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MEDIEVAL ART

WORKING WITH LINE



COVER: Scene from *Song of Roland*. Stained-glass window, Thirteenth-century, Chartres, France.

©Sonia Halliday Photographs.

SCHOLASTIC ART

Maurice R. Robinson, founder of Scholastic Inc., 1895-1982

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► Dragonlike monsters like this one were mounted on the Viking ships that threatened early-medieval European settlements.

Animal Head Post from the Oseberg ship burial. c. 825 A.D. Wood, 5 in. high. © University Museum of Cultural Heritage, University of Oslo, Norway. Photo by Eirik Irgens Johnsen



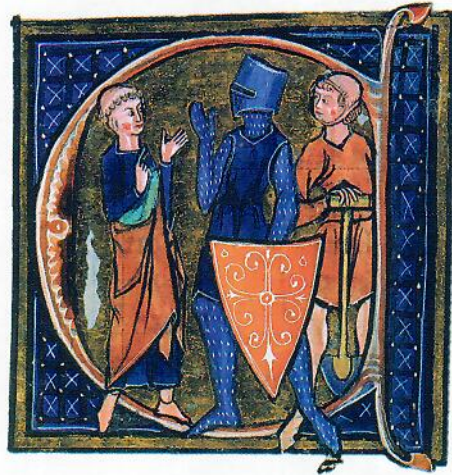
“The architecture, also an age of superstition, words, it was the beginning of

When you hear the term Middle Ages, what images come to mind—knights in armor, Viking ships, kings, queens, castles, cathedrals, spectacular tournaments? From a distance, medieval life might seem heroic, glamorous, and romantic. In reality, life in the Middle Ages—a 1,000-year period lasting from the 5th century to the 15th century—was for most people short, uncomfortable, and often dangerous. Kings may have had golden crowns, huge palaces, thousands of servants. But even they had no electricity, little heat, and no plumbing. And the great majority of people living in the Middle Ages were not royalty, or even members of the nobility.

At the beginning of the medieval period in Europe, the centuries-long order established by the Roman Empire was gradually breaking down. Invaders from the north—such as the Vikings from what is now Norway, Sweden, and Denmark—descended on the inhabitants of Western Europe. Great Viking ships, with monstrous figureheads rising from the prow (left), struck fear into their victims. For safety, people gathered together on the lands of powerful lords. The lord offered the peasants protection in exchange for working his land. Small communities made up of the lord’s castle, the

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Middle Ages accomplished mighty things in the arts, literature, and learning. . . . It was cruelty, needless pain and death. In other modern times.” —Morris Bishop, Medieval scholar



◀ “God’s household is threefold. Some pray in it, some fight in it, some work in it.”
—Medieval French Bishop

Priest, Knight, Peasant.
The British Library, London.
MS. Sloane 2435f. 35min

church, the village, and the surrounding farmland sprang up all over Europe. At the same time, Christianity was spreading. Many churches were built. The Catholic church became very powerful and Catholic monasteries were centers of learning. Monks made copies of the Bible to spread Christianity. They also copied ancient manuscripts to preserve centuries of classical learning.

As kings, lords, and large groups of peasants bonded together, people began thinking in terms of belonging to a nation, not just a tribe. National loyalties grew in territories that are now the British Isles, France, Germany, the Balkan states, and the Scandinavian countries. Conflicts broke out as one group of people conquered another. Works of art such as *The Bayeux Tapestry* (right), a 230-foot-long embroidery, shows the Normans (a group from France) defeating the English in 1066. The stagelike setting is emphasized by the stylized figures that stand out against a flat, white background. Colored threads outline the simplified shapes of the soldiers. The main action in the center is framed by two borders that add commentary. Written narrative also appears in many frames. In this scene, the diagonal lines of the spears on the right direct the viewer’s eye to the overlapping group of

▶ This great medieval battle changed the entire history of the modern world.

Battle of Hastings. Detail of the Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1073-83. Wool embroidery on linen, height 20 in. Photo by Nik Wheeler/Corbis.

repeated shapes of soldiers and their shields on the left.

Medieval society was made up of three rigid classes: nobles (this class also included knights), clergy, and peasants (see manuscript illumination above). Although commoners could become priests, a person was born a noble or a peasant and stayed in that class for life. Most people were peasants, and for them life during the Middle Ages was very hard. Many lived from hand to mouth in wooden hovels. Very few people could read or write, and nobody expected conditions to improve. The only hope for most people was their strong belief in Christianity, and the expectation that life in heaven would be better than life on earth.



TOWERS OF HOPE

“When I enter this structure, I find myself by the grace of God lifted in a mystic manner from this lower earth, toward an upper sphere.” —the Abbot Suger

► Building a cathedral involved many people — masons, stone cutters, laborers, carpenters, a blacksmith, plumbers, roofers, mortar makers, sculptors, a stained-glass maker, and an architect.

Life of St. Hedwig of Silesia, Ms. Ludwig XI Inv. No. 7. J. Collection: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu.

