Visual art can be powerfully persuasive, and one of the purposes of this book is to help you to recognize how this is so. Yet it is important for you to understand from the outset that you can neither recognize nor understand—let alone communicate—how visual art affects you without using language. In other words, one of the primary purposes of any art appreciation text is to provide you with a descriptive vocabulary, a set of terms, phrases, concepts, and approaches that will allow you to think critically about visual images. It is not sufficient to say, “I like this or that painting.” You need to be able to recognize why you like it, how it communicates to you. This ability is given the name visual literacy.
The fact is, most of us take the visual world for granted. We assume that we understand what we see. Those of us born and raised in the television era are often accused of being non-verbal, passive receivers, like TV monitors themselves. If television—and the mass media generally, from Time to MTV—has made us virtually dependent upon visual information, we have not necessarily become visually literate in the process. To introduce you to the idea of visual literacy, this chapter will begin by introducing you to the main tools needed for our discussion—the relationship between words, images, and objects in the real world, the idea of representation, the distinction between form and content in art, conventions in art, and iconography. With these in hand, we will then consider some of the major themes of art in Chapter 3.

WORDS AND IMAGES

The degrees of distance between things in the world and the words and images with which we refer to them is precisely the point of René Magritte’s *The Treason of Images* (Fig. 16). We tend to look at the image of a pipe as if it were really a pipe, but of course it isn’t. It is the representation of a pipe. *Ceci n’est pas une pipe,* the painting tells us: “This is not a pipe.” Nor is the word “pipe” the same as an image of it. The word is an abstract set of marks that “represents,” in language, both the thing and its image. Language is even further removed from the real world than visual representation. And within language there are different degrees of distance as well. “This,” finally, is not a “pipe.” These two words are not the same: “This” is a pronoun that could point to anything, and only in this context does it point to a “pipe.”

In the West, we tend to confuse words and the things they represent. This is not true in other cultures. For example, in Muslim culture, the removal of the word from what it refers to is seen as a virtue. Traditionally, those who make pictures with human figures in them are labeled “the worst of men,” and to possess such a picture is comparable to owning a dog, an animal held in contempt because it is associated with filth. In creating a human likeness, the artist is thought to be competing with the Creator himself, and such *hubris,* or excessive pride, is, of course, a sin. As a result, calligraphy—that is, the fine art of handwriting—is the chief form of Islamic art.

The Muslim calligrapher does not so much express himself—in the way that we, individually, express ourselves through our style of writing—as act as a medium through which Allah can express himself in the most beautiful manner possible. Thus all properly pious writing, especially poetry, is sacred. This is the case with the page from the poet Firdausi’s *Shahnamah* at the right (Fig. 17).

Sacred texts are almost always completely abstract designs that have no relation to the world of things. They demand to be considered at least as much for their visual properties as for their literary or spiritual content. Until recent times, in the Muslim world, every book, indeed almost every sustained statement, began with the phrase “In the name of Allah”—the *bismillah,* as it is called—the same phrase that opens the Koran. On this folio page from the *Shahnamah,* the *bismillah* is in the top right-hand corner (Arabic texts read from right to left). To write the *bismillah* in as beautiful a form as possible is believed to bring the scribe forgiveness for his sins.
Fig. 17 Triumphant Entry (Page from a manuscript of the “Shahnamah of Firdawsī”), Persian, Safavid, 1562–1583. Opaque watercolor, ink, and gold on paper, L. 47.5 × W. 33.0 cm (18 3/4 × 13 in.) Francis Bartlett Donation and Picture Fund 14.692. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Reproduced with permission. © 2002 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All rights reserved.
Lorna Simpson’s *The Park*

As a photographer, Lorna Simpson is preoccupied with the question of representation and its limitations. All of her works, of which the multi-panel *Necklines* (Fig. 18) is a good example, deal with the ways in which words and images function together to make meaning. Simpson presents us with three different photographs of the same woman’s neck and the neckline of her dress. Below these images are two panels with four words on each, each word in turn playing on the idea of the neck itself. The sensuality of the photographs is affirmed by words such as “necking” and “neck-ed” (that is, “naked”), while the phrases “neck & neck” and “breakneck” introduce the idea of speed or running. The question is, what do these two sets of terms have to do with one another?

