through the visible wear of later financial ruin, with an honesty about his own aging that has no real precedent in the courses covered so far.

Vermeer: The Tronie, Not a Portrait

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING (C. 1665)

Formally, a single figure emerges from a plain, near-black background, her head turned to meet the viewer's gaze directly, a single bright highlight rendered on the large pearl earring itself. Despite its fame, this isn't a portrait of a specific, named individual — it's a *tronie*, a Dutch genre of its own: a study of an expression, a type, or a costume, not a commissioned likeness of a real sitter. Vermeer's own total surviving output is remarkably small — roughly three dozen paintings — and his precise, luminous handling of light has led some scholars to suggest he may have used a camera obscura as a compositional aid, though this remains a genuinely debated technical question rather than a settled fact.

Fame doesn't always track historical documentation — *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is one of the most recognized paintings in the world today, yet almost nothing is known for certain about who the sitter was, why Vermeer painted her, or who first owned the work. A painting's own modern popularity and the depth of its actual historical record are two genuinely separate things.

Same Century, Two Genuinely Different Art Worlds

ASPECT	CATHOLIC ROME (CHAPTER 1)	DUTCH REPUBLIC
Primary patron	The Church, via Counter-Reformation policy	Individual civilian buyers, an open market

ASPECT	CATHOLIC ROME (CHAPTER 1)	DUTCH REPUBLIC
Dominant subject	Religious drama, saints, mysticism	Genre scenes, still life, landscape, portraiture
Scale/goal	Monumental, overwhelming, persuasive	Intimate, domestic-scaled, observational

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

An open market, where painters produce work speculatively for whoever might buy it, is genuinely different from commission-based patronage. Which system do you think gives an artist more creative freedom — and which gives them more financial security?

REFLECTION 2

Rembrandt's roughly forty self-portraits track his own visible decline as honestly as his early success. Why do you think an artist would return to painting their own aging face so many times, across an entire career?

REFLECTION 3

Girl with a Pearl Earring is a study of an imagined type, not a real named sitter — yet it's one of the most famous "portraits" in the world. Does knowing that change how you'd look at it?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 2

- Calvinism rejected church imagery, emptying that commission market and creating an open civilian one instead
- New genres: genre painting, still life, landscape, portraiture — all secular

- Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1640-42) — a static group-portrait convention broken into dramatic, Caravaggio-descended motion
- Rembrandt's ~40 self-portraits — an unprecedented, honest lifelong self-record
- Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (c. 1665) — a *tronie*, not a commissioned portrait
- Same century, two genuinely different art economies: Catholic Church patronage vs. an open Dutch civilian market

What's Next

Next chapter: **Rococo & Neoclassicism** — a deliberate study in contrast, ornamental pleasure against austere reason, and how each reflected the politics of its own moment.

CHAPTER 3: ROCOCO & NEOCLASSICISM

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 3 · Rococo & Neoclassicism

This chapter deliberately covers two opposites within a single generation: Rococo's frivolous, ornamental pleasure, and Neoclassicism's stern, geometric reason — arriving one right after the other in the same French court culture, and carrying genuinely different political weight as that century moved toward revolution.

Rococo: Ornament, Pleasure, and Aristocratic Leisure

Rococo grows directly out of late Baroque decoration, but strips away Chapter 1's own religious drama entirely in favor of lighter, secular, pleasure-focused subjects — pastel palettes, asymmetrical curling ornament (*rocaille*), and courtly romance. Jean-Antoine Watteau effectively invented the genre's own central theme, the *fête galante* — elegant figures at leisure in idealized parkland settings — developed further by François Boucher, court painter to Louis XV and a favorite of his mistress, Madame de Pompadour.

JEAN-HONORÉ FRAGONARD, *THE SWING* (C. 1767)

Formally, a young woman swings through dappled, sun-lit foliage, her pink dress caught mid-motion, one shoe flying off toward the top of the composition. An older man, mostly hidden in shadow, works the swing's ropes from behind; a young man reclines in the bushes below, positioned to look directly up her skirt as she swings overhead. The palette is soft and pastel, the brushwork light and feathery, the whole scene staged as a private, playful, and openly flirtatious secret — a world entirely of leisure, with no hint of labor, religion, or civic duty anywhere in the frame.

Antiquity, Rediscovered Underground

Systematic excavation began at Herculaneum in 1738 and at Pompeii in 1748 (the site wasn't confirmed to actually be Pompeii, rather than nearby Stabiae, until 1763) — both towns buried and preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. For the first time, Europeans could see genuine, physically intact Roman houses, wall paintings, furniture, and everyday objects, rather than relying on later Roman marble copies the way Chapter 3 of Course 1 described. Wealthy travelers on the Grand Tour carried these direct images of antiquity home across Europe, fueling a genuine revival of interest in Greco-Roman form.

The Third Revival

Course 1 traced two earlier moments of deliberate classical revival — Rome itself reviving Greek idealization for Augustus (Course 1, Ch.3), and the Renaissance reviving it again a thousand years later (Course 1, Ch.7-8). Herculaneum and Pompeii trigger a genuine third revival, this time driven by direct physical excavation rather than surviving texts or earlier copies — a real reminder that classical antiquity's own influence never fully disappears; it just keeps getting rediscovered.

Neoclassicism: Austerity, Reason, and Civic Virtue

JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID, OATH OF THE HORATII (1784)

Formally, this is Rococo's near-total opposite: a stark, geometric composition of three arches framing three clear figural groups, restrained and controlled coloring, and rigid, deliberate poses in place of Fragonard's soft, fluttering motion. The subject — three Roman brothers swearing an oath to fight, and likely die, for their city — carries an equally opposite value system: stoic self-sacrifice for the state, placed explicitly above personal or family feeling (the women in the same composition are shown grieving, visibly excluded from the men's own resolve).