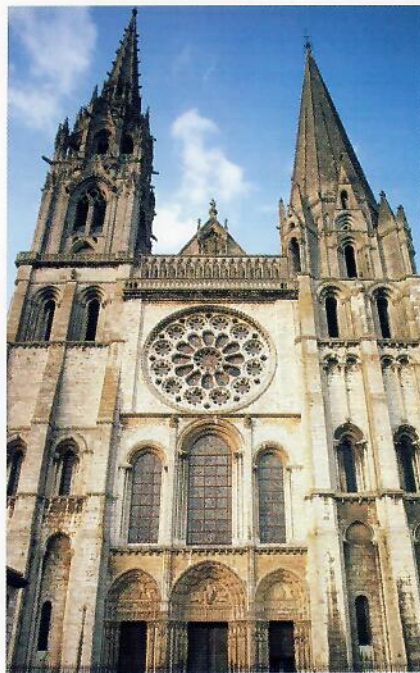


▲ (above) Innovative structures called “flying buttresses” were invented during the Middle Ages to hold up cathedral walls from the outside. Tall, light-filled cathedrals like Chartres (left) could not have been built without the aid of these buttresses.

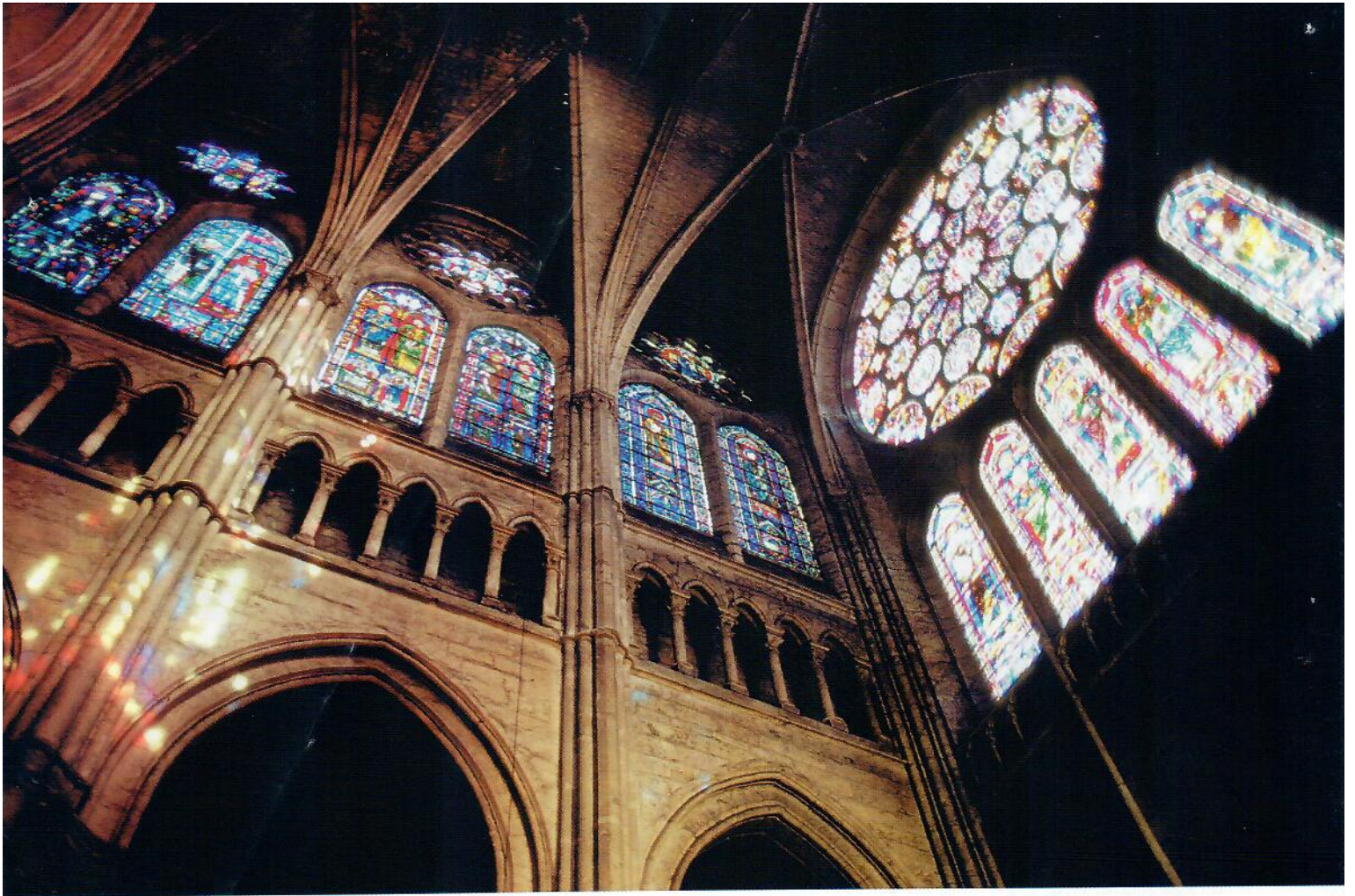
*Flying buttresses: photo © Adam Woolfitt/Corbis
Chartres Cathedral, 1194-1260.
photo © John Heseltine/Corbis*