Necklaces and neckties go around the neck. So do nooses at hangings. In fact, “necktie parties” conduct hangings, hangings break necks, and a person runs from a “necktie party” precisely because, instead of wearing a necklace, in being hanged one becomes “neckless.”

If this set of verbal associations runs contrary to the sensuality and seeming passivity of Simpson’s photographs, they do not run contrary to the social reality faced, throughout American history, by black people in general. The anonymity of Simpson’s model serves not only to universalize the situation that her words begin to explore, but also depersonalizes the subject in a way that suggests how such situations become possible. Simpson seeks to articulate this tension—the violence that always lies beneath the surface of the black person’s world—by bringing words and images together.

A group of large-scale black-and-white serigraphs, or silkscreen prints, on felt, take up different subject matter but remain committed to investigating the relationship between words and images. Created for the premier opening of the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City in October 1995, all of the works but one are multi-panel photographs of landscapes (the one exception is a view of two almost identical hotel rooms). They employ a unique process.

Simpson first photographed the scenes. Then she arranged with Jean Noblet, one of the Premier serigraph printers in the world, to print them, blown up into several large panels, on felt, a material never before utilized in the silkscreen printing process. The felt absorbed vast quantities of ink, and each panel had to be printed several times to achieve the correct density of black. Furthermore, each panel had to match the others in the image. In less than two weeks,
the entire suite of seven images, consisting of over fifty panels, was miraculously printed, just in time for the show.

Each of the images is accompanied by a wall text that, when read, transforms the image. On one side of The Park (Fig. 19), for instance, the viewer reads:

_Just unpacked a new shiny silver telescope. And we are up high enough for a really good view of all the buildings and the park. The living room window seems to be the best spot for it. On the sidewalk below a man watches figures from across the path._

On the other side of the image, a second wall text reads:

_It is early evening, the lone sociologist walks through the park, to observe private acts in the men’s public bathrooms. . . . He decides to adopt the role of voyeur and look out in order to go unnoticed and noticed at the same time. His research takes several years. . . ._

These texts effectively involve Simpson’s audience in a complex network of voyeurism. The photographer’s position is the same as the person’s who has purchased the telescope, and our viewpoint is the same. Equipped with a telescope (or the telescopc lens of a camera) apparently purchased for viewing the very kind of scene described in the second text, we want to zoom in to see what’s going on below.

There is, in fact, a kind of telescopic feel to the work itself. The image itself is more than 5½ feet square and can be readily taken in from across the room. But to understand it, we need to come in close to read the texts. Close up, the image is too large to see as a whole, and the crisp contrasts of the print as seen from across the room are lost in the soft texture of the felt. The felt even seems to absorb light rather than reflect it as most photographic prints do, blurring our vision in the process. As an audience, we zoom in and out, viewing the scene as a whole, and then coming in to read the texts. As we move from the general to the particular, from the panoramic view to the close-up text, the innocuous scene becomes charged with meaning. The reality beneath surface appearances is once again Simpson’s theme—the photographer challenging the camera view.
Yet words, however beautifully written, have limitations. If you allow yourself to believe for a moment that the photograph of the tree in the diagram below (Fig. 20) represents a "real" tree, and that the drawing in the middle is its "image," the question arises: Should we trust the word "tree" more or less than the image of it? It is no more "real" than the drawing. It is made from a series of pen strokes on paper—not an action radically removed, at least in a physical sense, from the set of gestures used to draw the tree. In fact, the word might seem even more arbitrary and culturally determined than the drawing. Most people would understand what the drawing depicts. Only English speakers understand "tree." In French the word is arbre, in German baum, in Turkish ağacı, and in Swahili mti.

An excellent case can be made, in other words, for the primacy of images over words. Most of us trust a photograph of an unusual event more than some witness's verbal description of it. "The camera never lies," we tell ourselves, while the reliability of a given witness is always in doubt.