A royal commission that became a revolutionary icon — David's painting was commissioned in 1784 through King Louis XVI's own royal arts administration, and completed under that same royal patronage system this chapter has otherwise treated as Rococo's own domain. Yet its stern imagery of civic duty and self-sacrifice was rapidly adopted as a visual touchstone for

revolutionary ideals just a few years later — a genuine historical irony: the monarchy itself funded the aesthetic language that would soon be turned against it.

Two Styles, Two Politics

ASPECT	ROCOCO	NEOCLASSICISM
Color & line	Pastel, soft, asymmetrical curves	Restrained, geometric, rigid
Subject	Leisure, romance, aristocratic pleasure	Civic duty, self-sacrifice, moral clarity
Associated with	The <i>ancien régime</i> aristocracy	Enlightenment reason; later, revolutionary ideals
Reference point	An idealized present of leisure	An idealized Roman past of duty

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Fragonard's *The Swing* was made purely for aristocratic pleasure, with no civic or moral message at all. Does art need a serious purpose to be genuinely valuable, or is pure pleasure and playfulness a legitimate goal in its own right?

REFLECTION 2

A royally-commissioned painting became a symbol of the revolution that would later execute that same king. What does that suggest about how much control a patron genuinely has over how their own commissioned art gets used later?

REFLECTION 3

This is the third time this course has covered antiquity being deliberately revived — by Rome itself, by the Renaissance, and now by 18th-century Neoclassicism. Why do you think Greco-Roman form specifically keeps getting rediscovered and reused, rather than some other past style?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 3

- Rococo — pastel, ornamental, secular pleasure; Watteau's *fête galante*, Boucher, Fragonard
- Fragonard's *The Swing* (c. 1767) — playful, flirtatious aristocratic leisure
- Herculaneum (1738) & Pompeii (1748, confirmed 1763) — direct excavation reviving interest in antiquity, the third such revival this course has covered
- David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) — stark, geometric, civic self-sacrifice over personal feeling
- A royal commission that became a revolutionary visual icon within a few years

What's Next

Next chapter: **Romanticism** — Goya, Turner, and Delacroix; emotion, the sublime, and nature placed over Neoclassical order.

CHAPTER 4: ROMANTICISM

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 4 · Romanticism

Where Chapter 3's Neoclassicism prized restraint, reason, and idealized order, Romanticism inverts nearly every one of those priorities: raw emotion, nature's overwhelming power, and — most pointedly — a willingness to depict contemporary political horror rather than a distant, morally tidy Roman past.

The Sublime: A New Aesthetic Category

In 1757, the philosopher Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, formally distinguishing the merely beautiful — pleasing, harmonious, Chapter 3's own Neoclassical order — from the **sublime**: an experience of awe mixed with real terror, provoked by something whose scale or power genuinely threatens to overwhelm the viewer. Burke argued that terror was, in fact, the ruling principle behind any experience of the sublime. This single idea gives Romanticism its own coherent aesthetic goal, genuinely distinct from anything covered so far in this course.

Goya: A Direct Moral Reversal

FRANCISCO GOYA, *THE THIRD OF MAY 1808* (1814)

Commemorating Spanish civilians executed by Napoleon's occupying French troops during the Peninsular War. Formally, a single stark lantern isolates the central victim, arms flung wide in a pose widely read as echoing a crucifixion, his face lit with raw terror rather than composed nobility. The firing squad, opposite him, is rendered as a faceless, mechanical line of identical soldiers — the state's own violence stripped of any individual humanity at all.

🔮 Answering David Directly

This is a deliberate, pointed reversal of Chapter 3's *Oath of the Horatii*. Both paintings show state-sanctioned violence and self-sacrifice; David frames it as noble, controlled, and worth admiring. Goya frames the same underlying subject — a state killing people in the name of duty — as horrifying, chaotic, and worth condemning. The formal tools (careful composition, deliberate lighting, real historical subject matter) are similar; the moral verdict could not be more opposite.

Turner: The Sublime as Pure Sensation

J.M.W. TURNER, *SNOW STORM: STEAM-BOAT OFF A HARBOUR'S MOUTH* (1842)

Formally, recognizable form nearly dissolves entirely into a swirling vortex of white, grey, and pale color — a steamboat is only barely distinguishable, dwarfed and nearly consumed by the storm itself. Turner is widely considered among the first painters to embody Burke's own theory directly: this isn't a calm, composed depiction of a storm from a safe distance, but an attempt to make the viewer feel something closer to the storm's own genuinely overwhelming, disorienting power.

Nature dwarfing human technology, on purpose — a steamboat, the era's own cutting-edge industrial achievement, is rendered as barely visible against the storm's own scale. The formal choice to nearly erase the ship is the whole point: nature's power here isn't just bigger than a human vessel, it's genuinely, meaningfully indifferent to it.

Delacroix: The Sublime, Turned Political

EUGÈNE DELACROIX, *LIBERTY LEADING THE PEOPLE* (1830)

Painted in the autumn of 1830, immediately following the actual July Revolution that had just toppled King Charles X. Formally, an allegorical female figure representing

Liberty — bare-breasted, holding the French tricolor flag aloft — strides over a barricade and fallen bodies, leading a genuinely mixed crowd of revolutionaries (a bourgeois figure in a top hat, a working-class youth with pistols) forward in one dynamic diagonal surge of movement and vivid color.

A genuinely contemporary subject, not history painting — Chapter 3's David painted an ancient Roman legend to comment indirectly on his own era's own values. Delacroix instead paints an actual event that had happened mere months earlier, with real, still-current political stakes — a meaningful shift from using the distant past as a moral mirror to depicting the immediate present directly.

Neoclassicism vs. Romanticism

ASPECT	NEOCLASSICISM (CH.3)	ROMANTICISM
Governing value	Reason, restraint, civic duty	Emotion, individual experience, the sublime
Composition	Geometric, controlled	Dynamic, dissolving, chaotic
Subject matter	Idealized ancient history	Contemporary events, raw nature
Attitude to state violence	Often ennobling (Horatii)	Often condemning (Goya)

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Burke argued terror is central to a genuine experience of the sublime. Can you think of something today — a landscape, a piece of media, a real experience — that produces that same mix of awe and real fear?