The building that most symbolizes the Middle Ages would probably be the medieval cathedral. Since life on earth was so unrewarding for most of the population, people survived by hoping for a better existence after death. And that was what the Church promised them. In exchange for this hope, the people built cathedrals for the Church. Construction of these enormous buildings was very expensive, and though the laborers often worked from sunrise to sunset, the process took a long time. Sometimes a son continued his father’s work until the building was finally finished.

In addition to providing a place to worship, and acting as a visible symbol of the Church’s power, cathedrals were also “sermons in stone,” since most people couldn’t read. The stained-glass windows, tapestries, statues, and paintings in the cathedral served as picture Bibles. The first Gothic (a style of architecture developed during the Middle Ages) cathedral was imagined and built by a 12th-century French clergyman, the Abbot Suger (Abbey Sue-GAY). Churches built earlier were small and dark. Suger envisioned a cathedral that would reach toward heaven. He also believes that worshipers would feel closer to God if they were surrounded



by light. So he combined all the latest 12th-century technologies to create a tall, soaring, light-filled structure (left) that seemed to reach toward the sky. Previously, buildings made of stone could be large, but they were dark inside because the windows and doors were small. The round arches at the top didn’t let in much light. And the openings could not be larger, or the walls would not be able to support the roof. But if these thick stone walls could be supported from the outside, the whole structure could be filled with light. It could also be given a vertical emphasis that would express the religious emotion behind the cathedral’s construction.



Abbot Suger's St. Denis Cathedral was the model for the majestic Chartres (Shart) Cathedral, built in France a few years later. Chartres is probably the most beautiful and important of the great medieval Gothic cathedrals. The builders used a technology that allowed the stone walls to be higher and the window openings to be much larger. Structures called **flying buttresses** (near left) were built outside to push against the walls and hold them up.

Chartres's two tall spires (below left) can be seen for miles around. Approaching from the front, the viewer comes to three massive, **symmetrical** doors. Each door is **framed** by columns which are also elongated figures of saints.

But the outside of the **monochrome** (one color) structure hardly prepares the viewer for the

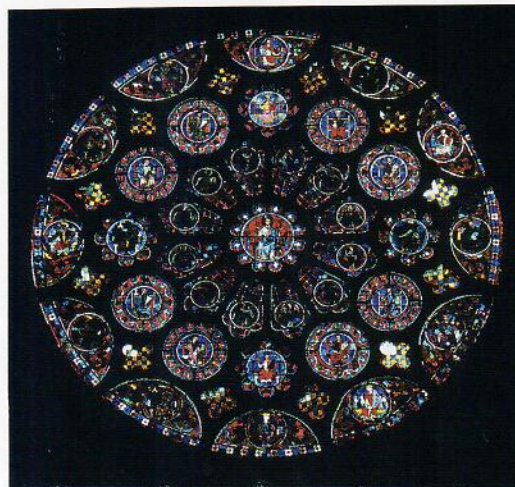
► **"We installed a splendid variety of new windows of marvelous workmanship over the main entrance."**—the Abbot Suger

Chartres, Rose window: photo © Adam Woolfitt/Corbis

experience of going inside. The surprise and awe felt by those entering Chartres when it opened in 1260 has not changed in nearly eight centuries. The space inside (above) seems to rise up forever and be filled with shimmering light that reflects off every surface. The light is filtered through the glass, so it changes according to the position of the sun. The **long, narrow lines** of the ribbing and the **high pointed arches** add to the feeling of height. The walls are filled with transparent windows (cover, above, left) made up of hundreds of pieces of colored glass held together with strips of **leading**. All these elements combine to create "the mystical experience" the Abbot Suger had in mind when he created the first Gothic cathedral.

▲ **"The interior of the building shone with the wonderful and uninterrupted light of the luminous windows."**
—the Abbot Suger

Chartres Cathedral, interior; photo © Michael Freeman/Bruce Combsman, Inc.



LETTERS THAT GLOW

“I want to release the light of a printed passage from within.” —early-Medieval scribe

Today, in the world of the Internet and instant communication, it's difficult to imagine a time when even printed books didn't exist. Since the printing press hadn't yet been invented, in the Middle Ages all documents and books had to be written out by hand. Books of today bear little resemblance to a medieval manuscript. Manuscripts were huge works of art bound in leather, decorated with precious jewels, and owned by a few wealthy and powerful individuals. Those who had the talent, time, and desire to create manuscripts were usually connected with the Catholic Church. Most medieval books were copies of the Bible and books of hours (prayer books). Monks like 12th-century Eadwine (right)

▼ **Can you find the letters R, D, and H. in the manuscript details below?**

Book of Kells, (below, top) c. 800. Trinity College Library, Dublin. Detail of folio 258r. Detail of folio 68v (below, bottom)

spent their entire lives working on manuscripts.

