

has been rethought, and as the traditional “folk” arts of other cultures have come to be appreciated by the Western art world, decorative pattern’s importance in art has been reassessed by many.

Of all the artists working with pattern and decoration, Miriam Schapiro has perhaps done the most to legitimate pattern’s important place in the arts. Schapiro creates what she calls “fem-mages,” a bilingual pun, contracting the French words *femme* and *hommage*, “homage to woman,” and the English words *female* and *image*. “I wanted to explore and express,” Schapiro explains, “a part of my life which I had always dismissed—my homemaking, my nesting.” In her monumental multimedia work *Barcelona Fan* (Fig. 7-9), Schapiro has chosen an explicitly feminine image, the fan that fashionable women, in earlier days, used to cool themselves. Partially painted and partially sewn out of fabric, it intentionally brings to mind the kinds of domestic handiwork traditionally assigned to women as well as the life of leisure of the aristocratic lady.

Time and Motion

Pattern’s repetitive quality creates a sense of linear and directional movement. Anyone who has ever stared at a wallpaper pattern, trying to determine where and how it begins to repeat itself, knows how the eye will follow a pattern. Nevertheless, one of the most traditional distinctions made between the

plastic arts—painting and sculpture—and the written arts, such as music and literature, is that the former are *spatial* and the latter *temporal* media. That is, we experience a painting or sculpture all at once; the work of art is before us in its totality at all times. But we experience music and literature over time, in a linear way; a temporal work possesses a clear beginning, middle, and end.

While there is a certain truth to this distinction, time plays a greater role in the plastic arts than such a formulation might suggest. Even in the case where the depiction of a given event implies that we are witness to a photographic “frozen moment,” an instant of time taken from a larger sequence of events, the single image may be understood as part of a larger *narrative* sequence: a story.

Consider, for instance, Bernini’s sculpture of David (Fig. 7-10). As opposed to Michelangelo’s David (see Fig. 3-12) who rests, fully self-contained, at some indeterminate time before going into battle, Bernini’s figure is caught in the midst of action, coiled and ready to launch his stone at the giant Goliath. In a sense, Bernini’s sculpture is “incomplete.” The figure of Goliath is implied, as is the imminent flight of David’s stone across the implicit landscape that lies between the two of them. As viewers, we find ourselves in the middle of this same scene, in a space that is much larger than the sculpture itself. We intuitively back away from David’s sling. We follow his eyes toward the absent giant. We are engaged in David’s energy, and in his story.



Fig. 7-9 Miriam Schapiro, *Barcelona Fan*, 1979.

Fabric and acrylic on canvas. 72 × 144 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Gift of Steven M. Jacobson and Howard Kalka, 1993.1993.408.



Fig. 7-10 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *David*, 1623. Marble, life-size. Galleria Borghese, Rome. Galleria Borghese, Rome/Canali PhotoBank, Milan/SuperStock.

A work of art can also, in and of itself, invite us to experience it in a linear or temporal way. Isidro Escamilla's *Virgin of Guadalupe* (Fig. 7-11) narrates one of the most famous events in Mexican history. The story goes that in December 1531, on a hill north of Mexico City called Tepeyac, once site of a temple to an Aztec mother goddess, a Christian Mexican Indian named Juan Diego beheld a beautiful dark-skinned woman (in the top left corner of the painting). Speaking in Nahuatl, the native Aztec language, she told Juan Diego to tell the bishop to build a church in her honor at the site, but the bishop doubted Juan Diego's story. So the Virgin caused roses to bloom on the hill out of season and told Juan Diego to pick them and take them to the bishop (represented in the bottom left corner of the painting). When Juan Diego opened his cloak to deliver the roses, an image of the dark-skinned Virgin appeared on the fabric (represented



Fig. 7-11 Isidro Escamilla, *Virgin of Guadalupe*, 1824. Oil on canvas, 22⁷/₈ × 15 in. Brooklyn Museum, Henry L. Battenman Fund, 45.128.189.

Thinking Thematically: See **Art, Politics, and Community** on myartslab.com

at the bottom right). Soon, miracles were associated with her, and pilgrimages to Tepeyac became increasingly popular. In 1746, the Church declared the Virgin patron saint of New Spain, and in the top right corner of the painting, other saints pay her homage. By the time Escamilla painted this version of the story, the Virgin of Guadalupe had become the very symbol of Mexican identity.

Likewise, we naturally “read” Pat Steir’s *Chrysanthemum* paintings (see Figs. 6-17 and 6-18) from left to right, in linear progression. While each of Monet’s *Grainstack* paintings (see Fig. 6-38) can be appreciated as a wholly unified totality, each can also be seen as part of a larger whole, a time sequence. Viewed in a series, they are not so much “frozen moments” removed from time as they are about time itself and the ways in which our sense of place changes over time.