REFLECTION 2

Goya and David both depict state violence using careful, deliberate artistic technique, yet reach opposite moral conclusions. Does technical skill alone tell you anything about whether a painting is endorsing or condemning what it depicts?

REFLECTION 3

Delacroix painted an event from just months earlier, rather than using ancient history as a moral stand-in the way David did. What's gained, and what's risked, when an artist depicts a still-unresolved contemporary political moment directly?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 4

- Edmund Burke's *sublime* (1757) — awe mixed with real terror, distinct from mere beauty
- Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814) — a direct moral reversal of David's *Oath of the Horatii*
- Turner's *Snow Storm* (1842) — form dissolving into atmosphere, nature dwarfing human technology
- Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (1830) — a genuinely contemporary event, not history painting
- Neoclassicism's order gives way to Romanticism's emotion, chaos, and the sublime

What's Next

Next chapter: **Realism & the Disruptive Arrival of Photography** — Courbet's own deliberate rejection of idealization, and photography's genuine, lasting impact on what painting was even for afterward.

CHAPTER 5: REALISM & THE DISRUPTIVE ARRIVAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 5 · Realism & the Disruptive Arrival of Photography

Romanticism pursued emotion and the sublime; Realism, arriving right behind it, pursues something almost opposite in spirit but equally opposed to Neoclassical idealization: painting the world exactly as it actually looks, with no glorification and no sentimentality. That same decade, a genuinely new invention — photography — begins raising an uncomfortable question painting would spend the rest of this course answering in different ways.

Courbet: A Deliberate Rejection of Idealization

Gustave Courbet, the movement's own central figure, stated his own materialist philosophy plainly: "I have never seen an angel. Show me an angel, and I'll paint one." Courbet refused, as a matter of principle, to paint anything he hadn't directly observed — no mythology, no idealized allegory, no religious vision.

THE STONE BREAKERS (1849)

Formally, two anonymous laborers — an old man and a young boy — are shown mid-task, breaking stones on a roadside, rendered at a scale traditionally reserved for grand history painting. Neither figure is idealized or heroized in the way a Neoclassical composition would have posed them; their labor is simply, plainly depicted. This is a real formal statement: using history-painting scale for ordinary manual work implicitly argues that a laborer's own life is exactly as worthy of serious artistic attention as a Roman legend or a biblical scene.

An irony this chapter can't avoid noting — *The Stone Breakers* was destroyed in February 1945, when the vehicle transporting it (along with other artworks) was bombed during World War II. The painting survives today only through photographs and copies made before its destruction —

meaning the very medium this chapter is about to describe as painting's own existential rival is also the reason this specific painting can still be seen at all.

A BURIAL AT ORNANS (1849–1850)

An enormous canvas — again, history-painting scale — depicting an entirely ordinary provincial funeral in Courbet's own hometown, populated by specific, individually recognizable local townspeople rather than any generalized or idealized mourners. Exhibited at the 1850–51 Paris Salon, it provoked what contemporary accounts describe as an "explosive reaction" — critics decried the sheer ordinariness and perceived "ugliness" of the subject as fundamentally unworthy of a canvas this size.

Photography Arrives

In 1839, the French Academy of Sciences formally announced Louis Daguerre's daguerreotype process — the first widely practical, reasonably reproducible photographic method. For the first time, a mechanical process could capture an exact, literal likeness of a person or scene, in a fraction of the time a painted portrait required.

A shared commitment

Realism and early photography share a real underlying goal — depicting the world exactly as observed, without idealization — even though one is painted by hand and the other produced mechanically.

A genuine threat

If a camera could capture a literal likeness faster and, eventually, more cheaply than a painter, painting's own centuries-old monopoly on documentary accuracy was suddenly, genuinely in question.

An honest, open question, not yet answered here — this chapter doesn't resolve what painting was "for" once photography could out-perform it at literal likeness — that's exactly the question the next chapter's own painters had to answer for themselves, and answered by turning toward something a camera of that era genuinely couldn't do.

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Courbet refused to paint anything he hadn't personally observed. Does that principle make his own work more honest than earlier art built on mythology and allegory, or simply differently scoped?

REFLECTION 2

Critics were scandalized by Courbet using a monumental canvas for an ordinary funeral. What does the size of a canvas communicate about a subject's own perceived importance, independent of how it's actually painted?

REFLECTION 3

If you were a portrait painter in 1839, watching photography suddenly capture a likeness in minutes rather than days, what would you have tried to do differently to remain genuinely valuable?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 5

- Courbet: "I have never seen an angel. Show me an angel, and I'll paint one." — Realism's own materialist principle
- *The Stone Breakers* (1849) — history-painting scale for anonymous laborers; destroyed 1945, survives only via photographs
- *A Burial at Ornans* (1849-50) — monumental scale for an ordinary funeral; scandalized the 1850-51 Salon
- 1839 — Daguerre's daguerreotype announced, the first widely practical photographic process
- Photography directly threatens painting's own traditional monopoly on documentary likeness

What's Next

Next chapter: **Impressionism & Post-Impressionism** — Monet, Van Gogh, and Cézanne breaking from the Academy's own official Salon system, turning toward exactly what a camera of the era couldn't yet capture.

CHAPTER 6: IMPRESSIONISM & POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 6 · Impressionism & Post-Impressionism

Chapter 5 left an open question: if photography can capture a literal likeness, what is painting even for? Impressionism answers directly — painting a fleeting, subjective sensory impression a slow, then-contemporary camera genuinely couldn't. Getting there required breaking with the era's own dominant institution first.

The Salon System, and Breaking From It

The official Paris Salon, run by a conservative academic jury, was for most of the 19th century the near-only path to a painter's own reputation and livelihood — favoring polished finish, idealized form, and traditional subject matter above almost everything else.

