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Lesson 24: Converging Histories - The Global Art World

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“Converging Histories – The Global Art World” is part of the

ART APPRECIATION

Open Educational Resource

by Marie Porterfield Barry
East Tennessee State University, 2020

Introduction

This course explores the world’s visual arts, focusing on the development of visual awareness, assessment, and appreciation by examining a variety of styles from various periods and cultures while emphasizing the development of a common visual language. The materials are meant to foster a broader understanding of the role of visual art in human culture and experience from the prehistoric through the contemporary.

This is an Open Educational Resource (OER), an openly licensed educational material designed to replace a traditional textbook.

Course Materials

Presentations

The course materials consist of 24 presentations examining art across the globe from prehistory through the contemporary art world. These introduce key vocabulary, explore the way that culture and art are linked, describe the varying methods and techniques of the featured artists, and encourage classroom discourse.

Reading Lists

Each of the 24 presentations has an accompanying reading list which provides links to articles, videos, and other resources. The reading list is meant to reinforce and clarify information covered in each of the presentations.

Sample Assignments

A list of sample assignments is also included. Ranging from brief essays to simple art projects, these are designed to be completed in a sketchbook to more deeply explore course concepts. Intended to encourage learners to think like artists, art critics, and art historians, assignments emphasize practices of creative thinking and artistic method, while reinforcing concepts addressed in classroom lectures and required readings.

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Adopting, Adapting, or Expanding the Resource

The goal for this OER is to build an educational resource that is flexible enough to address concepts relevant to the contemporary discourse and scholarship in the visual arts. For those interested in utilizing these course materials, I am providing below some additional information that may be useful in expanding, adapting, or reinterpreting the materials. Editable versions are available in Microsoft PowerPoint and Word at <https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/>

The font used to create the presentations and written documents for this OER is Calibri.

Finding Additional Readings, Lessons, and Articles

Smarthistory: <https://smarthistory.org/>

Smarthistory is an extensive open educational resource which publishes outstanding essays and video lectures about art. The Creating + Conserving section of Smarthistory includes wonderful informational articles and videos about materials and processes: <https://smarthistory.org/tag/conservation/>

MoMA Learning: https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/

MoMA Learning provides a wonderful selection of essays on works of modern art and also has assignment suggestions at the bottom of each section.

KhanAcademy: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>.

Khan Academy is an outstanding platform of open educational resources covering a variety of academic and scholarly topics.

Trivium Art History: <https://arthistoryproject.com/>

Trivium Art History is a free, online art history book with clean design and approachable descriptions of works of art, periods of art history, and fun artist biographies. The [Themes of Art](#) section is a nice tool to helping students explore works that match their interests. The [World of Art](#) section is a useful tool for an exploratory World Art sketchbook prompt. The [Timeline](#) section is useful, as it separates works of art into galleries based on period.

Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning: <https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/arts-textbooks/3/>

For a more traditional, textbook approach, there is an Introduction to Art open educational resource textbook available.

Locating Images

If you are utilizing the course materials and would like to add new images that are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons, there are several useful tips provided below for finding images.

The Met Museum: <https://www.metmuseum.org/>

The Met has an option to search for Open Access images within the collection [here](#). Make sure that the “Open Access” box is checked. The image license is [CC0 1.0](#), and will be marked OA Public Domain at the lower left of the image.

Google Images: <https://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi&ogbl>

[Google Images](#) has an option under “Settings” > “Advanced Search” to search by “Usage Rights”.

Choosing “Free to use share or modify” will allow a search for images suitable for expanding our OER.

Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

[Wikimedia Commons](#) is an outstanding resource for finding open source images, with a strong collection of works of art.

Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com>

[Flickr](#) allows users to specify image licenses on uploaded photographs. Click “Some rights reserved” at the lower right of the image to check the licensing. Some images will say “Public Domain” or will be licensed under a [Creative Commons](#) (CC) license, allowing for the use in an OER.

Smarthistory Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/groups/smarthistory/pool/>

The [Smarthistory Flickr](#) is expansive with images licensed for educational purposes.

Acknowledgements

This Art Appreciation OER was adapted from existing resources by Marie Porterfield Barry as part of East Tennessee State University’s Open Educational Resources (OERs) Initiatives, which are a collaboration of the Charles C. Sherrod Library and the Center for Teaching Excellence. Deepest gratitude for the support from Ashley Sergiadis of Sherrod Library and Phil Smith of the Center for Teaching Excellence during the building of this resource. Thanks as well to my students at East Tennessee State University whose feedback and participation during our Art Appreciation classes was immensely valuable in compiling and evaluating this OER.

The Global Art World



Raqib Shaw, *Paradise Lost*, 2001-11. Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Cropped from original, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Postmodern art exists in a world that is increasingly more connected and globalized.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: [Steven Zucker](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Artists from around the world are able to participate in the global art scene and bring with them knowledge of artistic traditions specific to the histories of various geographic regions, adding a richness of influence to the contemporary art world that does not rely solely on European traditions.



