

# Postmodernism

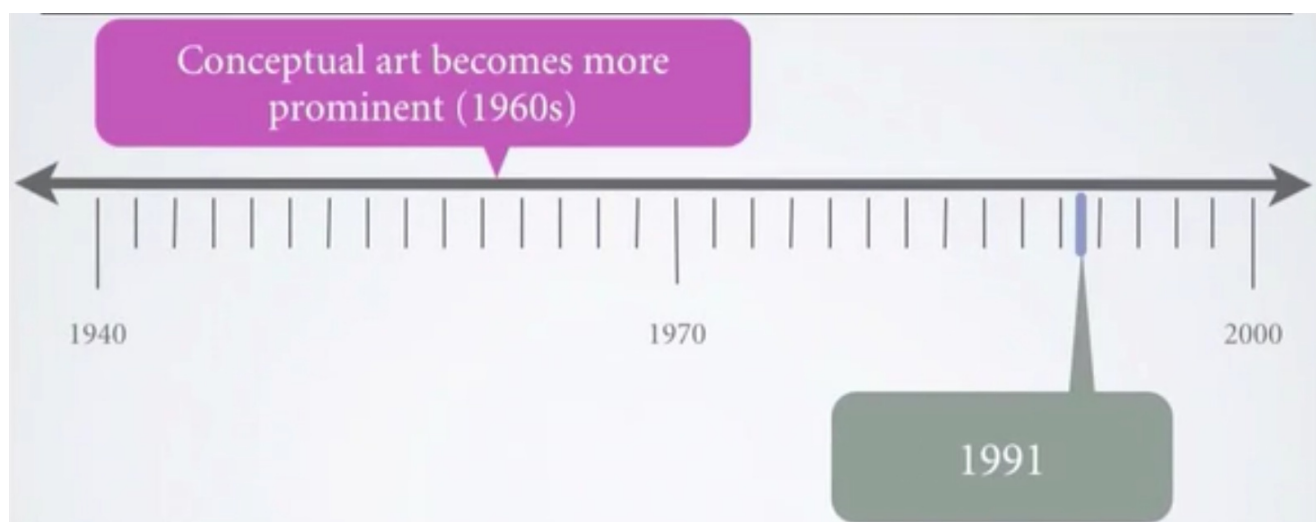
by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is about Postmodernism. By the end of the lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the differences between Modernism and Postmodernism, and identify examples of postmodern art. Postmodernism questions the definition of a work of art through any type of art that either eliminates the art object or suggests a completely new way of thinking about the art object. You will cover:

The art that we're looking at today is from 1991, but postmodern art dates from the midcentury. It originated sometime during the 1960s with the arrival of conceptual art.



## 1. Postmodernism

**Postmodernism** is a 20th-century philosophy and art movement characterized by qualities that include politics, appropriation, **installation**, and nontraditional materials. Postmodernism genre is challenging, particularly because a line between **Modernism** and Postmodernism is not clearly defined. In fact, there remains some debate regarding whether or not Postmodernism even exists with some categorizing it as just a further extension of Modernism, given Postmodernism's heavy reliance upon Modernism.

Modernism is art based on formal innovations, and there are distinct differences in the formal attributes that define certain movements, such as Cubism versus Regionalism. One way to think about the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism is that Modernism asked a question and answered it. Postmodernism asks a question but, while it may give some suggestions, leaves the answer open to

interpretation.

All art has philosophical ties, but philosophical questions and ideas tend to carry more weight in Postmodernism and genres such as conceptual art, where the idea is actually more important than what the artwork looks like. Another important aspect of Postmodernism is how it combines the old with the new. It recalls Constructive Universalism in this respect, in how Constructive Universalism created something new by borrowing elements from several different movements. Here's an example of a postmodern painting that was completed in part by the use of a robot:



**Birth Of the Viractual by Joseph Nechvatal**

**2002**

**Computer-robotic assisted acrylic on canvas**

This is a combination of the old with the new.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Postmodernism**

A 20th-century philosophy and art movement characterized by qualities that include politics, appropriation, installation, and non-traditional materials.

##### **Installation**

A technique of creating artwork in a space that creates an immersive experience.

##### **Modernism**

A 20th-century art movement that parts from past artistic traditions and does not adhere to any one style, having characteristics that include abstraction, order, minimalism, and rigid formalism.

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## 2. Dada Art

The Dada movement was immeasurably influential on Postmodernism. It was the first movement that really went beyond a simple reaction to previous movements and instead questioned the very essence of art itself.

