



Why a Painting is Like a Pizza: A Guide to Understanding Modern Art

Dr. Nancy G. Heller

Saturday, October 18, 2025 - 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. ET

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Robert Atkins, *ArtSpeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present* (Abbeville Press, 2nd ed., 2013)
- “ “ , *ArtSpoke: A Guide to Modern Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1848-1944* (Abbeville Press, 1993)
- James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (revised edition) (Routledge, 2014)
- Nancy G. Heller, *Why a Painting is Like a Pizza: A Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Modern Art* (Princeton University Press, 2002)
- David Hopkins, *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- David Joselit, *American Art Since 1945* (Thames & Hudson, 2003)
- Edward Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art Since 1945: Issues and Concepts*, 3rd edition (Thames & Hudson, 1995)
- Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross, *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us* (Random House, 2023)
- Lisa Phillips, *The American Century: Art & Culture, 1950-2000* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999)
- Nikos Stangos (ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art: Fauvism to Postmodernism*, 3rd edition (Thames & Hudson, 2003)

NAMES, TERMS, & CONCEPTS

- modern/modernist art
- contemporary art
- abstraction (nonobjective/nonrepresentational art)
- Minimalism
- monochrome paintings
- white-on-white paintings
- [Russian] Suprematism
- Pointillism
- Monotype
- Arabic calligraphy
- “Congo,” the first chimpanzee-painter (c. 1956-58)
- Thai elephant-painters (1998+)
- DALL-E, the first text-to-image generative A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) art platform, first released in 2021
- art installation
- formal analysis of an artwork
- land art

performance art

PRINCIPAL ARTISTS & ARTWORKS DISCUSSED

Ellsworth Kelly, *Blue Panel*, 1980 (North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh)
Robert Ryman, *Twin*, 1966 (Museum of Modern Art, NYC)
Jenny Holzer, plaque from *The Living Series*, 1981 (Baltimore Museum of Art, MD)
Marina Abramović, “The Artist is Present” (performance piece), 2010, various venues
Christo & Jeanne-Claude, *Surrounded Islands*, 1983 (temporary)
Andy Goldsworthy, icicles that spiral around a tree trunk (temporary; several versions)
El Anatsui, various “bottle-top” installations
Chakaia Booker, sculptures made from used rubber tires
Liza Lou, *Kitchen*, 1996 (Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC)
Anna Mary Robertson (“Grandma”) Moses, various landscape and genre scenes
Mary Lee Bendolph, one of the principal quilters from Gee’s Bend, Alabama
Georges Seurat, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, 1884-86 (Art Institute of Chicago)
Jules Heller, *Untitled (Potted Plant series)*, monotype, 1982 (Private Collection)
Zoe Leonard, *Strange Fruit*, 1992-97 (Philadelphia Museum of Art)
Jackson Pollock, *Number 3, 1949* (a.k.a. *Tiger*), 1949 (Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC)

OTHER RESOURCES

1994 play, “Art,” by Yasmina Reza (a comedy, ostensibly about a white-on-white painting), currently enjoying a Broadway revival—starring Bobby Cannavale, James Corden, and Neil Patrick Harris.
2010 play, “Red,” by John Logan (drama; about the American painter Mark Rothko)
2007 documentary film, “Ellsworth Kelly: Fragments,” by Edgar Howard & Tom Piper
2018 documentary about the art market, “The Price of Everything,” by Nathaniel Kahn
anything on the art21.org website (artist interviews and short documentaries)
short animation of Miró’s “The Garden” by Armik Malekian (available on YouTube)
any of the Maysles Brothers’ documentaries about Christo & Jeanne-Claude
2002 documentary film, “Andy Goldsworthy: Rivers and Tides,” by Thomas Riedelsheimer
Cartoons about art in the *New Yorker* magazine by Chris Madden, Amy Hwang, Rick Kirkman, et al