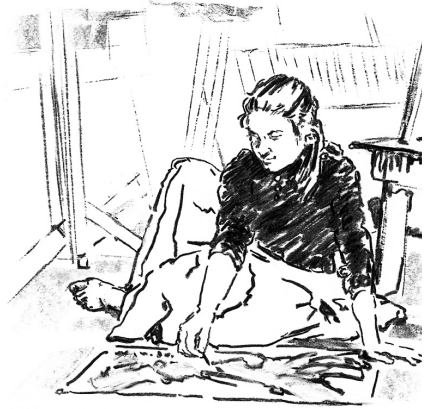


# What is art?

The term *art* can be confusing because it means different things to different people. *Art*, according to the National Curriculum, means *art, craft and design*. In general, we will use the same definition in this book, although we will often simply use the word *art*. But what is the difference between art, craft and design?



Art – expressing an idea or feeling

## Art

*Art* usually means anything made by people which expresses an idea or feeling in a skilful way. It is sometimes concerned with beauty and is usually (but not always!) interesting to look at.



Craft – making something with skill

## Craft

The word *craft* comes from an Old English word meaning strength. Someone who had a strength in a certain occupation was therefore

someone who had craft. Nowadays, craft refers to making something with skill and specialised knowledge, and often with imagination and creativity as well.

### **Design**

*Design* comes from an old Latin word meaning to mark out. When we sketch out an idea for a building or a car, for example, we are marking out, or designing. Design can be defined as: ‘the planning of visual elements, in order to solve a particular visual or spatial problem’.

Design – solving a particular problem



In addition to these general meanings of art, craft and design, we can use each of the words in more specialised ways, such as the design of a painting (referring to its composition) or the craft in a print (meaning the practical skill evident in the print, as something separate from its other qualities).

# Looking at art

This section provides you with ways of becoming familiar with art, through art criticism or appreciation.



How do you first relate to an artwork?

Art criticism is concerned with ways of looking at artworks. *Criticism* in this context does not normally mean saying something bad about an artwork (although it can mean that!), but rather responding to an artwork in an intelligent way. See pages 15 to 17 for some question prompts you can use when looking at an artwork. There are different approaches to looking at artworks; the following ‘4R’ approach is a useful one: react, research, respond and reflect.

## **React**

This is your first reaction to the artwork: How do you feel about it? What does it remind you of? How do you ‘relate’ to it? You might well see a piece of art in a modern gallery and say ‘my dog could do better than that!’, which is a perfectly reasonable initial response, but you need to go further and ask yourself why the art object is in a gallery in the first place; are other people seeing something that you’re missing? Note down your first feelings and ideas about the piece.

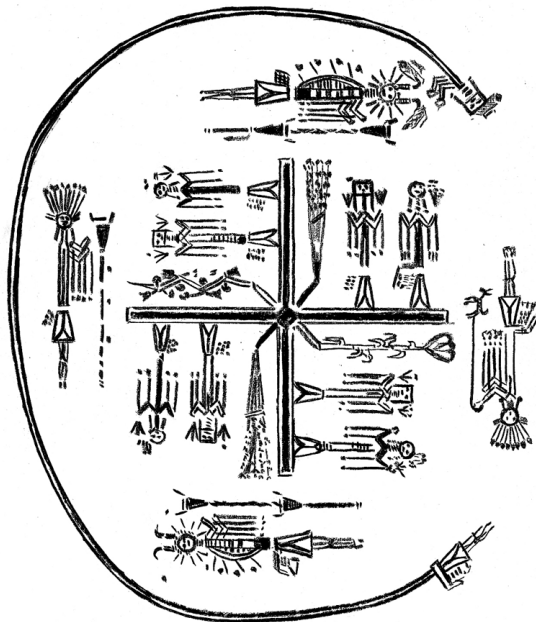
## **Research**

This is an important second step, involving an examination of the artwork in two stages: firstly of the artwork itself; and then the circumstances surrounding its production.

The first stage of the research involves looking carefully at the artwork, either as a reproduction or (preferably) in real life. Examine the visual and tactile elements (colour, pattern, texture, composition, shape, form, line, space, tone) and their relationship to each other in the artwork.

# Art and culture

As part of your course, you will be expected to show your understanding of how art, craft and design contribute and relate to different areas of human experience. Some background information about the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of art is given in this section.



American Indian spiritual work such as this is produced during ritualistic ceremonies

## **Spiritual aspects**

Traditionally, art has been a means of depicting religious experience, for example, in the work of Medieval artists and craftworkers in Christian architecture, and the Islamic designs found in mosques.

You might find it rewarding to visit a Christian cathedral – they were designed and constructed to fill people with a sense of awe and wonder. You might also find it useful to look at Tantric art, which is associated with Hinduism.

However, spirituality in art is not confined to religion. Both Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) and Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) tried to have a spiritual dimension to their paintings. Kandinsky wrote extensively about spirituality in art, as well as producing paintings; Mondrian tried to portray, amongst other things, the essence of harmony through the careful use of colour and balance in his compositions.

## **Moral aspects**

Some artists have intentionally focused on the moral aspect of life and have tried to tell a particular story through their work. For example, the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) are often full of symbolism which is intended to make a moral point.

Find a reproduction of a painting by Holman Hunt (or better still, go and see an original in the Tate Modern or Birmingham City Art Gallery), and see

# Materials and techniques

**A**rt can be created from almost anything, but here are a few hints about some of the more commonly-used materials, as well as some tips on selected approaches to making art. Further information on various materials and techniques can be found in the glossary on page 93.

## Sketchbooks

Sketchbooks are extremely useful for jotting down ideas and recording visual information. This is essential to the process of art-making; most artists will have a sketchbook or a notebook of some kind. Information can be in any form, such as scraps of patterned paper, bus tickets, poems or quick sketches of incidents you see on your way to and from school. You can use your sketchbook as a kind of visual diary. Its most important function though is as a record of your research.



An example page from a sketchbook

A sketchbook will help you to develop:

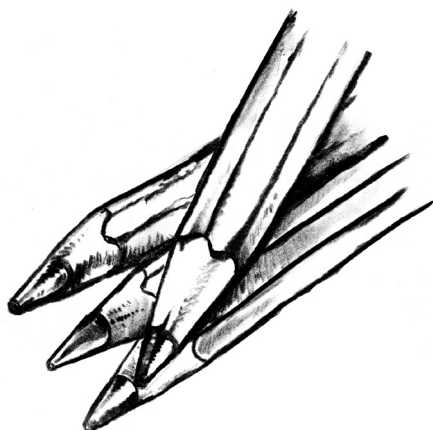
- a personal, individual style
- confidence, and the freedom to make mistakes
- an ability to think about your work.

## Pencils

The pencil is perhaps your most useful drawing tool, but you should use the appropriate pencil for your needs. The ‘lead’ of pencils is actually

graphite, which comes in varying degrees of softness.

Most pencils in everyday use have HB written on them – this stands for Hard Black.



Hard pencils sometimes have F written on their side (standing for Fine); or from H through to 6H – these pencils are suited to very precise technical drawing.

Use the appropriate pencil for your needs

Softer pencils go from B through to 6B or even softer; they are good for sketching where large areas of dark shading are needed. You would probably only need a small selection, such as one HB, one 2B and one 6B pencil. Keep your pencils very sharp. When drawing, you can vary both the pressure (by pressing down hard or lightly according to the effect you want) and the angle at which the pencil is held relative to the paper.