Takashi Murakami at Fondation Vuitton, Paris. Author: [Jean-Pierre Dalbéra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

Japanese artist Mariko Mori combines traditional symbolism and iconography from Buddhism with futuristic imagery using technology to create immersive environments.



Mariko Mori. Author: [Mark Hoekstra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Mariko Mori say of her work:
“I am interested in circulating past iconography in the present in order to get to the future.”



Mariko Mori. Author: [Mark Hoekstra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

In works such as *Pure Land* Mori creates highly symbolic works of art which are meant to be part of large immersive installations.

During exhibitions, the photograph of *Pure Land* is accompanied by a video installation called *Nirvana* in which the viewers see the female figure and alien musicians animated.

The central floating female, played by Mori herself, hums for seven minutes at the conclusion of which a fan turns on and wafts perfumed air at the audience.



Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org/).

© Mariko Mori / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Educational Fair Use](#).

Pure Land is set at sunrise above the Dead Sea, a body of water so salty that it does not support life. According to Japanese Shinto belief, salt is used for purification.

The lotus blossom that floats below the central female herself symbolizes purity and rebirth in paradise according to Buddhism.

In the background, a spaceship-like form sits at the shore of the sea. The form resembles a Tibetan *stupa*, which is a type of sacred Buddhist burial mound.



Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org/).
© Mariko Mori / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Educational Fair Use](#).

The symbols within *Pure Land* combine traditional imagery such as the lotus blossom with more futuristic aspects to create a unique blend of imagery for the contemplation of death, purification, and rebirth.



Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org).
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The imagery in Mori's *Pure Land* relates to traditional paintings of Pure Land Buddhism in which the Amida Buddha with his attendants comes to carry the soul of the dead to paradise in a lotus blossom.

Scrolls depicting the Amida Buddha were often hung by the bedsides of the dying to ensure rebirth in paradise.

Mori reinterprets the attendants of the Buddha, or the *bodhisattvas*, as small musical aliens. These beings are compassionate people who help save those who are suffering.



Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org).
© Mariko Mori / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Educational Fair Use](#).

Left: *Welcoming Descent of Amida and Bodhisattvas*, late 14th century. Source: Met Museum, License: [CC0 1.0](#)

The alien-like attendants of the Buddha appear again in Mori's interactive sculpture *Oeness*. The six aliens stand, facing outwards, holding hands. When a viewer hugs one of the alien forms, the heartbeat can be felt and the creature's eyes light up.



Mariko Mori, *Oeness*, 2003. Author: [Mark Hoekstra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

The artist uses herself to depict the role of the central Amida Buddha-like figure. The artist transfers herself to the role of the guide, inviting the viewer into the “Pure Land of Perfect Bliss” and toward Enlightenment through her work.



Mariko Mori, *Pure Land*, 1996-98, glass with photo interlayer. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org).
© Mariko Mori / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York. [Educational Fair Use](#).

Watch Mariko Mori describe concepts addressed in her work:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJ510QfMaGA>

Ai Weiwei is a contemporary Chinese artist renowned for his socially and politically engaged works of art.

In one of his earliest works, he famously dropped an irreplaceable Han Dynasty urn, allowing the ancient Chinese artifact to shatter on the floor.



Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* and *Colored Vases*
Author: Adrian Berg, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC 2.0

Ai Weiwei is interested in Marcel Duchamp's concept of the *readymade* and the way in which objects for everyday use may be elevated to the status of art.



Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* and *Colored Vases*
Author: Adrian Berg, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC 2.0

In his work utilizing the “cultural readymade” of the Han Dynasty urn, Weiwei questions why and by whom cultural values are created.

The work references the widespread destruction of cultural artifacts during China’s Cultural Revolution. The destruction of the artifacts was meant to allow for the building of a new society with new cultural artifacts.



Ai Weiwei, *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn and Colored Vases*
Author: Adrian Berg, Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC 2.0