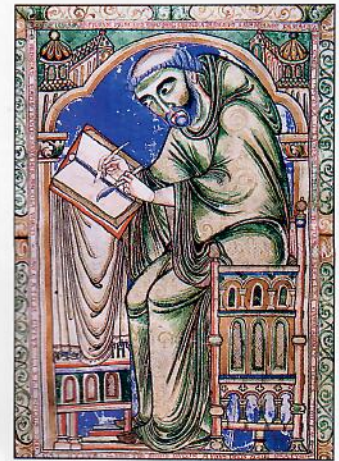
Illumination comes from the Latin for “adorn.”

Illuminators wanted to

release the meaning of a text buried within. Few medieval people could read, so manuscripts like the *Lindisfarne Gospels* (right) were decorated to tell the story visually. In this work, the **straight lines** of the letters and frame steady the page, while the **interlacing, swirling lines and shapes**

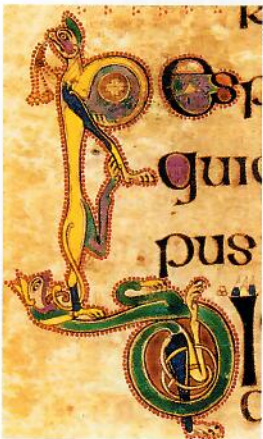
in the large X and P seem to move constantly. **Intertwined** birds and animals sweep around the letters, moving the viewer's eye along the text.

In all the examples of manuscript illumination shown here, the backgrounds are **flat**, the shapes **simplified**, the **heavy, black outlines** resemble the **leading** used in stained



▲ **“I am the prince of writers; neither my fame nor my praise will die quickly.”**
—English scribe Eadwine of Canterbury

Eadwine of Canterbury, c. 1150. Trinity College Library, Cambridge. Hs. R. 17.1



glass. The margins are filled with **curving** plant forms and fantastic creatures relating to the text.

Only at the end of the Middle Ages did individual illuminators become known by name. Three of the most important were French brothers—Herman, Jean, and Paul Limbourg. In 1413 a rich nobleman, the Duke of Berry, commissioned them to paint a Book of Hours. The 12 calendar pages

◀ **This illustrated letter “a” was part of a text about an artist.**

The British Library, London. MS. Royal 6 E VI f. 329

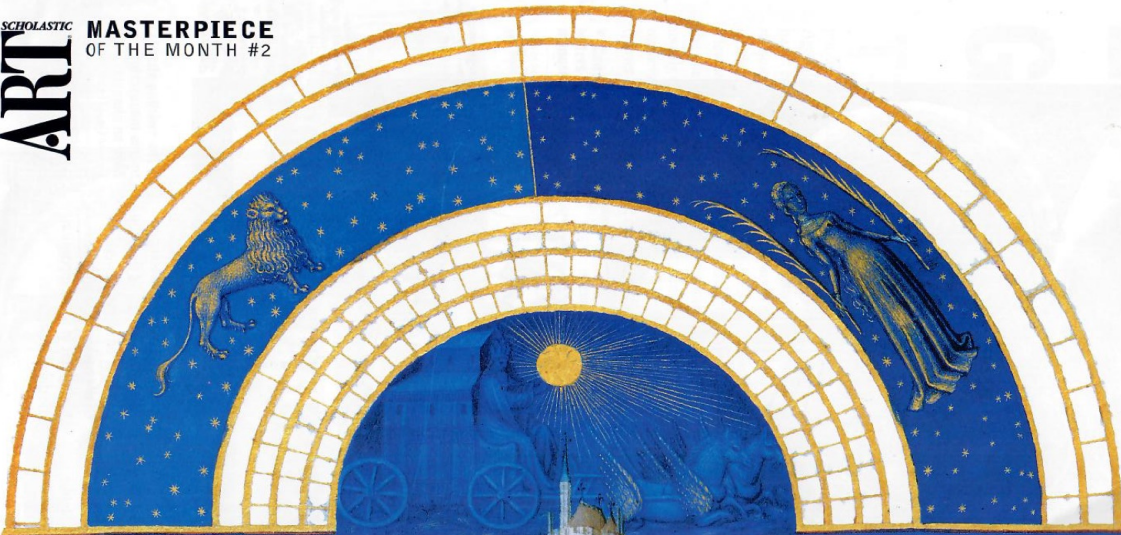


created for this work provide an illustrated document of Medieval life. In the month of August (pages 8-9), the nobles in the foreground carrying falcons go hunting. In the **middleground**, peasants harvest and swim. Among the first to paint specific landscapes, the Limbourgs' lifelike scenes have a feeling of **deep space**. The flowing lines in

front move across the composition, while the line of the hills and river bring the viewer's eye to the **background** and the **focal point** of the composition, the duke's vast castle.