The Dada concepts of readymade, or designating everyday objects as art; and assemblage, or using objects that had a different original purpose and combining them as something new, are important in Postmodernism.

An example of readymade:



**Fountain by Marcel Duchamp**

**1917**

**Porcelain**

An example of assemblage:



**Mechanical Head by Raoul Hausmann**

1920

Assemblage



THINK ABOUT IT

How would you begin to apply **institutional critique**, formalized evaluation, to pieces such as these?



TERM TO KNOW

### **Institutional Critique**

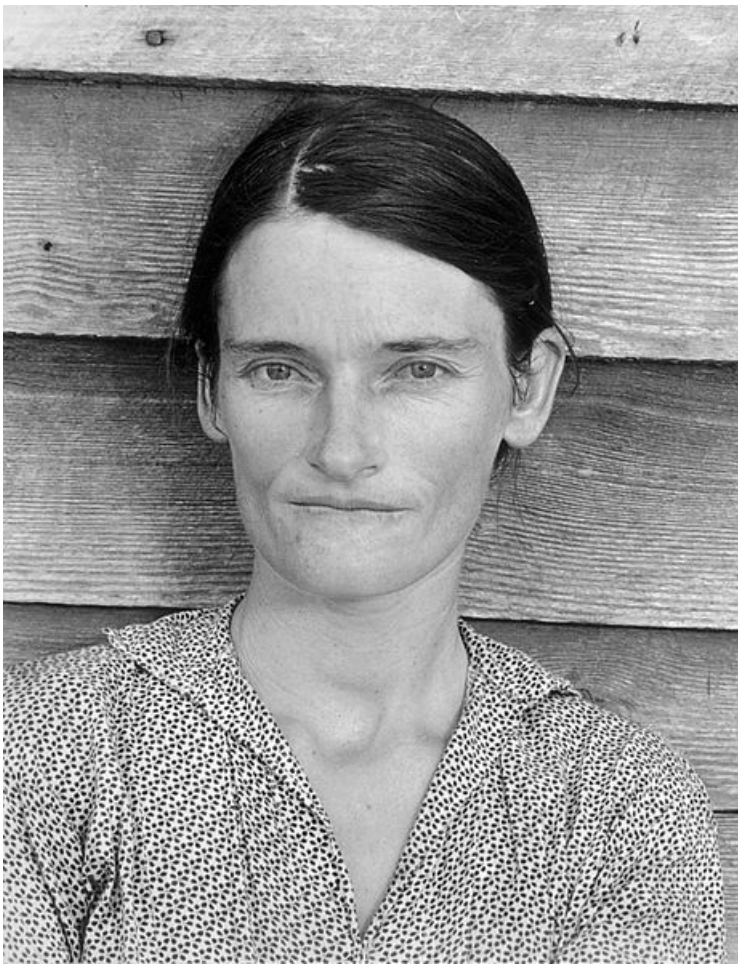
A process of formalized evaluation.

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## 3. Sherrie Levine

Postmodernists question the definition of the work of art by creating works of art that either eliminate the art object or suggest a completely new way of thinking about the art object. Because of this fact, many of the art movements from the latter part of the 20th century are considered postmodern. The postmodernist also undermines the traditional role of the artist, mainly through the use of **appropriation** to question the **originality** of the work of art.

Sherrie Levine is an artist known for this approach. One of her series, called “After Walker Evans,” was a series of photographs taken of photographs from the Depression-era photographer Walker Evans.



**After Walker Evans: 4 by Sherrie Levine**

**1981**

**Gelatin silver print**

Her work “Fountain” is an almost exact replica of the Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's “Fountain,” which was, itself, a urinal signed by the artist.



**Fountain by Sherrie Levine**

**1991**

**Bronze**

Now in both examples, she's taken the idea of questioning art one step further. If the repurposing of an object can be considered art, what about the repurposing of art itself?



#### BIG IDEA

Postmodernism questions the definition of a work of art through any type of art that either eliminates the art object or suggests a completely new way of thinking about the art object.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Appropriation**

An artmaking process that takes or “borrows” objects or images from everyday life and reassigns their context.

##### **Originality**

The idea of being unique, new, or inventive.



#### SUMMARY

Now that you've gone through the lesson, are you able to identify and define today's key terms? Can you describe the differences between **Modernism** and **Postmodernism**? Can you identify examples of postmodern art? You looked at the influence of **Dada art** and saw examples of the questions Postmodernism asks by looking at the work of **Sherrie Levine**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell



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A process of formalized evaluation.

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