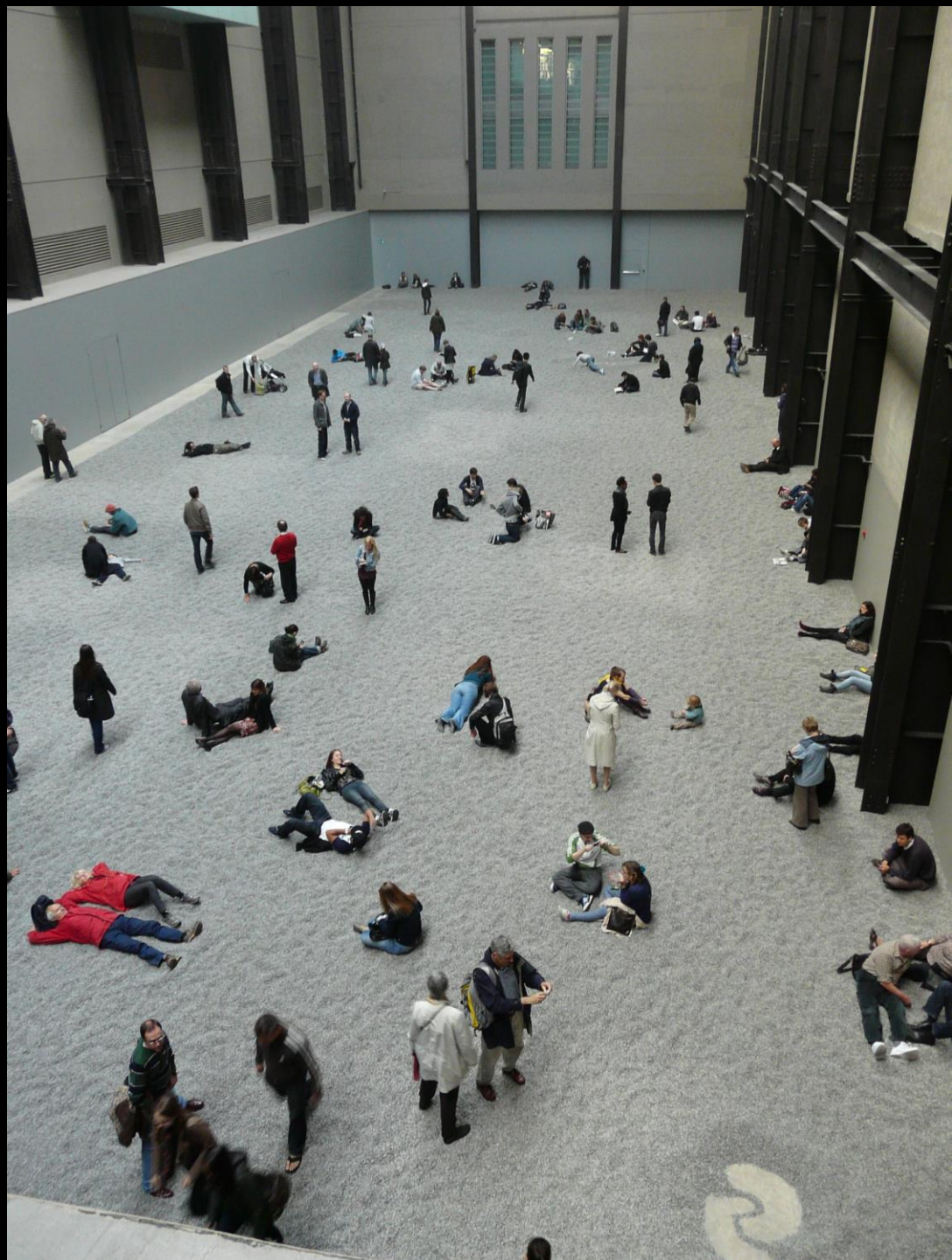
In another of his works, Ai Weiwei hired traditional artisans from Jingdezhen, the city in China that was once responsible for making imperial porcelain (such as the vases seen here) to make porcelain sunflower seeds.



Ming Dynasty Vases, c. 1403-1424. Author: [British Museum](#), Cropped from original, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

He then filled the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in London with the porcelain seeds.