▲ The swirling shapes in this manuscript have an almost hypnotic effect.

The Lindisfarne Gospels, c. 700-early 8th century. 9 3/8 x 8 1/8 in. The British Library, London. MS. Cotton Nero D. IV, sheet 29/r.



AUGUST FROM THE HOURS OF



THE DUKE OF BERRY

BY THE LIMBOURG BROTHERS

Limbourg Brothers (1370-80-1416). Manuscript illumination from *Très Riches Heures of the Duke of Berry*; August: Falcon Hunt. ca. 1413-16. 11 1/2 x 8 1/4 in. Réunion des Musées Nationaux, France. Art Resource, N.Y., NY.

ART SPOTLIGHT

MODERN MESSAGES

“I’ve always been concerned with the relationship that exists between words and images.” —Alexis Smith

“ART IS THE LANGUAGE I SPEAK IN; IT’S HOW I COMMUNICATE WITH THE WORLD.” —ALEXIS SMITH

ARRESTING WORDS

Contemporary American artist Alexis Smith collects just about anything she sees. Book jackets, road maps, film posters, and ticket stubs are just a few of the objects the artist combines to tell her visual stories. Words, quotes, slogans, and signs are important elements in Smith’s collages.

As medieval manuscripts reflected characteristics of the Middle Ages, the images Smith creates reflect aspects of 21st-century American culture. In her work the artist comments on consumerism, mass media, the automobile culture, and the end of the American frontier. Smith did a large installation piece called *On the Road*, about a cross-country automobile drive. *Iron Sorrows* (left) is part of that installation. The work is very simple and very suggestive. A familiar red, octagonal stop sign (purchased in a thrift store, not taken from a highway), the thick, white lines of the letters punctuated with reflective dots, has several twisted car parts flattened against it.

Smith says about this work, “On one level, I’m dealing with things like people driving around in cars. But I’m also speaking about freedom and will and how much control human beings have over their destinies.”

◀ Alexis Smith, b. 1949. *Iron Sorrows*, 1990. Mixed-media collage, 27 x 25 1/2 in. Private collection. Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles.



“I WANT TO REVEAL THE REALITY BEHIND VISIBLE THINGS.” —PAUL KLEE

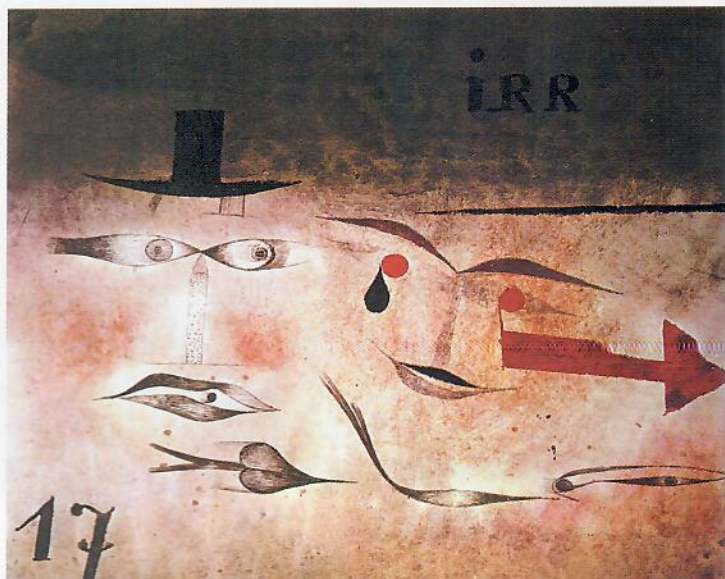
MAGIC LINES

Swiss-born 20th-century artist Paul Klee (Clay) thought of creativity as a magical experience. In his art he wanted to uncover the reality existing beyond the world of appearances or, as he expressed it, “the underlying mystical design of the visible world.” To do this, he used his own visual language made up of private signs with universal meanings. During his career Klee worked as a teacher, so he liked to explain what he meant using symbols, diagrams, and charts.

Many of Klee’s paintings, like *Seventeen, Crazy* (right) contain signs, numbers, arrows, and letters. Can you find the work’s title in the painting? (*Irr* is German for crazy.) What might this combination of symbols mean: a dark hatlike shape over two eyes, a mouth, and a heartlike shape attached to an arrow? These are next to a pair of eyebrows over red eyes filled with tears. A large red arrow indicates that this second “face” is leaving the frame. Klee’s symbols usually had deep meanings. His arrows could indicate cycles, change, or growth.

Perhaps this work suggests that the highs and lows experienced at 17 are extreme, but only temporary.

▶ Paul Klee (1879-1940). *Seventeen, Crazy*, 1923. Watercolor. 8 7/8 x 11 1/4 in. Kunstmuseum, Basel. A.R.S.





