

Art History Research Fellowship: 2020 Winners

Excerpts from Research Papers

Agnes Gund Excellence in Art History Research Award

The Obscure History of Manifestos in the Art World

Aneesa Razak

Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and the Performing Arts

Art Teacher: Joyce Riley

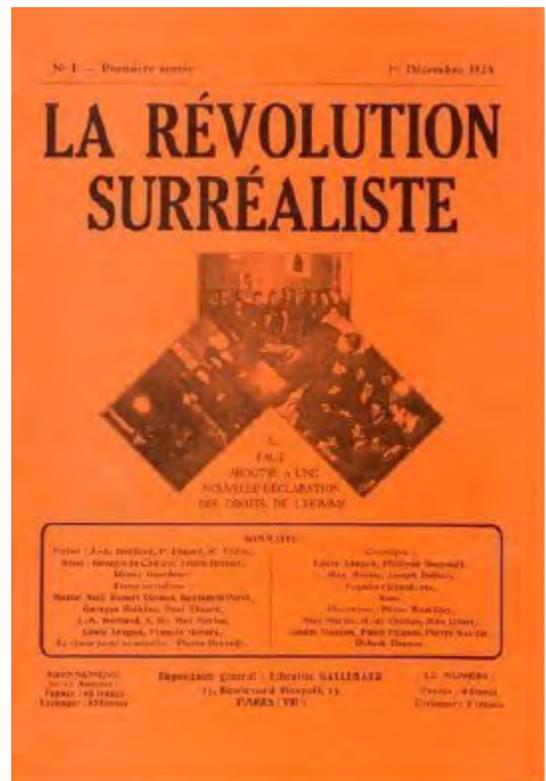
Principal: Yeou- Jey Vasconcelos

Historically, manifestos have been used to criticize, evoke, and spread knowledge about an idea that is usually political. Many artists before the 20th century indulged in their political beliefs in conjunction with their art practice. Artists such as the “High Priest” of the Surrealist movement, Andre Breton, was a committed Marxist and even went as far to join the French Communist Party in 1927.

Breton’s Surrealist manifesto published in his magazine *La Révolution Surréaliste (The Surrealist Revolution)*

promoted the unleashing of the unconscious mind and combining reality and dreams (Automatism). After his famed manifesto was published, Breton met with later exiled Leon Trotsky to further the freedom of art and publish yet again another manifesto titled *Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*. Breton began to push boundaries in the forms of art, writing, and politics. Many before and after Breton had lasting impacts on the art world through their documentation and written opinions

and questions about society and art. These constant changes have only validated the use of manifestos even more because they are no longer just political tools; their influence has had lasting impacts on our society and the future of the art world.



Paul L. King Excellence in Art History Research Award

Balkan Iconoclasm

Zoja Mišut

Frank Sinatra School of the Arts High School

Art Teacher: Sacha Twarog

Principal: Gideon Rafel Frankel



Hagia Sophia, 537 A.D. Ashlar, Brick
Istanbul, Turkey

The strongest attack on the enemy is the destruction of their home and culture. Iconoclasm refers to this destruction, the assault on art and the symbols of beliefs and religions. This happens when a new

culture takes over an area and establishes their own control and power. It is an ancient tactic used in the Trojan War when Achilles sliced off of the head of the statue Apollo sacred to the Trojans. It is still common practice in modern warfare today. The same destruction and replacement of religious buildings during The Crusades are currently used against victims of overpowering nations. Personal attachment to art is not a modern or religious concept, but a human need that has been around since the beginning of civilizations. Attacking and destroying the symbols is the most dangerous damage an enemy can do since it attacks people psychologically and spiritually.

Rona Roob Art History Research Award

Psychology in Art

Sarah O'Brien

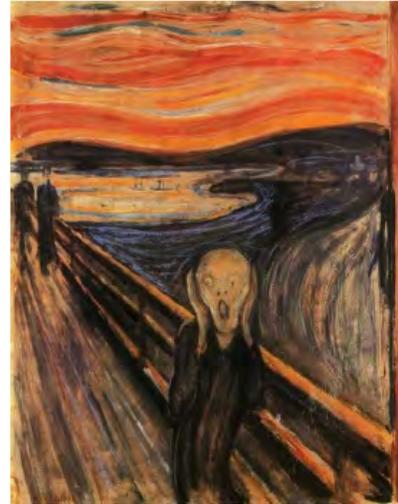
High School of Art and Design

Art Teacher: James Harrington

Principal: Maximillian Re-Sugiura

Despite the advances of technology and social media that democratizes museum collections throughout the world, the mass proliferation of art and the best efforts of curators, the appreciation of art appears to the common person to be a snobbish pastime for pseudo-intellectuals and elites seeking to bring some color into their lives, as it seemed to me. You, reader, know as well as I do that this couldn't be further from the truth. Art can offer some of the most intimate intellectual experiences, allowing you to peer through the eyes of geniuses long ago; to see the world they saw. Despite the centuries and vast distances that separate us from these pioneers of the craft, despite the difference in experience, language, age, and belief, everyone—if only they would look closer—could see that we all share the same emotions.