Cameras, of course, can and do lie. Consider Duane Michals's photograph of an embracing couple (Fig. 21). The subject matter of the work—what the image depicts—and its content—what the image means—are radically opposed. The man in this photograph insists on using it as if it were proof in a court of law, and we are the jury. Evidently the relationship is over, but the man wants us to believe that "once upon a time" he was loved by someone, that this woman was happy in his company. His insistence is embarrassing. We read his protestation as a fairy tale that he has created in order to deceive himself.

Whichever we tend to trust more, the visual or the verbal (and it probably depends upon the context of any given situation), it should nevertheless be clear that words and images need to work together. Each is insufficient in itself to tell the whole "truth." It should be equally clear that any distrust of visual imagery we might feel is, at least in part, a result of the visual's power. When, in Exodus, the worship of "graven images" that is, idols, is forbidden, the assumption is that such images are powerfully attractive, even dangerously seductive. As we have noted, the page of Arab poetry reproduced previously (Fig. 17) depends for its power at least as much on its visual presence and beauty as it does on what it actually says.

**DESCRIPTING THE WORLD**

In the last section, we explored the topic of visual literacy by considering the relationship between words and images. Words and images are two different systems of describing the world. Words refer to the world in the abstract. Images represent the world, or reproduce its appearance. Traditionally one of the primary goals of the visual arts has been to capture and portray the way the natural world looks. But, as we all know, some works of art look more like the natural world than others, and some artists are less interested than others in representing the world as it actually appears. As a result, a vocabulary has developed that describes how closely, or not, the image resembles visual reality itself. This basic set of terms is where we need to begin in order to talk or write intelligently about works of art.

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28 Part I The Visual World
Representational, Abstract, and Nonobjective Art

Generally we refer to works of art as either representational, abstract, or nonobjective (or nonrepresentational). The more a work resembles real things in the real world, the more representational, or realistic, it is said to be. You may also encounter the related terms naturalistic or illusionistic, meaning "like nature," and illusionistic, which refers to an image so natural that it creates the illusion of being real. Traditional photography is, in many ways, the most representational medium, because its transcription of what lies before the viewfinder appears to be direct and unmanipulated. The photograph, therefore, seems to capture the immediacy of visual experience. It seems equivalent to what we actually see. It is important to remember, however, that photography captures only what is visible in the camera's viewfinder. As in the Duane Michals photograph, the photographic image does not necessarily capture the emotional world that lies beneath the surface, or what lies beyond the frame. Photography offers up only a replica of the visual or illuminated world, not the world as a whole.

The four images on the following pages, all by different artists, proceed in steps from the most representational to the most nonrepresentational art. As a series, they embody a...
continuum from the representational through the abstract to the nonobjective.

Representational works of art portray natural objects in recognizable form. Thus, Albert Bierstadt’s painting of The Rocky Mountains (Fig. 3) is representational, even though the scene it depicts may be imaginary. Erna Motna’s Bushfire and Corroboree Dreaming (Fig. 5), with its lack of recognizable landscape features, is far less representational even though it refers to an actual Australian site. The sculpture of Pat, on the left (Fig. 22), is fully representational. The sculpture almost looks as if it is alive, and certainly anyone meeting the real “Pat” would recognize her from this representation of her. In fact, Pat is one of many plaster casts made from life by John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres, residents of the South Bronx in New York City. In 1980, Ahearn moved to the South Bronx and began to work in collaboration with local resident Torres. Torres had learned the art of plaster casting from his uncle, who had cast plaster statues for churches and cemeteries. Together Ahearn and Torres set out to capture the spirit of a community that was financially impoverished but that possessed real, if unrecognized, dignity. “The key to my work is life—lifecasting,” says Ahearn. “The people I cast know that they are as responsible for my work as I am, even more so. The people make my sculptures.”

While natural objects remain recognizable in abstract works of art, they are rendered in a stylized or simplified way. Marisol’s Baby Girl (Fig. 23), is still recognizable as a representation of a little girl, but it is much less realistic than Pat. Instead of rendering the human form exactly, Marisol simply draws the human form on the large, barely rounded blocks of wood. As a result, the work seems half sculpture, half drawing.