“THE WORDS IN MY PICTURES ARE AS REAL AS ANY SHAPE OF A FACE OR A TREE.” —STUART DAVIS

ABSTRACT SIGNS

What do you think of the title of this painting (above)—*Too Many Teens?* It was created (and titled) by early-20th-century American painter Stuart Davis. Can you find the four teenage boys in the center of the composition surrounded by fragments of advertisements, posters, and signs?

Like medieval scribes, Davis made art based on large, bold capital letters. But Davis’s letters did not contain religious imagery. Nor were they meant to explain a text. The words and phrases he used were taken from the advertising billboards, neon signs, and brand names he saw in the New York City environment that surrounded him. Even the signature of the artist near the center of the painting has

becomes a kind of corporate logo.

Davis’s images, like this one, are so **simplified** and **abstracted** it is sometimes hard to “read” them. But his paintings are all based on real subjects. As the artist put it, “Although I dismember, explode, and dissect reality, its parts are always recognizable.” The four **linear** teenagers in the middle of this painting are almost overwhelmed by the **bright, solid shapes** of the lettering and the large advertising images around them. The **jagged patterns, thick lines, and loud primary** (red, yellow, blue) colors in this work are meant to capture the feeling of a large, early-20th-century American city.

▲ Stuart Davis (1892–1964). *Tropes de Teens*, 1956. Oil on canvas. 45 1/4 x 60 1/4 in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Gift of the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation, 1966. Estate of Stuart Davis. Licensed by VAGA, N.Y., N.Y.

ARTIST OF THE MONTH

JASON VENDRYES:



Eighteen-year-old Jason Vendryes has always been fascinated by graphic design. And when he first took a computer-graphics class during his junior year at Dakota Ridge High School in Littleton, Colorado, he knew he had found his calling. “With computer graphics, I can create whatever comes into my head. And I also get to design things that other people like. I just love that feeling.”

Currently a freshman at Arapaho Community College in Littleton, Jason’s dream is to get into advertising and develop brands. His designs have already made an impact. All through high school, Jason

designed T-shirts and sweatshirts for the marching band. He was also paid to develop a logo for an area newsletter. “That experience was a turning point in my art career,” he says.

What was it that first got you involved with art?

I’ve been creating art since my first art class in the fourth grade. We had to make some little design with squares. For some reason, mine got entered into an art show and won an award. That was exciting and encouraged me to keep doing art. My mom is also into art—she paints watercolors—so I got interested because of her as well.

MOVING LETTERS

To find out more about *The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards*, ask your teacher to write to: *The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, Inc.*, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3999 or phone 212-343-6892. www.scholastic.com/artandwriting

How did you come to do this art award-winning piece?

It was an assignment for my senior year graphics class. I had to design a collage on the computer. So I came up with the idea of showing little people being squished by two giant hands. The people are trying to protect themselves and get away. One runs from a quarter. Another on the end of the fingers is sitting and biting his nails like he's worried. The guy on the bottom is holding on for dear life.

How did you get your idea?

I was looking around the classroom and saw a poster of some mountain climbers scaling a mountain. The mountain turned into a bowl of some kind. As I was staring at it, I just got the idea of little versions of me climbing up something, or doing something out of the ordinary. Suddenly, I remembered some cartoons I saw a long time ago, I don't know where. In them giant hands came out of clouds and condemned people and squished people. That's what I was going after: the effect of chaos.

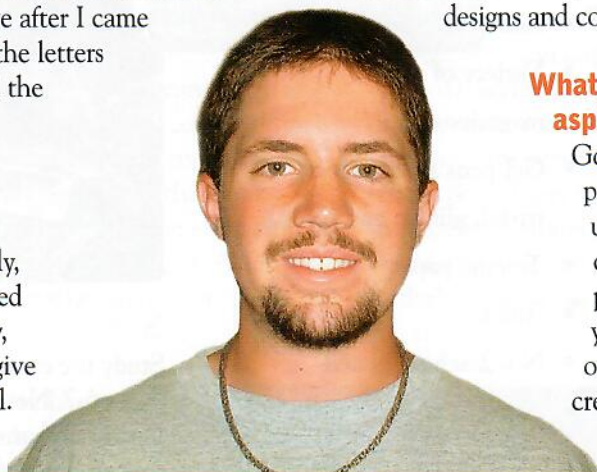
You call your piece *Chaos*. What made you focus on that word?

After I had finished my design, people said, "What are you going to call it? What does it mean?" I said, "Well, it's just kind of chaotic. Chaos. That word is a perfect title!"

I integrated the word and image after I came up with the title. I felt adding the letters made the piece clear. It tied all the elements together.

What type did you use?

I wanted the lines to look like they were vibrating and squiggly, so I didn't want solid type. I used outline type, added the shadow, and used a computer effect to give the piece more of a chaotic feel.



How did you go about creating this piece?