The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893
National Gallery, Oslo, Norway



Richard Roob Art History Research Award

A Brush of Our Past

Takumi Natsume

Frank Sinatra School of the Arts High School

Art Teacher: Sacha Twarog

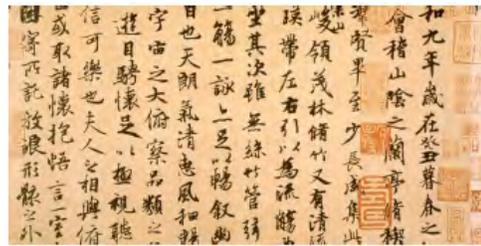
Principal: Gideon Frankel

“道” Does this look familiar to you? Perhaps the sound, Michi or Dou might ring a bell. No? Never? Ju dou (柔道)? Ken dou (剣道)? Bushi dou(武士道)?

Dou , or really the word Michi ,means “road,” “path,” or “way of” in Japanese. Thus, in direct translation, Judou is “The way of flexibility,” Kendou is “The way of swords,” and Bushidou is,

“The way of the warrior.” Like Karaoke or Karate, there are many terms used by English speakers that are surprisingly derived from the Japanese language.

Ancient Chinese Calligraphy.



Ancient Chinese Calligraphy

But why am I talking about words in an art history essay? To explain that, we must go more in depth into the history of Japanese. The Japanese language can be divided into three different alphabets. One being Hiragana , the other being Katakana, and lastly the most confusing, Kanji. Out of the three alphabets two are phonetic (Hiragana and Katakana) and one is logographic (Kanji). A phonetic alphabet means that each letter of the alphabet holds no particular meaning, just the sound that it makes when combining it with other letters. In comparison, a logographic alphabet is a written system where each character holds its own meaning. This makes Japanese the only language in the world to implement both phonetic and logographic alphabets into their writing system.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Emotion in Art

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Art Teacher: Chelsea Stambouly

Principal: Daryl Blank



The Slave Ship, J.M.W. Turner, 1840

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Art is a form of expression, and throughout art history, a variety of artists have used many mediums to evoke emotion, publicize opinions, or inspire action. The artistic materials as well as techniques used contribute to the ethos and pathos approach in multiple fine arts...

There are paintings that may evoke intense emotion due to both the subject matter and techniques. One prime example could be Joseph Millard Turner's piece *Slave Ship* that was once displayed at The Met. At first glance the colors of the painting may appear to look beautiful, but the heavy brush strokes, and the fire-like gradient immediately show a sense of chaos; even the use of contrast in color could arise a sense of horror. The top of the piece is very fire-like because of the typhoon and the bottom is very dark and bloody; the artist's choice to contrast such bright and dark colors side by side definitely impacts how the audience views this painting. Personally, when looking at Turner's piece I feel a sense of sadness, a bit of anger, and disgust at what the image is portraying. As mentioned prior this is a slave ship, but as I look more in depth I see bloody body parts such as arms or legs of the slaves hanging on or off the slave ship in shackles. This depiction of death and mistreatment makes me uncomfortable...however that was what Turner was going for, and my sense of anger comes from those harsh brush strokes. The art piece itself is supposed to be a representation of the poem, in *The History and Abolition of the Slave Trade* by Thomas Clarkson, and Turner himself was just as angered reading the poem as I am viewing this painting.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Commodifying Frida Kahlo: Devalued by the Markets

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Art Teacher: Chelsea Stambouly

Principal: Daryl Blank

Kahlo's image has been commodified continuously which has desensitized the viewer from the symbolism in the work. Frida Kahlo's ethics are compromised in the face of commercialization and it is important to understand the harm this does to the messages in her art. Invalidating her experience, and thereby her art, exemplifies no justice to what she stood for in her life. Frida Kahlo deserves to have her art and story represented with dignity and respect in every interpretation of Frida Kahlo and her image...