Fig. 7-12 Claude Monet (1840–1926), *Water Lilies, Morning: Willows* (right side), 1916–26.

Triptych, each panel 80 × 170 in. Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, France.

Giraudon/RMN Reunion des Musees Nationaux/Art Resource, NY.

 **View** a Closer Look for the *Water Lilies* on myartslab.com

To appreciate large-scale works of art, it may be necessary to move around and view them from all sides, or to see them from a number of vantage points—to view them over time. Monet's famous paintings of his lily pond at Giverny, which were installed in the Orangerie in Paris in 1927, are also designed to compel the viewer to move (**Fig. 7-12**). They encircle the room, and to be in the midst of this work is to find oneself suddenly in the middle of a world that has been curiously turned inside out: The work is painted from the shoreline, but the viewer seems to be surrounded by water, as if the room were an island in the middle of the pond itself. The paintings cannot be seen all at once. There is always a part of the work behind you. There is no focal point, no sense of unified perspective. In fact, the series of paintings seems to organize itself around and through the viewer's own acts of perception and movement.

According to Georges Clemenceau, the French statesman who was Monet's close friend and who arranged for the giant paintings to hang in the Orangerie, the paintings could be understood not just as a simple representation of the natural world, but also as a representation of a complex scientific fact, the phenomenon of "Brownian motion." First described by the Scottish scientist Robert Brown in 1827, Brownian motion is a result of the physical movement of minute particles of solid matter suspended in fluid.

Any sufficiently small particle of matter suspended in water will be buffeted by the molecules of the liquid and driven at random throughout it. Standing in the midst of Monet's panorama, the viewer's eye is likewise driven randomly through the space of the paintings. The viewer is encircled by them, and there is no place for the eye to rest, an effect that Jackson Pollock would achieve later in the century in the monumental "drip" paintings he executed on the floor of his studio (see *The Creative Process*, pp. 144–145).

Some artworks are created precisely to give us the illusion of movement. In **optical painting**, or "Op Art," as it is more popularly known, the physical characteristics of certain formal elements—particularly line and color—are subtly manipulated to stimulate the nervous system into thinking it perceives movement. Bridget Riley's *Drift 2* (**Fig. 7-13**) is a large canvas that seems to wave and roll before our eyes even though it is stretched taut across its support. One of Riley's earliest paintings was an attempt to find a visual equivalent to heat. She had been crossing a wide plain in Italy: "The heat off the plain was quite incredible—it shattered the topographical structure of it and set up violent color vibrations. . . . The important thing was to bring about an equivalent shimmering sensation on the canvas." In *Drift 2*, we encounter not heat, but wave action, as though we were, visually, out at sea.



Fig. 7-13 Bridget Riley, *Drift No. 2*, 1966.

Acrylic on canvas, 91½ × 89½ in. The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1967.

© Bridget Riley. Courtesy Karsten Schubert, London.

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

While not as large as Monet's paintings at the Orangerie, Jackson Pollock's works are still large enough to engulf the viewer. The eye travels in what one critic has called "galactic" space, following first one line, then another, unable to locate itself or to complete its visual circuit through the web of paint. Work such as this has been labeled "Action Painting," not only because it prompts the viewer to become actively engaged with it, but also because the lines that trace themselves out across

the sweep of the painting seem to chart the path of Pollock's own motions as he stood over it. The drips and sweeps of paint record his action as a painter and document it, a fact captured by Hans Namuth in October of 1950 in a famous series of photographs (**Fig. 7-14**) of Pollock at work on the painting *Autumn Rhythm*, and then in two films, one shot in black and white and the other in color. An excerpt from the black-and-white film can be viewed on myartslab.com. It shows Pollock

first creating a linear network of black lines by dripping paint with a small brush over an entire canvas, and then overlaying that web of lines with white paint dripped from a much larger brush. The second, color film was shot from below through a sheet of glass on which Pollock was painting, vividly capturing the motion embodied in Pollock's work. The resulting work, *No. 29, 1950* (**Fig. 7-15**), was completed over the course of five autumn weekends, with Namuth filming the entire event. After a false start on the painting, which Pollock wiped out in front of the camera, he created a collage web of paint, containing pebbles, shells, sand, sections of wire mesh, marbles, and pieces of colored plastic.

Namuth's photographs and films teach us much about Pollock's working method. Pollock longed to be completely involved in the process of painting. He wanted to become wholly absorbed in the work. As he had written in a short article called "My Painting," published in 1947, "When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing . . . the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well."