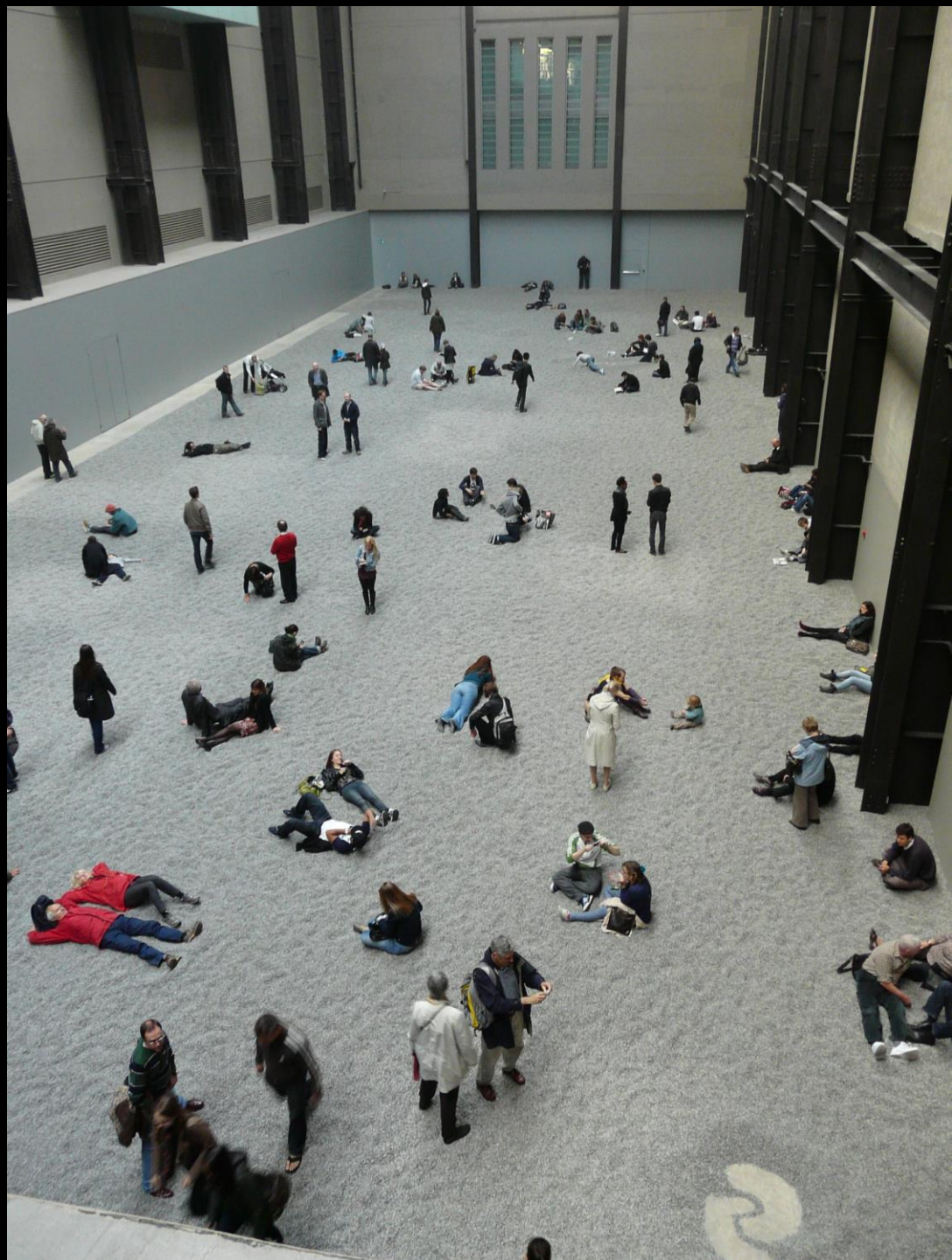
The meaning behind the work of art is complex, combining the artist's own nostalgia for his youth in which even the poorest of people could afford to enjoy sunflower seeds with friends to feelings about the Chinese Revolution during which many starved.



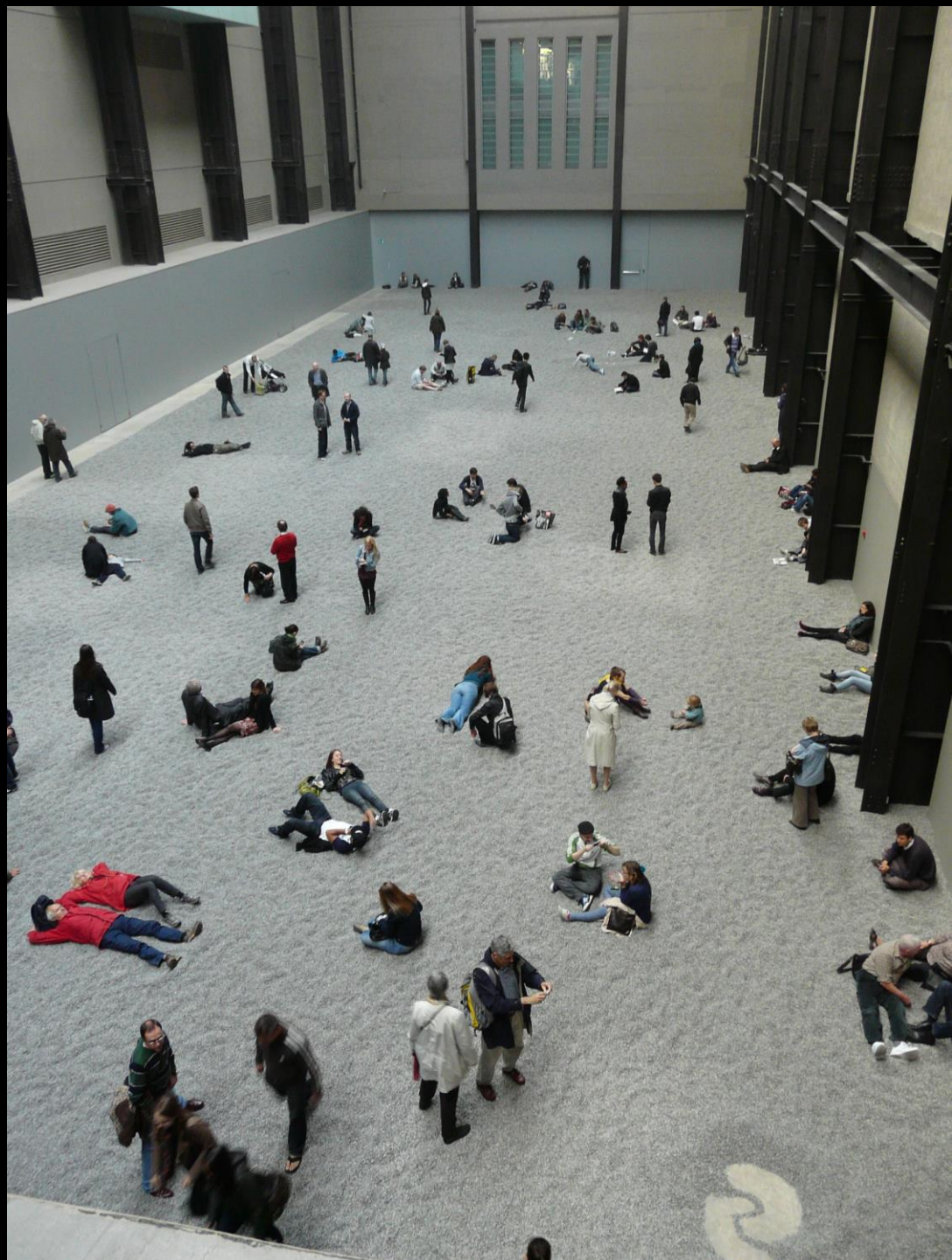
Ai Weiwei, "Sunflower Seeds" at Tate Modern, Turbine Hall.
Author: [Loz Pycock](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