The less a work resembles real things in the real world, the more abstract it is said to be. Abstract art does not try to duplicate the world exactly but instead reduces the world to its essential qualities. It is concerned with the formal qualities of an image (such as line and form and color), or with the emotions that may be expressed through it. For example, Marisol’s Baby Girl is over six feet tall, sitting down. Her exaggerated size lends her the emotional pres-
ence of a monster, an all-consuming, all-demanding force far larger than her actual size.

Joel Shapiro's Untitled (Fig. 24) is a barely recognizable, highly abstract version of a human figure lying on its side. Shapiro believes that we all inevitably see representational forms in any configuration (just as we see representational shapes in cloud formations), so he lets us see these nine wooden blocks as a figure. Nevertheless, their abstract formal quality as rectangular volumes is asserted even more completely than in Marisol's work.

Nonobjective works of art do not refer to the objective world at all. Shapiro's work is very close to becoming as nonobjective as Carl Andre's Redan (Fig. 25). Composed of twenty-seven wooden blocks piled in a zig-zag formation, Andre's work seems to be nothing more than an arrangement of geometric forms. If we look up its title in a dictionary, however, we discover that it refers to an architectural feature of fortifications in which two walls are set at an angle facing the enemy. Nevertheless, Andre is more interested in the form of his

Fig. 24 Joel Shapiro, 1981, untitled
Wood, approx. 8 1/4 x 31 1/4 x 8 1/2 in. (21.8 x 78 x 21 cm). Photo Courtesy of PaceWildenstein. © 2003 Joel Shapiro/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Fig. 25 Carl Andre (American, 1935– ), Redan, original, 1964 destroyed; reconstructed 1970.
Wood, 27 units, each unit 30.5 x 30.5 x 91.4 cm (12 x 12 x 36 in.); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Purchased with assistance from the Women's Committee Fund, 1971. © Carl Andre/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
piece, its angles and its presence in the room, than in its actual reference.

It is not always easy, or even necessary, to make absolute distinctions between the representational, the abstract, and the nonobjective. Joel Shapiro's work, Fig. 24, is a good example. A given work of art may be more or less representational, more or less abstract. Very often certain elements of a representational painting will be more abstract, or generalized, than other elements. Likewise, a work may appear totally nonobjective until you read the title, and see that, in fact, it does refer to things in the actual world, however loosely. Purely nonobjective art, such as Kasimir Malevich's *Suprematist Painting* (Fig. 26), is concerned only with questions of form, and we turn now to those considerations.

**Form and Content**

When we speak of a work's form, we mean everything from the materials used to make it, to the way it employs the various formal elements (discussed in Part II), to the ways in which those elements are organized into a composition. Form is the overall structure of a work of art. Somewhat misleadingly, it is generally opposed to content, which is what the work of art expresses or means. Obviously, the content of nonobjective art is its form. Malevich's painting is really *about* the relation between the black rectangle, the blue triangle, and the white ground behind them. Though it is a uniform blue, notice that the blue triangle's color seems to be lighter where it is backed by the black triangle, and darker when seen

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Fig. 26 Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematist Painting, Black Rectangle, Blue Triangle*, 1915. Oil on canvas, 26½ x 22½ in. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.
against the white ground. This phenomenon results from the fact that our perception of the relative lightness or darkness of a color depends upon the context in which we see it, even though the color never actually changes. If you stare for a moment at the line where the triangle crosses from white to black, you will begin to see a vibration. The two parts of the triangle will seem, in fact, to be at different visual depths. Malevich’s painting demonstrates how purely formal relationships can transform otherwise static forms into a visually dynamic composition.

Claude Monet uses the same forms in his Grainstack (Fig. 27). In fact, compositionally, this work is almost as simple as Malevich’s. That is, the haystack is a triangle set on a rectangle, both set on a rectangular ground. Only the cast shadow adds compositional complexity. Yet Monet’s painting has clear content. For nearly three years, from 1888 to 1891, Monet painted the haystacks near his home in Giverny, France, over and over again, in all kinds of weather and in all kinds of light. When these paintings were exhibited in May 1891, the critic Gustave Geffroy summed up their meaning: “These stacks, in this deserted field, are transient objects whose surfaces, like mirrors, catch the mood of the environment. . . . Light and shade radiate from them, sun and shadow revolve around them in relentless pursuit; they reflect the dying heat, its last rays; they are shrouded in mist, soaked with rain, frozen with snow, in harmony with the distant horizon, the earth, the sky.” This series of paintings, in other words, attempts to reveal the dynamism of the natural world, the variety of its cyclic change.