In Namuth's photographs and films, we witness Pollock's absorption in the work. We see the immediacy of his gesture as he flings paint, moving around the work, the paint tracing his path. He worked on the floor, in fact, in order to heighten his sense of being in the work. "I usually paint on the



Fig. 7-14 Hans Namuth, Jackson Pollock painting *Autumn Rhythm*, 1950.

Gelatin silver print, Center for Creative Photography, Tucson.

Photograph by Hans Namuth.



Fig. 7-15 Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956), *No. 29, 1950, 1950*.

Oil, expanded steel, string, glass, and pebbles on glass, 48 × 72 in. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Purchased 1968.

© 2012 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

 **View** the Closer Look for *Autumn Rhythm* on myartslab.com

floor,” he says in Namuth’s film. “I feel more at home, more at ease in a big area, having a canvas on the floor, I feel nearer, more a part of a painting. This way I can walk around it, work from all four sides and be in the painting.” We also see in Namuth’s images something of the speed with which Pollock worked. According to Namuth, when Pollock was painting, “his movements, slow at first, gradually became faster and more dancelike.” In fact, the tracteries of line on the canvas are like choreographies, complex charts of a dancer’s movement. In Pollock’s words, the paintings are

*energy and motion
made visible—
memories arrested in space.*

Namuth was disturbed by the lack of sharpness and the blurred character in some of his photographs, and he did not show them to Pollock. “It was not until years later,” Namuth admitted, “that I understood how exciting these photographs really were.” At the time, though, his inability to capture all of Pollock’s movement led him to the idea of making a film. “Pollock’s method of painting suggested a moving picture,” he would recall, “the dance around the canvas, the continuous movement, the drama.”



Fig. 7-16 (top) Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters*, 1976.

Gelatin silver print, 7¹¹/₁₆ × 9⁵/₈ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. 687.1976.

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 7-17 (bottom) Nicholas Nixon, *The Brown Sisters, Truro, Massachusetts*, 2011.

Gelatin silver print, 17¹⁵/₁₆ × 22⁵/₈ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist. 884.2011.

© Nicholas Nixon, courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco and Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.



commitment of the women to sustain the project, and now, as they age, the prospect of their—or the photographer’s—eventual demise. The series is not only a testament to time’s relentless force, but to the power of family, and love, to endure and sustain us all, as if in spite of time itself. The power of the image to endure may, Nixon’s work suggests, in fact lie at the heart of every family’s commitment to documenting in photography its very history, even as the family is transformed and irrevocably changed by that history.

The ways in which time and motion can transform the image itself is one of the principal subjects of Grace Ndiritu, a British-born video and performance artist of Kenyan descent. Ndiritu makes what she calls “hand-crafted videos,” solo performances in front of a camera fixed on a tripod. *Still Life: White Textiles* (Fig. 7-18) is one part of the larger four-screen video work *Still Life*. (An excerpt from the *White Textiles* segment, as well as excerpts from a number of her other works, can be screened at axisweb.org, a British non-profit corporation that describes itself as “the online resource for contemporary art.” Search Ndiritu’s name under the “artists and curators” heading.) Ndiritu’s title, *Still Life*, is entirely ironic, for seated between two sheets of African batik printed fabric, she caresses her thighs, moves her hands beneath the fabric, pulls it, stretches it—in short, she *animates* the cloth. At once hidden and exposed, Ndiritu creates an image that is at once chaste and sexually charged.

Still Life was inspired by a 2005 exhibition of paintings by Henri Matisse at the Royal Academy in London, “Matisse: The Fabric of Dreams, His Art and His Textiles.” Seeing the show, she said,

reaffirmed the similarity of our working process . . . we share the ritual of assembling textiles and setting up the studio with fabrics as a background to galvanize our artistic practice. Matisse understands and

Of all the arts, those that employ cameras are probably most naturally concerned with questions of time and motion. Time and motion are the very conditions of these media. Consider Nicholas Nixon’s ongoing series of photographs depicting his wife, Bebe Brown Nixon and her three sisters, the Brown sisters (Figs. 7-16 and 7-17). Each year, beginning in 1975, when the four women ranged in age from 15 to 25, Nixon has made a single black-and-white photograph of the four, always photographing them in the same order from left to right: Heather, Mimi, Bebe, and Laurie. Although he shoots any number of exposures, he has printed only one photograph each year. By 2011, he had created a series of 37 photographs that reveal not only the gradual aging process of the sisters, but, he suggests, the ever-changing dynamics of the relationships among them. Yet two of the most fascinating aspects of the series are the

appreciates the beauty and simplicity of working with textiles. The hallucinogenic properties of overlapping patterns, shift and swell in his paintings, override perspective and divorce shape from color.