The *Sunflower Seeds* provided work for roughly 1,600 people in Jingdezhen in order to make the 100 million porcelain seeds that filled the massive Turbine Hall.

The handmade objects, each painstakingly painted to resemble a real seed, ask the viewer to consider the concept of “Made in China” and how this concept had drastically changed since the time in which fine plates were called “China” in the west due to their superior quality in craftsmanship and form.



Furthermore, the artist references the way in which the Chinese communist revolutionary and founding father of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, was often depicted alongside sunflowers as an allegory of Chairman Mao as the sun and his loyal followers as the sunflowers.



Ai Weiwei, "Sunflower Seeds" at Tate Modern, Turbine Hall.
Author: [Loz Pycock](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)



Initially, viewers were invited to handle the porcelain seeds and to walk upon them to experience the quality of the seemingly naturalistic (but in fact entirely artificial) seeds.

Visit the studio of Ai Weiwei and hear from the artist on making the *Sunflower Seeds*:
<https://youtu.be/PueYwpkJW8>

Raqib Shaw, an Indian-born British artist, makes elaborately detailed mixed media paintings which include glitter and sparkling beads to complete their glistening and pristine surfaces.



Raqib Shaw's *Jane* appropriates and reimagines Hans Holbein's portrait of Jane Seymour, wife of Henry VIII.



Hans Holbein, *Jane Seymour*, Oil on Panel, 1536.

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: [Public Domain](#)



Raqib Shaw, *Jane*, Enamel, glitter, plastic beads and graphite on paper, 2006.

Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#),

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Shaw replaces the head of Jane Seymour with a piranha-like fish face. Above her head float fleshy blobs with horrified faces and contour drawings of partial female bodies.

The grotesque and gruesome heads remind us of the dark history of the reign Henry VIII, which saw two of his wives beheaded, including the one who directly proceeded Jane.



Hans Holbein, *Jane Seymour*, Oil on Panel, 1536.

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



Raqib Shaw, *Jane*, Enamel, glitter, plastic beads and graphite on paper, 2006.

Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons,

License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

The repainting of historical figures such as Jane Seymour act as a form of cultural criticism or defacement, questioning the icons of history.



Raqib Shaw, *Jane*, Enamel, glitter, plastic beads and graphite on paper, 2006.

Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

The elaborately detailed and richly patterned surfaces of Shaw's painting blend European art historical movements with styles that reference the history of miniature painting in India.



Raqib Shaw, *Jane*, 2006

Enamel, glitter, plastic beads and graphite on paper.

Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

The richly detailed surfaces of Raqib Shaw's paintings reference his childhood in Kashmir, growing up as the son of merchants selling rugs, jewelry, and antiques.

These opulent surfaces also relate to the history of Indian painting, in which flattened, richly embellished, and intricately patterned surfaces surround figures and animal forms.

Attributed to Miskin, *The Crow Addresses the Animals*,
Gouache on paper. C. 16th century (Mughal Empire) Source:
[The British Museum](#), License: CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
© The Trustees of the British Museum



Bichitr's *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album is a spectacular example of a Mughal (present-day India) miniature painting.



Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain

The fourth Mughal emperor, known as Jahangir or “Seizer of the World”, is seen here giving a book to a Sufi Shaikh, or holy man.

Jahangir gives his complete attention to the holy man standing before him. Inscriptions on the image reiterate that the emperor prefers the holy man above kings, signifying his spiritual leanings.



Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain

Beneath the Shaikh are three more figures waiting to visit with the emperor: an Ottoman sultan, an English king (James I), and a self-portrait of the artist, Bichitr.

Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain



James I never actually visited the Mughal court. However, his portrait was presented to Jahangir as part of a diplomatic exchange.

The artist uses the placement of the figures as a way to emphasize the meaning of the image. James I does not seem to be displaying proper respect for Jahangir, as he faces the viewer, but he is also placed below Jahangir, the Shaikh, and the Ottoman Sultan, showing him as lower in the hierarchy.

Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain



The self-portrait of the artist at the lower corner wears a yellow jama (robe), indicating that he is a Hindu serving in the Mughal court and painting Islamic art. In his self-portrait, he holds a miniature painting in his hand.

Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain



The artist cleverly blends traditional Mughal painting styles and iconography with borrowed images from European art, such as the putti figures floating above Jahangir, as well as the image of the English king.

This blending of Mughal painting with European imagery reminds us that the visual exchange between cultures through art is not new to Postmodernism.

Bichitr, *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings*, from the St. Petersburg album, 1615-1618 (Mughal Empire), Watercolor, gold and ink on paper. Author: [Google Art Project](#), *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain



Raqib Shaw's paintings balance traditions from the east and the west while presenting a delicate and delectable combination of the hyperreal and the hyper-fantastical.



Raqib Shaw, *Paradise Lost*, 2001-11. Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Raqib Shaw, *Paradise Lost*, 2001-11. Author: [Raqib Shaw](#), *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Raqib Shaw, *Paradise Lost*, 2001-11. Author: Raqib Shaw, *Cropped from original*, Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: CC BY-SA 3.0



Raqib Shaw, *After George Stubbs' Cheetah and Stag*, Manchester Art Gallery.
Author: [Widdowquinn](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Watch a video interview with Raqib Shaw and tour his atelier:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/raqib-shaw-9784/raqib-shaw-craft-romantic-extreme>

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian artist who lives in exile.

Her series, *Women of Allah*, examines the identity of female martyrs in Iran during the Islamic Revolution of 1979.



Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org/art/object/shirin-neshat-rebellious-silence)

In *Rebellious Silence*, the female subject is depicted in a stark black chador against a pale background.

A first glance, the symmetrical composition exemplifies balance, but a rifle bisects the image, suggesting division, rupture, and imbalance. The disunion caused by the weapon suggest binary contradictions such as between East and West, modernity and tradition, or beauty and violence.



Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat. Source: Smarthistory

According to Neshat, “every image, every woman’s submissive gaze, suggests a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface.”



Neshat's *Women of Allah* series examines the tenuous balance between the gaze and the veil. The veil itself, often seen as simply a garment of oppression by Western eyes, is not so one-dimensional in its interpretation within cultures where it is worn and where its significance suggests a more complex interplay between repression and freedom.



The veil is meant to shield the female form from the male gaze, which is intended to protect women from becoming sexualized objects. However, it also obscures their body and keeps them from being seen at all.



Neshat empowers her female figures by allowing them to gaze back at the viewer, while also wearing garments that obscure their forms. This shifts the focus of the viewer to the subject's powerful, responsive gaze itself, rather than just allowing her to exist as an object to be gazed upon.



Other images from the series, such as *Faceless*, show the female subjects in more active poses and explore concepts relating to religious martyrdom and the Iranian Revolution.

Neshat emphasizes the power, determination, strength, and complexity of her female subjects portrayed in her works. The directness of the gaze and the confrontational poses of her subjects reinforce these ideas.



Shirin Neshat, *Faceless*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston
©Shirin Neshat. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org)

An additional layer to the *Women of Allah* series is the text which is written directly onto the photographs in Farsi. The Iranian language of Farsi, written in the Arabic script, covers the exposed skin of the subjects with poetry and writings by women, voicing a variety of viewpoints and perspectives.

Calligraphy holds a vastly important role in the history of Islamic art. The calligraphy adds a sense of flatness and patterning to the photographs, which also references the history of Iranian art.



Shirin Neshat, *Faceless*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston
©Shirin Neshat. Source: [Smarthistory](https://www.smarthistory.org)

The history of Iranian art includes richly decorated books of poetry with figurative paintings and decorative calligraphy, such as the epic historical poem the *Shahnama*, or *Book of Kings*.



Muzaffar 'Ali
The Angel Surush Rescues Khusrau Parviz from a Cul-de-sac
 from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp,
 c. 1530. Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper.
 Source: [MET Museum](https://www.metmuseum.org), License: [CC0 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The *Shahnama* tells the story of the ancient kings of Iran, blending history with lore and including stories about love, suffering, and death.



Muzaffar 'Ali . *The Angel Surush Rescues Khusrau Parviz from a Cul-de-sac.* from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, c. 1530. Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper.

Source: [MET Museum](https://www.metmuseum.org), Cropped from original,
License: [CC0 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Copied and illuminated numerous times throughout the history of Iran, the epic work of *Shahnama* exemplifies the exalted position shared by visual arts, poetry, and calligraphy, and the way in which these three art forms are able to occupy the same space throughout the history of Iranian art.



Sultan Mohammed
The Court of the Gayumars
from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp (Safavid Dynasty),
c. 1525. Gouache, ink, and gold on paper.
Author: [Aga Khan Museum](#), Source: Wikimedia
Commons, License: Public Domain

The poem written over the skin of the female subject in *Rebellious Silence* is Tahereh Saffarzadeh's "Allegiance with Wakefulness", which celebrates the bravery of martyrdom.