In a successful work of art, form and content are inseparable. Consider another two
examples of the relation between form and content. To our eyes, the two heads on this page (Figs. 28 and 29) possess radically different formal characteristics and, as a result, differ radically in content. Kenneth Clark compares the two on the second page of his famous book *Civilisation*: “I don’t think there is any doubt that the Apollo embodies a higher state of civilization than the mask. They both represent spirits, messengers from another world—that is to say, from a world of our own imagining. To the Negro imagination it is a world of fear and darkness, ready to inflict horrible punishment for the smallest infringement of a taboo. To the Hellenistic imagination it is a world of light and confidence, in which the gods are like ourselves, only more beautiful, and descend to earth in order to teach men reason and the laws of harmony.”

**Conventions and Art**

Clark is wrong about the African mask. His reading is *ethnocentric*. That is, it imposes upon the art of another culture the meanings and prejudices of our own. Individual cultures always develop a traditional repertoire of visual images and effects that they tend to understand in a particular way. We call such habitual or generally accepted ways of seeing *conventions*. Different cultures possess different visual conventions and do not easily understand each other’s conventions. It is important to recognize that what we think is expressed in an art work sometimes results from our own prejudices or mistaken expectations: this is why learning about the art in the context of the culture it reflects is so important to understanding it.

In the case of the African mask, its features are exaggerated at least in part to separate it from the “real” and to underscore its ceremonial function. Clark is reading it through the eyes of Western civilization, which has referred to the African continent as “darkest” Africa ever since the Europeans first arrived there. The best light in which Clark’s reading of the African mask can be seen is to think of it as the manifestation of a traditional Western
convention in which the face is considered the outer expression of a psychological reality within. Distortions in the human face indicate or imply distortions or aberrations in the human psyche beneath. This particular convention can be traced back at least as far as Leonardo da Vinci's studies of grotesque heads (Fig. 30). Thus, when Clark sees an African mask, he reads into its features his own preconceptions of the psychic realities—violence, horror, or fright—that might lie beneath its surface.

The properties for which many in the Western world value African masks—the abstractness of their forms and their often horrifying emotional expressiveness—are not necessarily those most valued by their makers. For the Baule carvers of the Yamoussoukro area of the Ivory Coast, the Helmet Mask (Fig. 31) is a pleasing and beautiful object. But it has other conventional meanings as well.

This is the Dye sacred mask, according to one carver cited in Susan Vogel's *Perspectives: Angles on African Art*. "The god is a dance of rejoicing for me. So when I see the mask, my heart is filled with joy. I like it because of the horns and the eyes. The horns curve nicely, and I like the placement of the eyes and ears. In addition, it executes very interesting and graceful dance steps. . . . This is a sacred mask danced in our village. It makes us happy when we see it. There are days when we want to look at it. At that time, we take it out and contemplate it."

The Baule carvers pay attention to formal elements, but the mask is seen as much as part of a process, the dance, as an object. To the Baule eye, the mask projects its performance. It is a vehicle through which the spirit world is made available to humankind. In performance, the wearer of the mask takes on the spirit of the place, and the carver quoted above apparently imagines this as he contemplates it.