I used a digital camera and had someone take pictures of me and my hands in different positions. I took 20 different pictures, doing different things. To get the hanging-off-the-finger effect, I actually went to a friend's house and hung off his wall. Then I picked the ones I liked best. Next, I imported the images into the computer, and cropped them so I had just an outline. Next, I organized the images on a single computer file. I made my hands bigger, then shrunk all the figures and positioned them. When I came up with a combination I liked, I gave everything a shadow to add depth. Then I turned the image into a gray scale, which takes away all the color. Finally, I added my own color effects.

What's the biggest challenge creating art with the computer? And, what's the greatest reward?

The biggest challenge for me is coming up with ideas. A lot of times it's hard to come up with a concept I really like. I like to do work that has a subliminal message in it, like chaos. It makes people look at my art and think about its purpose. I'm working on "Chaos II" right now. I want to pick another word with a meaning that I can work with. It's not always easy. I'll see something and I'll think about it for a while, then play around with different designs and come up with an idea I like.

What advice do you have for other aspiring artists like yourself?

Go for your goals. And use your full potential to reach them. Don't give up. You'll always run into some kind of problem. But if you stick with your project and overcome the problem, you'll probably be happy with the outcome. If you like what you're creating, you're going to excel at it.

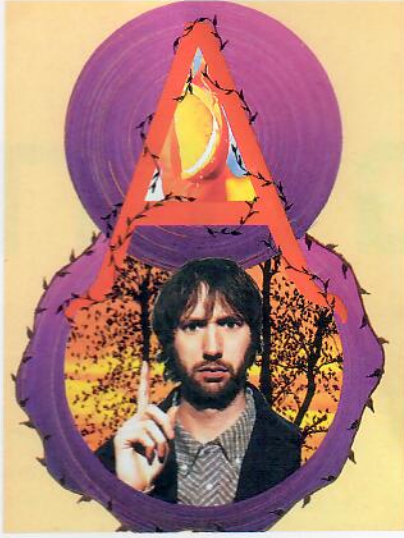
"I wanted the lines to look like they were vibrating and squiggly, so I didn't want solid type. I used outline type, added the shadow, and used a computer effect to give the piece more of a chaotic feel."

JESSI I. MILLER



Jessi Miller floats an angular typeface in a red background. The aquatic animals weaving around the spiky letter set up the underwater theme and keep the viewer's eye on the diagonals of the M.

ADAM K. JEVNE



Adam's geometric initial is nearly hidden by the organic, circular shapes surrounding it. The pointing finger brings the viewer's eye back up to the letter.

SHELLY M. DREHMER



Shelly has designed a very simple curved S shape, wrapped around a sunflower. Diagonal "rays" lead to the focal point of her radial composition, the center of the flower.

SCHOLASTIC ART WORKSHOP

ILLUMINATING YOUR NAME

When medieval scribes copied manuscripts, they highlighted certain letters by *illuminating*, or decorating them. These scribes illuminated a text in order to "release its true meaning." Illuminated letters usually gave clues about the subject or visually summarized the text.

In this workshop, you'll develop your own personal logo by illuminating one of your initials.

Prepared by Ned J. Nestl Jr., art instructor, Morrison (Ill.) Junior High School. Assisted by Andrea D. Beveroth, Nicholas Bonneur, Charlie Dubnick, School of Art, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Ill. Photos by Larry Gregory and Wade Duerkes, Northern Illinois University.

MATERIALS

- 9 x12 in. color construction paper
- Elmer's Glue-All
- X-Acto knife
- Cutting board
- Removable Scotch tape
- Variety of topical magazines
- Gel pens (gold, silver, pastel, glitter, and black)
- Tracing paper
- Ruler
- No. 2 school pencil
- Access to reduction-enlargement photocopy machine (optional)

First, choose a selection of possible images and typefaces for your illuminated initial.



STEP 1

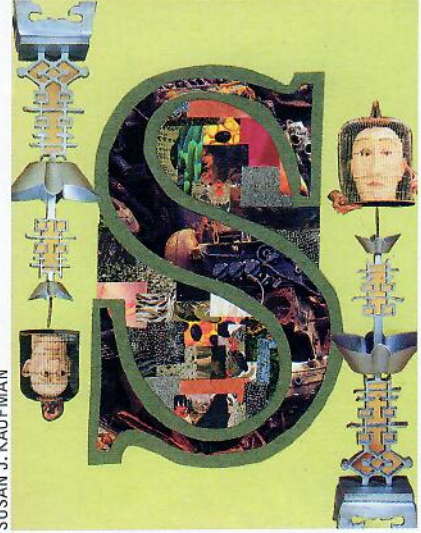
Study the examples of illuminated letters on pages 6-7. Note how illuminators combined human and animal forms with geometric shapes; how letters, backgrounds are filled with decorative elements. To do this project, you need to decide whether you want to illuminate your first initial or your last one. Go



The N in the corner of Nathan's *asymmetrical* design is almost obscured by the sumo wrestlers who fill the *negative space*. They visually *balance* the black letter, which stands out against the browns of the figures and background.