1863 — the Salon des Refusés

An unusually large number of rejections that year provoked such outcry that Napoleon III ordered a separate exhibition of the rejected works. Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* became its principal scandal — a nude woman in an ordinary, contemporary outdoor setting alongside clothed men.

1874 — the first Impressionist exhibition

Monet, Renoir, Degas, and others organized their own exhibition entirely independently — a genuine institutional rupture, opting out of the Salon system rather than merely being rejected by it.

 A Mocking Name, Proudly Kept

Reviewing the 1874 exhibition, critic Louis Leroy wrote of Monet's own *Impression, Sunrise*: "Impression — I was certain of it... what freedom, what ease of workmanship! Wallpaper in its embryonic state is more finished than that seascape." Leroy meant this as an insult — the painting looked unfinished, a mere "impression" rather than a real, complete work. The artists themselves adopted his own dismissive term as their movement's own name.

Monet: Painting What a Camera Couldn't

CLAUDE MONET, *IMPRESSION, SUNRISE* (1872)

Formally, loose, visible, rapid brushstrokes render a hazy harbor sunrise at Le Havre — the sun a single bright dab of orange, boats reduced to a few quick dark marks, the whole scene deliberately unfinished by the Salon's own polished standard. This is the direct answer to Chapter 5's own open question: an 1870s photograph, requiring a long exposure, could not capture a specific, fleeting instant of shifting light and atmosphere the way a fast, gestural brush could. Painting's own new purpose becomes documenting subjective, momentary visual sensation, not literal, static likeness.

Post-Impressionism: Beyond Pure Optical Sensation

A loose successor movement, Post-Impressionism keeps Impressionism's own bright palette and visible brushwork while pushing past its purely optical, in-the-moment goal — toward structure, symbolism, or raw emotional expression instead.

VINCENT VAN GOGH, *THE STARRY NIGHT* (JUNE 1889)

Painted at the asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where Van Gogh had voluntarily admitted himself following a mental health crisis. Formally, thick, swirling impasto brushwork renders the night sky as a churning, almost physically turbulent force, with an invented village added beneath a real view from his own asylum window — not a literal transcription of what he actually saw, but an emotional, imagined intensification of it. This is a genuinely different goal from Monet's own optical fidelity: an interior emotional state, projected outward onto the landscape itself.

PAUL CÉZANNE, *THE MONT SAINTE-VICTOIRE SERIES* (1880S–1906)

Cézanne painted the same mountain near his home in Aix-en-Provence roughly eighty times over the last two decades of his life. In an 1904 letter to the painter Émile Bernard, he advised: "treat nature by the cylinder, the sphere, the cone." Formally, his own late canvases build the mountain from faceted, distinct patches of color functioning almost like geometric building blocks — pursuing the stable, underlying structure beneath appearances, rather than Impressionism's own fleeting surface effect.

A genuine bridge forward — Cézanne's own faceted, geometric treatment of form is widely credited as a direct influence on the radical break covered in Chapter 7 — Cubism's own full dissolution of a single, fixed viewpoint.

Two Genuinely Different Post-Salon Goals

ASPECT	IMPRESSIONISM (MONET)	POST-IMPRESSIONISM (VAN GOGH / CÉZANNE)
Primary goal	Capturing a fleeting optical/sensory impression	Emotional expression (Van Gogh) or underlying structure (Cézanne)
Brushwork	Loose, rapid, atmospheric	Expressive/thick (Van Gogh) or faceted/structural (Cézanne)
Relationship to observed reality	A momentary, literal optical record	Deliberately reworked — emotionally or structurally

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Louis Leroy's insult became the movement's own proud name. Can you think of another example, in art or elsewhere, of a dismissive label being reclaimed the same way?

REFLECTION 2

Van Gogh painted an imagined village beneath a real view, rather than what he actually saw. Does adding invented elements make a painting more or less "truthful" than Monet's own more literal optical record?

REFLECTION 3

Organizing an independent exhibition outside the Salon system was a genuine institutional risk in 1874. What do you think it takes for a group of artists today to make a similarly risky, independent break from whatever the current dominant gatekeeping institution is?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 6

- 1863 — the Salon des Refusés; Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* scandal
- 1874 — the first Impressionist exhibition, organized entirely independently of the official Salon
- Louis Leroy's mocking review coined "Impressionism"; the artists proudly kept the name
- Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1872) — capturing fleeting light/atmosphere a slow camera couldn't
- Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (June 1889) — emotional intensification, not literal record
- Cézanne's Mont Sainte-Victoire series (1880s-1906) — geometric structure beneath appearances, a bridge to Cubism

What's Next

Next chapter: **Early 20th-Century Modernism** — Cubism, Fauvism, and Expressionism; Picasso, Matisse, and Kandinsky, and the real conceptual break of abandoning single-point perspective after 500 years.

CHAPTER 7: EARLY 20TH-CENTURY MODERNISM

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 7 · Early 20th-Century Modernism

Three movements arrive within roughly a decade, each abandoning a different foundational rule Western painting had followed for centuries: Fauvism abandons naturalistic color, Cubism abandons the single fixed vantage point Course 1's own Chapter 7 traced back to Brunelleschi, and Expressionism eventually abandons recognizable subject matter altogether.

Fauvism: Color, Freed From Description

HENRI MATISSE, *WOMAN WITH A HAT* (1905)

Exhibited at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, depicting Matisse's own wife. Formally, color is applied with no attempt at naturalistic accuracy at all — passages of green, red, and blue describe her face and hat not because that's what a face actually looks like, but purely for the color's own expressive, emotional force. Color stops being a tool for description and becomes a subject of its own.

👤 Another Insult, Another Adopted Name

Critic Louis Vauxcelles, seeing a small, traditionally-styled Renaissance-influenced sculpture placed in the same room as these wildly colored paintings, reportedly exclaimed "Donatello among the wild beasts!" — and described the room itself as a "cage aux fauves" ("cage of wild beasts"). The artists adopted "Fauves" (wild beasts) as their own name, exactly the same pattern Chapter 6 described with Louis Leroy and Impressionism.