Shirin Neshat, *Rebellious Silence*, *Women of Allah* series, 1994, black and white RC print and ink, photo by Cynthia Preston ©Shirin Neshat. Source: [Smarthistory](#)

In approaching the works of Shirin Neshat, the viewer is challenged to contemplate the complexity of the female experience. Specifically within the *Women of Allah* series, the artist asks that the viewer approach the subject of the Iranian female martyr with more nuance and openness to the complexity of the subject's experiences and principles.



Watch Shirin Neshat describe concepts in her work:
<https://youtu.be/VXZkn0nL34Y>

Takashi Murakami's fascination with science fiction and *manga*, or Japanese cartoons and comic books, informs his playful, technicolor works of art.



Takashi Murakami at Fondation Vuitton, Paris. Author: [Jean-Pierre Dalbéra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

Manga comics on display in Toyko.



Manga comic books on display in Tokyo. Author: [Todd Lappin](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

Murakami's concept of the *superflat* describes the flatness of the picture plane in his work and the way in which his work collapses the space between popular culture and high art.



Takashi Murakami at Fondation Vuitton, Paris. Author: [Jean-Pierre Dalbéra](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

Murakami's concept of the *superflat* also references the aesthetics of Japanese art, such as the woodblock prints from the Edo period which flatten the space within the picture plane, such as in the color woodblock print *The Great Wave* by Katsushika Hokusai.

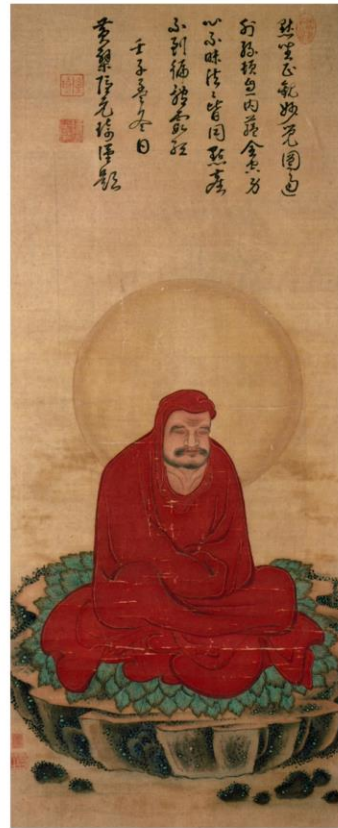
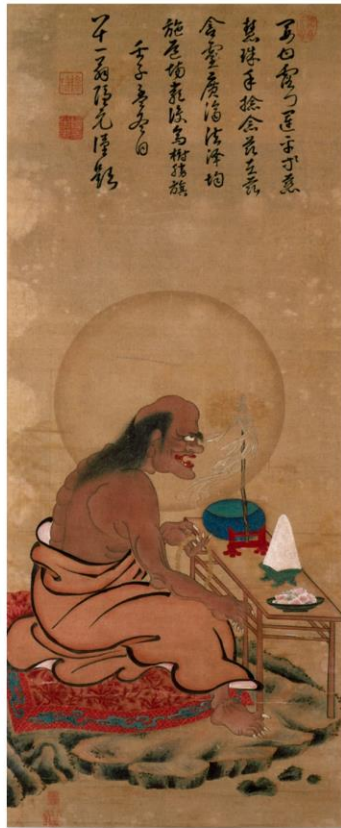


Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave* from the series *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku sanjūrokkei)*, c. 1830-32, polychrome woodblock print, ink and color on paper. Author: [Met Museum](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain

Alongside the flatness of woodblock prints and the stylistic inspiration from manga and science fiction, Murakami also includes traditional imagery from Buddhism, such as depictions of *arhats*.



An *arhat* is a Buddhist monk who has advanced along the path of Enlightenment.



Kawamura Jakushi, 18 Arhat, Inscription by Yinyuan, 18 hanging scrolls with color on silk. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: Public Domain

Murakami's arhats reference the traditional figures but approach them in a new style.



Detail from Takashi Murakami's *The 500 Arhats*. Author: [Tomomi Sasaki](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)



Kawamura Jakushi, *18 Arhat*, 18 hanging scrolls with color on silk. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), *Cropped from original*, License: Public Domain



Detail from Takashi Murakami's *The 500 Arhats*. Author: [Tomomi Sasaki](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Watch a video of artist Takashi Murakami speaking about the evolution of his work and see into his atelier:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YPOWBQAd1M>

El Anatsui, was born and raised in Ghana but spends much of his time as an artist in Nsukka, Nigeria.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: Steven Zucker, *Cropped from original*, Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

El Anatsui's mixed media tapestries resemble cloth but are made of refuse metal.

They are sculptural and move away from the wall and out into the space of the viewer in rippling waves.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: Steven Zucker, *Cropped from original*, Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

The repurposed metal used in his works have been handled before by others, relating to an idea shared among the Ashanti people of Ghana of *sunsum*.