The effects of which Ndiritu speaks are clearly visible in Matisse's *Harmony in Red (The Red Room)* (Fig. 5-25), where the textile pattern of the tablecloth is mirrored in the wallpaper, flattening perspective and disorienting the viewer's sense of space. After visiting North Africa in 1911, Matisse often painted female models clothed in African textiles in settings decorated with other textile patterns. But in Ndiritu's work, time and motion transform the textile from decorative pattern into live action. By implication, the female body in Ndiritu's "video painting," as she calls it, is transformed from a passive object of contemplation—as it was in so many of Matisse's paintings—into an almost aggressive agent of seduction. The power of the work lies in the fact that, hidden and exposed as Ndiritu is, that seduction is at once invited and denied.

Video artists Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler think of their videos as "long photographs" to which they have added sound, thus extending the space of the image beyond the frame. In *Detached Building* (Figs. 7-19 and 7-20), the camera dollies in one seamless movement around the inside of a tin shed converted into a workshop and rehearsal space, moving to the sound of chirping crickets over a cluttered workbench, a guitar, a chair, a sofa, a drum set, and a power drill, then passing without interruption through the shed's wall into the neglected garden behind it. A young woman enters the garden, picks up stones, and throws them at a nearby house. A window can be heard breaking, and a dog begins to bark. The camera passes back into the interior of the shed, where three young men are now sitting around the room, while a fourth plays a continuous riff on a bass guitar. The camera sweeps around the room again and then passes back outside. The young woman has disappeared. Only the chirping of crickets and the muted sound of the bass guitar can be heard. The camera passes back through the wall, sweeps around the room again, and moves back outside to a view of the guitar player within. The video plays on a continuous 5-minute, 38-second loop, and so, at this point, the



Fig. 7-18 Grace Ndiritu, *Still Life: White Textiles*, 2005/2007.

Still from a silent video, duration 4 min. 57 sec.
© LUX, London.



Fig. 7-19 Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler, *Detached Building*, 2001.

High-definition video with sound transferred to DVD, 5 min. 38 sec. loop.

Installation photo by Stefan Rohner. Courtesy of the artists and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Burger Collection, Zurich.

camera returns to the empty workshop, and the entire sequence repeats itself. What, the viewer wonders, is the connection between the two scenarios, the men inside, the woman outside? No plot evidently connects them, only a series of oppositions: interior and exterior, light and dark, male and female, the group

and the individual. The movement of the camera across the boundary of the wall suggests a disruption not only of space but of time. In looped video works such as this one, viewers can enter the installation at any point, leave at any point, and construct any narrative they want out of what they see.

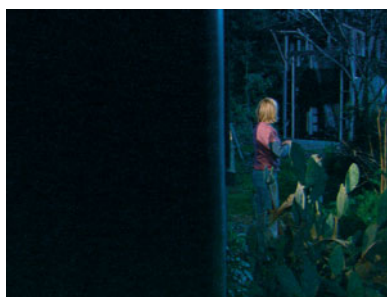
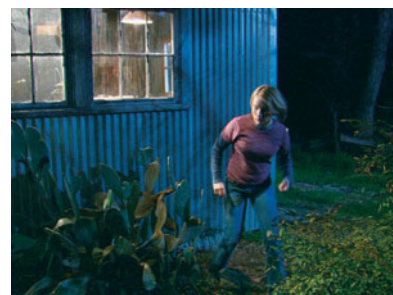


Fig. 7-20 Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler, *Detached Building*, 2001.

High-definition video with sound transferred to DVD, 5 min. 38 sec. loop.

Stills courtesy of the artists and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.

THINKING BACK

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How does visual texture differ from actual texture?

Actual texture refers to the real surface quality of an artwork. Visual texture, by contrast, is an illusion, not unlike the representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. What is impasto? How does Manuel Neri use texture in *Mujer Pegada Series No. 2*? What is the technique of *frottage*?

What is pattern?

Pattern is a repetitive motif or design in an artwork. Any formal element (such as line, shape, mass, color, or texture) can form a pattern, when repeated in a recognizable manner. Why has pattern been used in art throughout history? What is the animal style? What are “femmagés”?

How are the plastic arts temporal as well as spatial?

Traditionally, the plastic arts (such as painting and sculpture) have been regarded as *spatial*, while music

and literature have been classified as *temporal*. However, it is important to recognize the temporal aspect of the plastic arts as well. An image or object may often be part of a larger story, which is, by definition, sequential. Why might Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *David* be called “incomplete”? How do Claude Monet’s paintings of water lilies relate to the phenomenon of Brownian motion?

Which of the arts are most concerned with time and motion?

Of all the arts, those that employ cameras are probably most naturally concerned with questions of time and motion. The very conditions of photography and film are, in fact, time and motion. How does time structure Nicholas Nixon’s ongoing series *The Brown Sisters*? What does Grace Ndiritu do in her “hand-crafted videos”?