If we do not immediately share with the Baule carvers the feelings evoked by the mask, we can be educated to see it in their terms. When we see the mask only through the conventions of our own culture, then we not only radically alter its meaning and function, but we implicitly denigrate the African viewpoint, or, at best, refuse to acknowledge it at all.
Fig. 32 Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441), *The Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife Giovanna Cenami. The Arnolfini Marriage*, 1434.
Iconography

Even within a culture, the meaning of an image may change or be lost over time. When Jan van Eyck painted _The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami_ in 1434 (Fig. 32), its repertoire of visual images was well understood, but today much of its meaning is lost to the average viewer. For example, the bride’s green dress, a traditional color for weddings, was meant to suggest her natural fertility. She is not pregnant—her swelling stomach was a convention of female beauty at the time, and her dress is structured in a way to accentuate it. The groom’s removal of his shoes is a reference to God’s commandment to Moses to take off his shoes when standing on holy ground. A single candle burns in the chandelier above the couple, symbolizing the presence of Christ at the scene. And the dog, as most of us recognize even today, is associated with faithfulness and in this context, particularly, with marital fidelity.

The study or description of such visual images or symbolic systems is called iconography. In iconographic images, subject matter is not obvious to any viewer unfamiliar with the symbolic system in use. Every culture has its specific iconographic practices, its own system of images that are understood by the culture at large to mean specific things. But what would Arab culture make of the dog in the van Eyck painting, since in the Muslim world dogs are traditionally viewed as filthy and degraded? From the Muslim point of view, the painting verges on nonsense.

Even to us, viewing van Eyck’s work more than five hundred years after it was painted, certain elements remain confusing. An argument has recently been made, for instance, that van Eyck is not representing a marriage so much as a betrothal, or engagement. We have assumed for generations that the couple stands in a bridal chamber where, after the ceremony, they will consummate their marriage. It turns out, however, that in the fifteenth century it was commonplace for Flemish homes to be decorated with hung beds with canopies. Called “furniture of estate,” they were important status symbols commonly displayed in fifteenth-century Flanders in the principal room of the house as a sign of the owner’s prestige and influence. The moment is not unlike that depicted by Shakespeare in _Henry V_, when the English king proposes to Katherine, the French princess: “Give me your answer; i’ faith, do; and so clap hands and a bargain: how say you lady?” Such a touching of the hands was the common sign of a mutual agreement to wed. The painter himself stands in witness to the event. On the back wall, above the mirror, are the words _Jan de Eyck fuit hic. 1434—“Jan van Eyck was here, 1434”_ (Fig. 33). We see the backs of Arnolfini and his wife reflected in the mirror, and beyond them, standing more or less in the same place as we do as viewers, two
other figures, one a man in a red turban who is probably the artist himself.

Similarly, most of us in the West probably recognize a Buddha when we see one, but most of us do not know that the position of the Buddha’s hands carries iconographic significance. Buddhism, which originated in India in the fourth century B.C.E., is traditionally associated with the worldly existence of Sakyamuni, or Gautama, the Sage of the Sakya clan, who lived and taught around 500 B.C.E. In his thirty-fifth year, Sakyamuni experienced enlightenment under a tree at Gaya (near modern Patna), and he became Buddha or the Enlightened One.

Buddhism spread to China in the third century B.C.E., and from there into Southeast Asia during the first century C.E. Long before it reached Japan, by way of Korea in the middle of the fifth century C.E., it had developed a more or less consistent iconography, especially related to the representation of Buddha himself. The symbolic hand gestures, or mudra, refer both to general states of mind and to specific events in the life of Buddha. The mudra best known to Westerners, the hands folded in the seated Buddha’s lap, symbolizes meditation (Fig. 34). The snake motif, seen here, illustrates a specific episode from the life of the Buddha in which the serpent-king Mucilinda made a seat out of its coiled body and spread a canopy of seven heads over Buddha to protect him, as he meditated, from a violent storm.

One of the most popular of the mudra, especially in East India, Nepal, and Thailand, is the gesture of touching the earth, right hand down over the leg, the left lying in the lap (Fig. 35). Biographically, it represents the moment when Sakyamuni achieved Enlightenment and became Buddha. Challenged by the Evil One, Mara, as he sat meditating at Gaya, Sakyamuni proved his readiness to reach Nirvana, the highest spiritual state, by calling the earth goddess to witness his worthiness with a simple touch of his hand. The gesture symbolizes, then, not only Buddha’s absolute serenity, but the state of Enlightenment itself.