Cubism: Abandoning the Single Vantage Point

PABLO PICASSO, *LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON* (1907)

Formally, five nude figures are rendered as fractured, angular planes, drawing directly on African mask and Iberian sculptural forms; two of the faces are shown from genuinely incompatible angles at once — features from a profile view and a frontal view merged into a single face. This is the real conceptual break this chapter's own title promises: since Brunelleschi's demonstration around 1415 (Course 1, Chapter 7), Western painting had assumed one fixed, single viewpoint a scene was observed from. Cubism abandons that assumption entirely, showing an object or figure from multiple angles simultaneously within the same picture.

The same critic, twice — remarkably, Louis Vauxcelles is also directly responsible for naming this movement. Reviewing a 1908 painting by Georges Braque — reportedly after Matisse himself described it to Vauxcelles as "made of little cubes" — Vauxcelles wrote of "bizarre cubiques," and "Cubism" stuck. The same critic coined both of this chapter's own first two movement names, each time as a dismissive remark that the artists themselves kept.

Expressionism & Abstraction: Abandoning the Subject Itself

Wassily Kandinsky pushed furthest of the three. In his 1911 treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he argued that color and form could directly communicate spiritual and emotional content on their own — without needing to depict any recognizable object, person, or scene at all.

WASSILY KANDINSKY, *COMPOSITION VII* (1913)

Preceded by more than thirty preparatory studies, but painted in the final canvas in just four days. Formally, there is no identifiable subject at all — a dense, swirling cacophony of color and abstract form, often described as an attempt to capture the feeling of hearing music rather than depicting anything visible in the world. Where

Fauvism distorted color and Cubism fractured form while still depicting recognizable subjects, Kandinsky removes the recognizable subject entirely.

Three Movements, Three Different Rules Broken

MOVEMENT	KEY WORK	RULE ABANDONED
Fauvism	Matisse, <i>Woman with a Hat</i> (1905)	Naturalistic, descriptive color
Cubism	Picasso, <i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)</i> (1907)	A single, fixed viewpoint (Brunelleschi's own c. 1415 system)
Expressionism/Abstraction	Kandinsky, <i>Composition VII</i> (1913)	Recognizable subject matter itself

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

The same critic, dismissively, named both Fauvism and Cubism. Do you think a hostile critic's own insult shapes how a movement is later understood, even after the artists reclaim the term?

REFLECTION 2

Brunelleschi's single-viewpoint perspective system lasted roughly 500 years before Cubism abandoned it. What do you think makes a foundational artistic convention like that stay dominant for so long, and what finally makes it break?

REFLECTION 3

Kandinsky argued color and form alone could communicate spiritual content with no recognizable subject at all. Do you find that a convincing claim, or does meaning in art require something

recognizable to attach to?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 7

- Matisse's *Woman with a Hat* (1905) — color freed entirely from naturalistic description
- Vauxcelles's "cage aux fauves" (1905) names Fauvism; his "bizarre cubiques" (1908) names Cubism — the same critic, twice
- Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1907) — the real break from Brunelleschi's c. 1415 single-viewpoint system (Course 1, Ch.7)
- Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911) — color/form can express meaning with no recognizable subject
- *Composition VII* (1913) — 30+ studies, painted in 4 days, fully non-representational

What's Next

Next chapter: **Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism & Postwar Art** — Dalí, Pollock, and Rothko, as the art world's own center of gravity shifts from Paris to New York after World War II.

CHAPTER 8: SURREALISM, ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM & POSTWAR ART**Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary**

Course 2 · Chapter 8 · Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism & Postwar Art

This chapter covers a genuine geographic rupture, not just a stylistic one: the art world's own center of gravity shifts from Paris to New York, driven directly by World War II — and one specific gallery, and one specific patron, is where that shift actually, physically happened.

Surrealism: The Unconscious, Made Visible

André Breton's 1924 Surrealist Manifesto, drawing directly on Freudian psychoanalysis, called for art that bypassed conscious rational control entirely, accessing dreams and the unconscious mind instead.

SALVADOR DALÍ, *THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY* (1931)

Formally, soft, melting clocks drape across a barren, dreamlike landscape, alongside a strange amorphous organic form and a swarm of ants on a pocket watch — objects and textures that shouldn't logically coexist, rendered with an almost hyper-realistic technical precision that makes their impossible combination feel unsettlingly plausible. Dalí developed what he called the "paranoiac-critical method" — a deliberate, self-induced paranoid state meant to surface genuinely subconscious imagery onto the canvas.

War Forces a Migration

World War II directly displaced much of Europe's own avant-garde art world. Numerous Surrealist and modernist artists fled occupied Europe for New York, carrying their movement's

own ideas — particularly psychic automatism, spontaneous unconscious expression — with them.

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM'S ART OF THIS CENTURY GALLERY (OPENED OCTOBER 1942, NEW YORK)

This gallery is the literal, physical bridge institution this chapter's own shift depends on — Guggenheim exhibited exiled European Surrealists and young, then-unknown American artists (including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell) in the very same space. She gave Pollock his first solo exhibition in 1943 and directly commissioned his large-scale *Mural* (1943) — meaning the connection between European Surrealism and emerging American Abstract Expressionism wasn't a vague, indirect stylistic influence, but a real, traceable set of personal and financial relationships in one gallery.

Abstract Expressionism: Two Genuinely Different Answers

JACKSON POLLOCK, *AUTUMN RHYTHM (NUMBER 30)* (1950)

Formally, Pollock laid unprimed canvas flat on the studio floor and poured, dripped, and flung paint from sticks and loaded brushes while moving around every side of it, rather than working upright at an easel with a brush touching the surface directly. The result is an "allover" composition with no single focal point and no clear beginning or end — critic Harold Rosenberg's term "action painting" captures the real shift here: the canvas becomes an arena recording the artist's own physical act, not a surface used to depict something separate from that act.