Grandparents, My Parents and I (Family Tree) 1936

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

In her paintings, Kahlo dignified her lineages such as in *My Grandparents, My Parents, and I (Family Tree) 1936*. Kahlo's grandparents are painted in the left and right corners of the canvas. With a red ribbon tying them all together (most likely signifying the bloodline) the descendants of the family tree surround the center member of the family, Frida Kahlo. A toddler version of Frida is holding the ribbon together for her, as her mother and father, are living proof of her mixed heritage. Kahlo did not shy away in painting her grandparents on her mother's side their true skin color.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Answering the Question: How does the work of Marc Chagall, Diego Rivera and Thomas Hart Benton reflect their historical period?

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The work of these artists reflects the social, political and economic impact of critical historical events such as the development of the Russian Revolution, the course of World War I and II, the outbreak of the Cold War, and the Industrialization movement. By encompassing and capturing moments of political and financial struggle, Marc Chagall, Diego Rivera and Thomas Hart Benton gave a human face to the grand historical events they were experiencing...



Detail of *America Today*, Thomas Hart Benton, 1930-1931, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

...Thomas Hart Benton's *America Today* captures scenes of financial struggle while exhibiting the progression of industrialization throughout various panels representing collaboration amidst the working class. One of the smallest panels is composed horizontally, cropping into a scene of collective diagonal hands reaching out towards bread and a person pouring out coffee, while white hands clench into their money in the same direction. Based on the black top hat and a portion of a black and white suit as the white hands move outwards, the viewer is left to conclude that those hands belong to men in power. Movement is defined in the hands without money by the slanted fingers leaning forward, suggesting a sense of urgency for food. By cropping the image, Thomas Hart Benton applied emphasis to the phrase "lend a hand" during times of necessity, but leaves the viewer guessing who will be served first according to implied status. Though simplified, the section is powerful in alluding to the difference in social classes and economic inequity.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Henry Darger: The Life of “The Protector of Children” and His Connection to Outsider Art
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Outsider or Intuitive art, is a phrase used to describe the genre of art created by self-taught, naïve art makers. Over generations, the category has expanded several times signaling factors like poverty, race, age, being disabled, poor, and was essentially used to subordinate and exoticize circumstances of the artists' lives. In the 1940's, French Modernist painter Jean Dubuffet coined this phrase to describe artwork made by those with disabilities, prisoners, or the clinically insane. Typically, those labeled as outsider artists have little or no contact with the mainstream art world, or even within the typical human world...



Part of Darger's Chicago Apartment

...I became interested with this subgenre of art after having looked at the work and story of Henry Darger. By day, Darger was a janitor in a Chicago hospital and by night a prolific artist and a “protector of children”. With over 15,000 pages, Darger spent the entirety of his life creating his magnum opus *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* one escapes into a theoretical and surrealist world, where the Vivian girls, the protagonists take us into a highly fantastic and sociopolitical universe.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Answering the question: What starts an art movement?

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Art Teacher: Sacha Twarog

Principal: Gideon Frankel



The Sistine Ceiling, Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1508-1512 Vatican City, Rome

Artists of the past shape the artists of the future. There is no Caravaggio without Michelangelo. Neoclassical artists would not exist without the Renaissance and the Classical past. Now Contemporary artists embrace art in all forms, inviting artists to create anything and expand the boundaries of what art can do. So what comes next? What emerges in the wake of Postmodernism? What will Contemporary art inspire, and will it be so radically different from today's art forms? Will it change the way we view art and how we understand artistic form? This raises the fundamental question: What starts an art movement in the first place?...

...Throughout history artistic movements have taken from the past, been influenced by religion and spirituality, or been forced to change due to the advances of science and innovation. Artists create Contemporary work for all these reasons, so how will we determine when a new era is born? An artist must do something immensely different, something undefined today. Art will inevitably progress, but to change the art world, one artist, or a few will have to redefine what art can be, and influence their predecessors, peers, and successors. Art that has a global impact, and directly influences and affects all people, across all societies is what will start the next art movement.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Analysis of “My Dress Hangs There” by Frida Kahlo

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Art Teacher: James Harrington

Principal: Maximillian Re-Sugiura

...Emotions such as sadness, joy or disgust are universal, but having prior knowledge of what the artist was experiencing at the time is significant to comprehend their message. This is especially true for Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Her 18” by 21” oil painting titled *My Dress Hangs There* is full of symbols. She began painting it in



1933, during her stay in New York City and completed the piece when she returned to Mexico with her husband Diego Rivera. Frida Kahlo's time in America is reflected in her work as she uses symbols to depict her yearning for Mexico, her views on American wealth, and disapproval of industrialization...