A Buddhist audience can read these gestures as readily as we, in the predominantly Christian West, can read incidents from the story of Christ. Figure 36 shows the lower nine panels of the center window in the west front
of Chartres Cathedral in France. This window was made about 1150 and is one of the oldest and finest surviving stained-glass windows in the world. The story can be read like a cartoon strip, beginning at the bottom left and moving right and up, from the Annunciation (the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she will bear the Christ Child) through the Nativity, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, and the Adoration of the Magi. The window is usually considered the work of the same artist who was commissioned by the Abbot Suger to make the windows of the relic chapels at Saint-Denis, which portray many of the same incidents. "The pictures in the windows are there," the Abbot explains in his writings, "for the sole purpose of showing simple people, who cannot read the Holy Scriptures, what they must believe." But he understood as well the expressive power of this beautiful glass. It transforms, he said, "that which is material into that which is immaterial." Suger understood that whatever story the pictures in the window tell, whatever iconographic significance they contain, and whatever words they generate, it is, above all, their art that lends them power.

Fig. 36 Lower nine panels of the center lancet window in the west front of Chartres Cathedral, showing the Nativity, Annunciation to the Shepherds, and the Adoration of the Magi, c. 1150. Chartres Cathedral, France. Giraudon/Art Resource, New York.
Wolf depict the landscape, but how do they differ? Can you determine why Howling Wolf might want to depict the confluence of Medicine Creek and the Arkansas in his drawing? It is as if Howling Wolf portrays the events from above, so that simultaneously we can see tipis, warriors, and women in formal attire, and the grove in which the United States soldiers meet with the Indians. Taylor's view is limited to the grove itself. Does this difference in the way the two artists depict space suggest any greater cultural differences? Taylor's work directs our eyes to the center of the image, while Howling Wolf's does not. Does this suggest anything to you?

Perhaps the greatest difference between the two depictions of the event is the way in which the Native Americans are themselves portrayed. In Howling Wolf's drawing, each figure is identifiable—that is, the tribal affiliations and even the specific identity of each individual are revealed through the iconography of the decorations of their dress and tipis. How, in comparison, are the Native Americans portrayed in Taylor's work? In what ways is Taylor's work ethnocentric?

One of the most interesting details in Howling Wolf's version of the events is the inclusion of a large number of women. Almost all of the figures in Howling Wolf's drawing are, in fact, women. They sit with their backs to the viewer, their attention focused on the signing ceremony before them. Their braided hair is decorated with customary red paint in the part. This convention is of special interest. When the Plains warrior committed himself to a woman, he ceremonially painted her hair to convey his affection for and commitment to her. Notice the absence of any women in Taylor's depiction, as opposed to their prominence in Howling Wolf's. What does this suggest to you about the role of women in the two societies?
THE CRITICAL PROCESS

Thinking about Visual Conventions

Very rarely can we find the same event documented from the point of view of two different cultures, but the two images here, one by John Taylor, a journalist hired by Leslie’s Illustrated Gazette (Fig. 37), and the other by the Native American artist Howling Wolf (Fig. 38), son of the Cheyenne chief Eagle Head, both depict the October 1867 signing of a peace treaty between the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Comanche peoples and the United States government at Medicine Lodge Creek, a tributary of the Arkansas River, in Kansas. Taylor’s illustration is based on sketches done at the scene, and it appeared soon after the events. Howling Wolf’s work, actually one of several depicting the events, was done nearly a decade later, after he was taken east and imprisoned at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, together with his father and seventy other “ringleaders” of the continuing Native American insurrection in the Southern Plains. While in prison, Howling Wolf made many drawings such as this one, called “ledger” drawings because they were executed on blank accountants’ ledgers.

Even before he was imprisoned, Howling Wolf had actively pursued ledger drawing. As Native Americans were introduced to crayons, ink, and pencils, the ledger drawings supplanted traditional buffalo hide art, but in both the hide paintings and the later ledger drawings, artists depicted the brave accomplishments of their owners. The conventions used by these Native American artists differ greatly from those employed by their Anglo-American counterparts. Which, in your opinion, is the more representational? Which is the more abstract?

Both works possess the same overt content—that is, the peace treaty signing, but how do they differ in form? Both Taylor and Howling