Andrew has repeated his A as a *small-scale negative inset*, placing it inside a large *positive* version. This treatment suggests the theme of time passing.



In her nearly *symmetrical composition*, Susan has packed every space within her *outlined* letter with images. The fantastic *textures* and *shapes* inside the S are *echoed* by the two caged, robot-like heads that *frame* it.

Use a centuries-old technique to create your own personal logo.

through magazines and select interesting images that express something about yourself—personal narrative, humor, irony, friendship, environment, religion. Look at a variety of typefaces. Which would be most suitable for your theme?

STEP 2

Select and enlarge one letter in a specific typeface (you can use copy machine). Or you can design a letter yourself. It should fit within a 9 x 12 in. composition. Your letter must be at least 3 in. high, or bold enough to be the composition's **focal point**. Choose images that work with the letter and express your message/theme; eliminate those that don't. Carefully cut out images using X-Acto knife and cutting board. Select a background color.

STEP 3

Begin arranging your composition. Use small pieces of removable Scotch tape to hold images in place until ready to glue. Images and typeface should relate. Composition can be **symmetrical** (same on both sides) or **asymmetrical**, (each side is



Then, select, enlarge one letter and cut out final images.

different but visually balanced). You may use an image **fragment**; images can run off edges. Imagery can be woven around, inside, outside, or along the edge of the letter. Elements can **repeat** or **overlap**. Keep in mind that your letter must be readable, and it should dominate the composition in some way.

SOME QUESTIONS

What format will work best for your theme: **vertical** or **horizontal**? What type of letter will best expresses your personality or theme: **thick**, **thin**, **tall**, **wide**, **straight**, **curved**, **solid**, **outlined**? Will the typeface you choose be **geometric** (straight), **organic**

(curved), **script** (like handwriting), **block**, **capital** letter or **lowercase**, **serif** (letters with extra strokes on the ends), or **sans serif**? Will your letter be **small**, **fill the frame**, or will part be **cropped**? Which composition will work best—**symmetrical**, **asymmetrical**, or **radial** (based on a circle with center as focal point)? Will your images be **dark on light background** or **light on dark**? How will you treat the visuals surrounding your initial? Will images

weave around the letter or **fill the inside spaces**? Will images **repeat**, change in **scale**, move into the **margins**, or **overlap** and serve as a **frame** for the entire composition?

Last, arrange letter and images until design is final. Then, glue down.



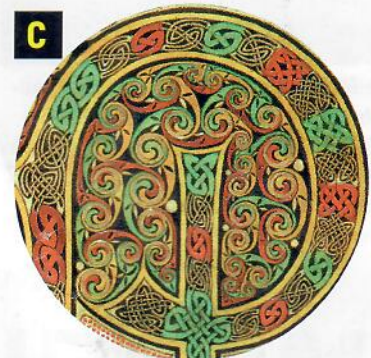
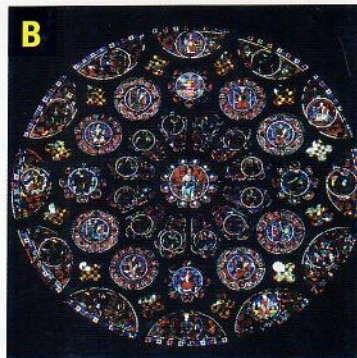
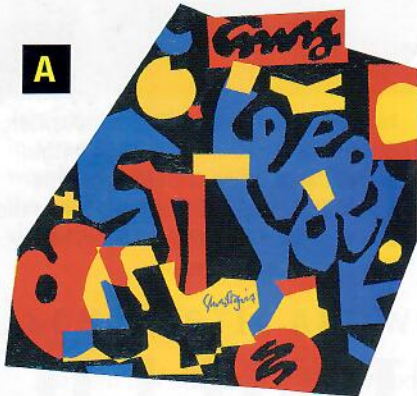
CRITICS CORNER

ILLUMINATING IMAGES

What kind of message does each of these works of art convey?

Medieval artists created art to express their faith, while modern artists use words and letters to communicate their emotions and their own point of view.

Below are details of works featured in the issue and a list of descriptions, phrases, and names. Next to each, write the letter of the visual (or visuals) that seems most appropriate.



- ___ 1. Manuscript illumination
- ___ 2. Stained-glass window
- ___ 3. Stuart Davis
- ___ 4. Medieval society
- ___ 5. Automobile culture
- ___ 6. Lindisfarne
- ___ 7. Chartres cathedral

- ___ 8. The Duke of Berry
- ___ 9. Hypnotic effect
- ___ 10. Primary colors
- ___ 11. A medieval artist
- ___ 12. Alexis Smith
- ___ 13. Illuminated letter
- ___ 14. Leading

- ___ 15. Limbourg brothers
- ___ 16. Picture Bible
- ___ 17. Bright, solid letters
- ___ 18. Swirling, interlocking lines
- ___ 19. Reflective dots
- ___ 20. Book of Hours
- ___ 21. Priest, knight, peasant