Sunsum describes an energy that gets transferred into an object as it is handled. A certain vitality is transferred to the object as it is passed through different hands.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: Steven Zucker, *Cropped from original*, Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

A further layer of meaning in the work is the complicated reality of consumerism and the fact that these materials would have likely otherwise ended up in a trash heap outside the city.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: Steven Zucker, *Cropped from original*, Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/)

The history of textiles in the artist's homeland of Ghana is rich and important, including symbolic woven fabric known as *Kente cloth*. A predominant color in Kente is gold, which is associated with royalty.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: [Steven Zucker](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Kente cloth was originally reserved for Ashanti royalty to be used for ceremonial or sacred occasions.



Asantehene (Ashanti Monarch) Osei Tutu II wearing Kente cloth, 2005.
Author: [Retlaw Snellac](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC BY 2.0](#)

As the production of Kente cloth increased, however, so did its function. The cloth may be found decorating shrines and was adopted by the Ewe people, who were under the rule of the Ashanti in the late 18th century. Due to being less centralized, the Ewe people developed patterns of Kente cloth that symbolically related more to everyday life and was not reserved for royal use.



Ewe design, Kente cloth.
Author: [ZSM](#), Source:
Wikimedia Commons,
License: [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Each pattern of Kente cloth has a name. Names may be inspired by dreams of the weavers, historical events, philosophical concepts, human or animal behavior, oral literature, or they may be given to relate to a sacred or ritual ceremony during which the cloth is used.



19th Century Kente cloth. Author: [MET Museum](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: [CC0 1.0](#)

El Anatsui's tapestries, however, are not made of fiber; they are made of flattened metal scraps.



El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: [Steven Zucker](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)



Many of the flattened scraps of metal used by the artist come from liquor bottles, whose lids have been pounded flat and wired together.

This references the west African practice of using alcohol as a libation to honor the ancestors. Before eating or drinking, a bit of palm wine or other alcohol is dribbled onto the ground.

El Anatsui, *Many Came Back*, 2005. Author: Steven Zucker, *Cropped from original*,
Source: Flickr, License: CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

El Anatsui's tapestries are made in workshops, much in the way that the traditional Kente cloth of Ghana was produced.



El Anatsui, *Duvor (Communal Cloth)*. Author: [The Shifted Librarian](#), Source: Flickr, License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Watch a video of El Anatsui explaining the meaning behind his bottlecap tapestries:

<https://youtu.be/5I7XZL9KjFQ>



Reading List: 24_The Global Art World

Article about Mariko Mori's *Pure Land*:

<https://smarthistory.org/mariko-mori-pure-land/>

Bio on Artnet with quote by Mariko Mori, "I am interested in circulating past iconography in the present in order to get to the future.":

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/mariko-mori/>

Article by the Met Museum about *Welcoming Descent of Amida and Bodhisattvas*:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/42.25.37/>

Article about Ai Weiwei's *Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)*:

<https://smarthistory.org/ai-weiwei-kui-hua-zi-sunflower-seeds/>

Video tour of the production of Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PueYywpkJW8>

Article on Ai Weiwei's *Remembering* and the Politics of Dissent:

<https://smarthistory.org/ai-weiwei-remembering-and-the-politics-of-dissent-2/>

Short bio of Ai Weiwei from the Guggenheim:

<https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/ai-weiwei>

Video interview with Raqib Shaw and tour of his atelier:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/raqib-shaw-9784/raqib-shaw-craft-romantic-extreme>

Tate article about Raqib Shaw's *Jane*:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/shaw-jane-t12373>

Biographical article about Raqib Shaw:

<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/raqib-shaw-old-masters/>

Article about the Mughal miniature painting *Jahangir Preferring a Sufi Shaikh to Kings* by Bichitr:

<https://smarthistory.org/bichitr-jahangir-preferring-a-sufi-shaikh-to-kings-2/>

Video interview with Takashi Murakami and a look inside his atelier:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YPOWBQAd1M>

Article about Takashi Murakami by Tate:

<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/pop-life-art-material-world/pop-life-art-material-world-explore-15>

Article about Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave*:

<https://smarthistory.org/hokusai-under-the-wave-off-kanagawa-the-great-wave/>

A description of an arhat is available as part of this article:

<https://smarthistory.org/longmen-caves-luoyang/>

Video lecture about the works of El Anatsui:

<https://smarthistory.org/el-anatsui-untitled/>

Interview with artist El Anatsui about the meaning behind his bottlecap tapestries:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5I7XZL9KjFQ>

Article about Kente cloth:

<https://smarthistory.org/kente-cloth/>

Listen to Shirin Neshat's TED Talk on Art in Exile:

<https://youtu.be/4YS3gGpnPe8>

Read about the history of the *Shahnama*, or *Book of Kings* from the Met Museum:

https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/shnm/hd_shnm.htm

Read an article about Sultan Muhammad's *The Court of the Gayumars* from the *Shahnama of Shah Tahmasap I*:

<https://smarthistory.org/the-court-of-gayumars/>