MARK ROTHKO, LARGE-SCALE COLOR FIELD PAINTINGS (1950S)

Formally, Rothko's mature works are enormous fields of soft-edged, glowing rectangular color, meant to be experienced at extremely close range — he specified an

ideal viewing distance of roughly eighteen inches. "I paint big to be intimate," he explained — at that scale and proximity, the painting stops being a distant object on a wall and becomes something closer to an environment surrounding the viewer entirely. Rothko himself put it directly: "A painting is not a picture of an experience; it is an experience."

The same movement, two opposite temperaments — Pollock's own physical, gestural, all-over energy and Rothko's own still, contemplative, immersive color are both grouped under Abstract Expressionism, yet aim at almost opposite viewer experiences: one records a violent, ongoing physical act; the other offers a calm, meditative, enveloping stillness.

Comparing the Two Approaches

ASPECT	POLLOCK	ROTHKO
Physical process	Canvas on the floor, paint poured/flung from above	Canvas upright, soft-edged color applied in layers
Composition	Allover, no focal point	Large, simple rectangular color fields
Intended viewer experience	Witnessing a recorded physical act	Immersive, meditative closeness (c. 18 inches)

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Dalí's paranoiac-critical method was a deliberate technique for accessing subconscious imagery. Do you think an intentional, deliberate method can genuinely capture something as unplanned as the unconscious mind, or is that inherently a contradiction?

REFLECTION 2

Peggy Guggenheim's own gallery physically connected two generations of artists in one space. How much do you think a single well-placed patron or institution can shape the direction of an entire art movement?

REFLECTION 3

Rothko wanted his paintings viewed from just eighteen inches away, close enough to be enveloped by them. Have you ever experienced art differently depending on how physically close you stood to it?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 8

- Breton's 1924 Surrealist Manifesto — art bypassing conscious control, accessing the unconscious/dreams
- Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) — the "paranoiac-critical method"
- Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery (opened Oct. 1942) — the literal bridge between exiled Europeans and emerging Americans
- Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm* (1950) — "action painting," the canvas as an arena for a physical act
- Rothko's color field paintings — "I paint big to be intimate"; an ideal ~18-inch viewing distance

What's Next

Next chapter: **Pop Art to Postmodernism** — Warhol, conceptual art, and the genuinely unresolved "what counts as art" question this era first forced into the open.

CHAPTER 9: POP ART TO POSTMODERNISM

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 9 · Pop Art to Postmodernism

Chapter 8 closed on Pollock's visible physical gesture and Rothko's immersive personal color. Pop Art arrives as an almost total reversal — cool, impersonal, mass-produced imagery — and by the decade's own end, art had started asking a question this course still hasn't needed to answer directly: what actually makes something count as art at all?

Warhol: Rejecting the Personal Gesture

ANDY WARHOL, *CAMPBELL'S SOUP CANS* (1962)

Thirty-two canvases, first shown together in July 1962, each depicting one variety of Campbell's soup then sold by the company, lined up like a grocery-store shelf. Formally, each can is rendered with a deliberately uniform, near-mechanical precision — hand-painted, but styled to look impersonal and mass-produced, with no visible individual brushwork or gestural signature at all. Warhol's own studio was literally named "The Factory," embracing an assembly-line aesthetic rather than any claim to unique, individual authorial touch.

 A Direct Rejection of Chapter 8

Where Pollock's own drip technique made the artist's physical, individual gesture the entire point, and Rothko's color fields aimed at deep personal, spiritual immersion, Warhol removes personal expression almost entirely — commercial packaging, repeated identically, with the artist's own hand deliberately made invisible. This isn't a coincidence; it's a direct, pointed reaction against exactly what Abstract Expressionism had prized.

The Conceptual Ancestor: Duchamp's Readymades

Decades earlier, in 1917, Marcel Duchamp submitted *Fountain* — an ordinary urinal, signed "R. Mutt" — to an exhibition, without altering it in any physical way. Duchamp didn't craft, paint, or sculpt anything; he simply selected an existing manufactured object and declared it art. This single gesture planted the question Pop Art and conceptual art would spend the rest of this chapter pursuing directly: is an artist's own idea or selection alone enough to make something art, entirely independent of whether they physically made the object themselves?

Conceptual Art: The Idea as the Artwork

In June 1967, artist Sol LeWitt published "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" in *Artforum*, arguing that in genuinely conceptual work, "all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair" — as he put it directly, "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art." The physical object stops being the artwork's own point; the concept behind it is.

JOSEPH KOSUTH, *ONE AND THREE CHAIRS* (1965)

Formally, the piece presents the same chair three genuinely different ways at once: a real, physical wooden chair; a photograph of that exact chair, taken in the specific room it's currently installed in; and an enlarged printed dictionary definition of the word "chair." Kosuth himself neither built the chair, took the photograph, nor wrote the definition — he selected and assembled all three. Because the photograph must always depict the chair's own current installation room, the piece is literally different every single time it's shown somewhere new.

A genuinely hard test case, not a rhetorical trick — *One and Three Chairs* forces a real question rather than merely gesturing at one: which of the three — the object, the image, or the definition — is actually "the chair," or "the art"? There's no single, uncontested answer, and the piece is deliberately built so that no answer can be treated as obviously correct.

Postmodernism: Questioning the Whole Story

By this point, "postmodernism" describes a broader skepticism toward any single, unified story of artistic progress — the assumption, implicit in much of this course's own chronological structure, that each movement builds on and supersedes the last. Once Pop Art, conceptual art, and Abstract Expressionism can all coexist as genuinely valid, simultaneous, non-competing approaches, a single linear narrative starts to strain.

An honest note about this course's own structure — this course has been organized chronologically since Chapter 1 of Course 1, and that structure has genuinely worked, because each period largely did respond to, revive, or react against the one before it. From here forward, that clean chronological handoff becomes much harder to maintain — multiple, genuinely unrelated approaches now run in parallel rather than one era's own style cleanly giving way to the next.