...Unlike Kahlo's previous work, this painting compositionally has a collage feel, but with more depth. Her conscious decision to overlap and align the objects brings attention to the environment she has created or depicted, especially their significance as individual symbols and as a whole. When placing symbols the artist was faced with the challenge of possibly overwhelming the viewer at first glance. Kahlo overcomes that issue by using the rule of thirds. Each section is given breathing space but at the same time leads to one another. The left and right section in the foreground are defined by two columns, the one on the left is white and the one on the right is a yellow ochre color.

Also, a dark building that has a pointed roof and a long brown pipe divides the middle section. They serve as points of intersection as well, leading the viewer to the organic shape of the islands in the background. The placement of these vertical objects contributes to unifying the vertical and horizontal motion of the piece, thus ensuring that the viewer's eye goes around the entire piece. In addition, the various size and shape relationships allow for the structure of the objects to visually flow and complement each other rather than compete with one another.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

Who Does Art Belong To?

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Principal: Gideon Frankel

Some of the most renowned museums experienced or are currently embroiled in controversy over artwork whose provenance is deemed problematic. They are facing demands for the return of this work from nations that claim it as their own. Most notoriously, the British Museum in the United Kingdom displays millions of artwork from around the world, some of which were acquired through looting that occurred during the era of British imperialism.



This issue is clearly exemplified in the Benin Bronzes from Nigeria.

Although many museums own a number of these sculptures, the British Museum has around 700 of these brass plaques. These were decorations for the Oba's palace in the Kingdom of Benin (present-day Nigeria). The plaques typically displayed court rituals and acted as a visual aid for the history of the kingdom. "At shrines and altars back home, such works have context and meaning; in the clinical setting of the museum, they seemed diminished and out of place," says Victor Ehikhamenor of

The New York Times.

A portion of the plaques reference the Edo peoples' mutual connection to Portugal. Scenes depict the Oba wearing traded goods symbolizing the vast expansion of the Benin Kingdom. During the 18th century, Britain sought to trade with the Edo, as it saw trade between Portugal decline. Unlike Portugal, Britain and Benin did not exchange goods as mutually and the two societies would interact aggressively. This led to the British Punitive Expedition of 1897, resulting in the burning and looting of the Oba's palace. Through means of auction and collecting, the Benin Bronzes made their way across the world

from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City to even the private collection of Pablo Picasso. However, the British Museum's plaques in particular spark the most controversy due to their historic context, and are therefore considered stolen. This debate continues even today as Nigeria plans to build a royal museum of their own and seek to house the British Museum's Benin Bronzes within it. "I want people to be able to understand their past and see who we were," says Godwin Obaseki, governor of the Edo State.

Art History Research Fellowship Award

The Iconography of La Pietà

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Certain subjects repeat themselves through art history.

How does the artist's time period

influence how they interpret a recurring subject?

During a recent trip to Italy I was overcome

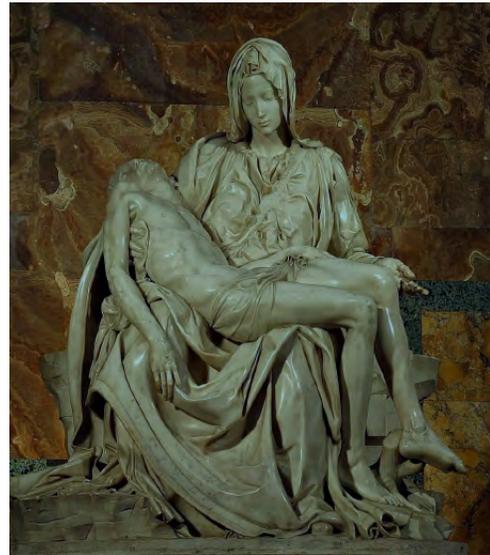
with the beauty of Michelangelo's La Pietà. I started to

think about other versions of this subject.

Why do they look so different? It can't just be who did

them that matters, but also when and where they did

them. How do different interpretations of La Pietà reflect their historical influences?



The biblical story of Mary and Jesus transcends the relationship between mother and son.

The emotional, visual, and spiritual embodiment of that relationship is captured in evolving styles over the centuries. Evolving refers to the growth of skill and a new unique depiction of the same powerful narrative. Each reinvention of La Pietà has been inspired by an earlier version.

Despite having influenced one another, each artist presents a unique approach to their new

version of La Pietà.

La Pietà means pity and mercy which establishes the story of Mary and Jesus. The

various versions created of La Pietà all share the common personification of grief and loss in the

expression of Mary. Jesus lacks strength in all versions which are all depicted with his neck

elongated and his mouth slightly open with shut eyes to express weakness. Mary displays her

motherly role by holding his lifeless body while she mourns his death.