Three Genuinely Different Answers to "What Makes This Art?"

MOVEMENT	KEY WORK	WHAT MAKES IT ART
Abstract Expressionism (Ch.8)	Pollock's <i>Autumn Rhythm</i>	The artist's own recorded physical gesture
Pop Art	Warhol's <i>Campbell's Soup Cans</i>	Deliberate impersonality; elevating mass culture into a gallery
Conceptual Art	Kosuth's <i>One and Three Chairs</i>	The idea/selection itself, independent of physical craft

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

Duchamp selected, rather than made, *Fountain*. Does simply choosing and presenting an existing object require a genuinely different kind of skill or judgment than physically crafting one — or none at all?

REFLECTION 2

In *One and Three Chairs*, which of the three elements — the object, the photograph, or the definition — feels most like "the real chair" to you, and why?

REFLECTION 3

This chapter argues a single, linear story of artistic progress starts to break down once genuinely different, simultaneous approaches all count as valid art at the same time. Do you think art history can still be told as one continuous story from here forward, or does it have to become several separate stories?

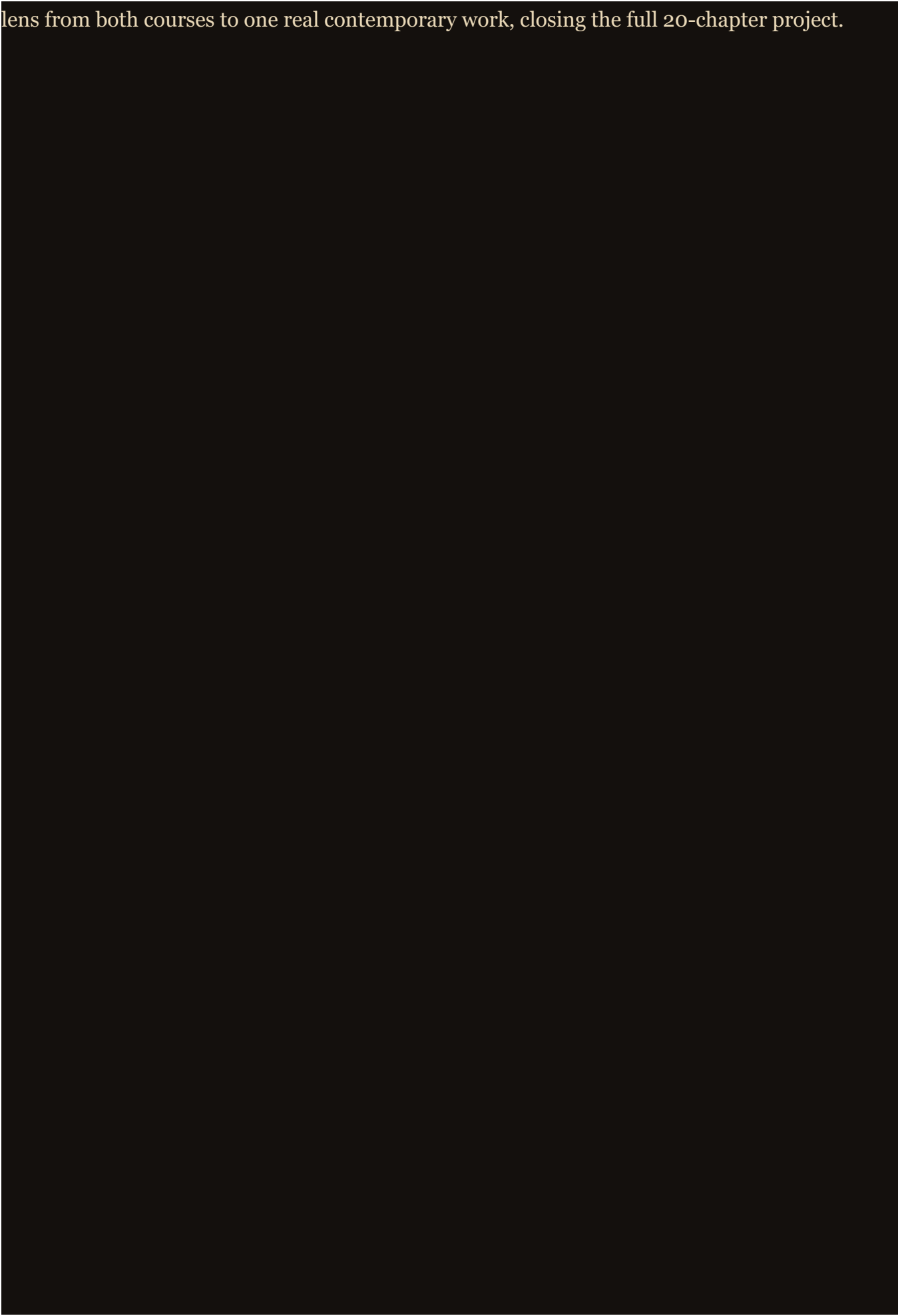
QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 9

- Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962) — a direct, deliberate rejection of Chapter 8's personal gesture
- Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) — the readymade; selection alone as a possible basis for art
- Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (Artforum, June 1967) — "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art"
- Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965) — object, photograph, and definition, with no single correct answer for which one is "the art"
- Postmodernism questions the single, linear "story of progress" this course's own structure has relied on

What's Next

Course 2's final chapter: **Contemporary Art & Building a Critical Framework** — a practical toolkit for approaching art made in the last two decades, applying every analytical

lens from both courses to one real contemporary work, closing the full 20-chapter project.



CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — CONTEMPORARY ART & BUILDING A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

Art History II: Baroque to Contemporary

Course 2 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Contemporary Art & Building a Critical Framework

*Chapter 9 admitted that a single, linear story stops working once genuinely different approaches coexist simultaneously — there's no one "contemporary style" the way earlier chapters could each name one dominant movement. This capstone answers that honestly: a practical framework of questions suited specifically to recent art, applied in full depth to one real, extraordinary case — Banksy's *Love Is in the Bin* (2018) — closing the full 20-chapter project spanning both courses.*

A Framework for Art With No Single Dominant Style

Rather than one style to expect, contemporary art calls for a short set of extra questions, on top of Course 1's own original three lenses (Chapter 1: formal analysis, iconography, historical context) — because recent art routinely blurs boundaries earlier chapters could mostly take for granted.

Market & display context

Is the work's own relationship to being bought, sold, or exhibited actually part of its meaning, rather than incidental to it?

Object vs. event/documentation

Does the work exist as a fixed physical object, or partly (or wholly) as a performance, an event, or its own recorded documentation?

Artist identity

Does who the artist is — or isn't, or claims not to be — change the work's own meaning in a way it wouldn't for an anonymous or substituted maker?

The Work, Described

BANKSY, *LOVE IS IN THE BIN* (ORIGINALLY *GIRL WITH BALLOON*, 2018)

On October 5, 2018, a framed print of Banksy's own well-known *Girl with Balloon* stencil image — a young girl reaching toward a drifting, heart-shaped red balloon, rendered in his characteristic monochrome street-stencil style — sold at a Sotheby's auction in London for £1.04 million. Seconds after the hammer fell, a concealed mechanism built into the frame triggered, and the canvas began sliding downward through a hidden shredder, accompanied by an alarm sound. The shredding stopped partway, leaving the top half of the image intact and the bottom half hanging in vertical ribbons. Banksy's own team, Pest Control, later renamed the resulting object *Love Is in the Bin*.

Formal Analysis

The shredded state *is* the finished formal object here, not damage inflicted on a separate, "real" artwork. The upper half retains the original stencil's own crisp monochrome lines and the single red accent of the balloon; the lower half dissolves into narrow vertical strips, the image genuinely destroyed as legible representation exactly where it crosses the frame's own edge. The physical mechanism — a shredder built directly into the frame itself — is as much a formal element of the finished piece as any brushstroke covered earlier in this course.

Iconography & Content

The original *Girl with Balloon* image already carried an established meaning before this event — widely read as evoking hope, loss, and fragile innocence, a balloon drifting just out of reach. Layered on top of that, the shredding itself reads as a pointed, real-time critique of the art market: a work by an artist whose own career grew out of illegal, anti-commercial street art, appearing to sabotage itself the instant it becomes an expensive collectible — the destruction attempt aimed squarely at the auction system currently profiting from it.

A genuine, documented irony — the "failed" self-destruction dramatically increased the work's own value rather than eliminating it: the same piece resold in 2021 for roughly £18.6 million, nearly eighteen times its original hammer price. Whatever critique of the market the shredding intended, the market itself absorbed and monetized the gesture almost immediately.

Historical & Market Context

Banksy's own identity remains deliberately, persistently unconfirmed — Pest Control functions as the only body able to authenticate a genuine Banksy work, since the artist himself has never publicly confirmed his identity. The shredding mechanism was reportedly built into the frame around 2006, over a decade before the 2018 auction — meaning this wasn't an improvised stunt but a long-planned intervention, timed and triggered at the precise moment of maximum institutional visibility: a live sale inside one of the world's most established auction houses.

Applying the Contemporary-Specific Questions

QUESTION	APPLIED TO <i>LOVE IS IN THE BIN</i>
Market/display context	Not incidental — the auction itself is the work's own stage and subject
Object vs. event/documentation	Both — a physical shredded object <i>and</i> a recorded, self-released video event central to the work's own meaning and spread
Artist identity	Central — Banksy's own persistent anonymity is what makes an anti-establishment gesture from inside the establishment read as sincere rather than a branded stunt by a known commercial artist

Bringing Every Lens Together

Formal analysis alone identifies a striking, half-destroyed image, but not why the destruction itself matters. Iconography alone reads the girl-and-balloon motif's own established meaning, but not why shredding it specifically targets the art market. Historical context alone explains

Banksy's anonymity and the decade of planning, but not the visual object actually left behind. Only combined — exactly as Course 1's Chapter 1 argued at the very start of this entire project — do these three lenses, plus this chapter's own contemporary-specific questions, explain why a work destroying itself live at auction became, almost immediately, one of the most valuable pieces of the entire era.

Questions to Sit With

REFLECTION 1

The market absorbed and rewarded a gesture apparently designed to critique it. Does that outcome undermine the sincerity of Banksy's own intended critique, or is being absorbed by the very system it targets itself part of the work's own point?

REFLECTION 2

Banksy's own anonymity is treated here as central to the work's own meaning. Can you think of another contemporary work, in any medium, where not knowing who made it — or why — is essential to how it actually functions?

REFLECTION 3

Looking back across this entire two-course project, from Chauvet's cave paintings to a self-shredding canvas: which single work has stuck with you most, and which of Chapter 1's own three lenses did the most real work in explaining why it mattered?

QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPTER 10

- Three extra questions for contemporary art: market/display context, object vs. event/documentation, and artist identity
- Banksy's *Love Is in the Bin* (2018) — a shredding mechanism built into the frame c. 2006, triggered live at a Sotheby's auction

- The original *Girl with Balloon* motif's own established meaning (hope, loss, innocence), layered with a market critique
- A genuine irony — the "failed" self-destruction increased the work's own value roughly eighteenfold by 2021
- Banksy's persistent anonymity as load-bearing context, not incidental biography
- All of Course 1's Chapter 1 lenses, plus this chapter's own contemporary questions, needed together — no single one explains the work alone

Art History: The Full Project Complete

Both courses are now finished — 20 chapters spanning roughly 34,000 years, from Chauvet's cave paintings through Botticelli's *Primavera* to a canvas that shredded itself live at auction. Every chapter applied the same three-lens toolkit Chapter 1 of Course 1 established at the very start, proving it works on a bison painted by torchlight exactly as well as it works on a 21st-century auction-house stunt captured on video and shared worldwide within minutes.