TEXTURE

Extract adapted from *Art in the World* by Stella Pandell Russell (1993)

Texture

The surface quality of an object, or its **texture**, attracts our senses of both touch and sight. Nature is rich in appealing surfaces, which artists sometimes try to duplicate or even exaggerate in their work. Artists' textures, however, are not real —they are only simulated. An example of an actual texture is an orange skin that, with a closer look, reveals true hills and valleys, which can compare with the surface of the moon. Paint may be applied to suggest the smoothness of human skin or of a river-polished rock. Rough and smooth, shiny and dull, hard and soft textures are contrasted to increase the expressiveness of shapes and to avoid monotony. The seduction of texture and the tactile quality of oil paint has made some artists put a great deal of pigment on the canvas, creating

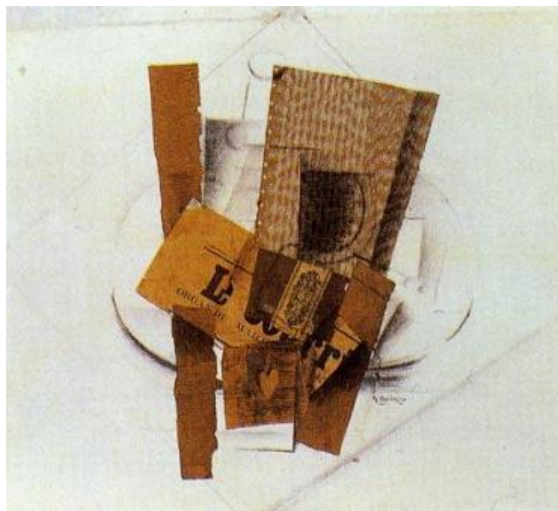Fig. 1: Vincent van Gogh. *Starry Night* (1889).

Fig. 2: Georges Braque. *Still Life: Playing Card, Bottle, Newspaper, and Tobacco Packet (Le Courrier)* (1914).

frenzied surfaces, as in Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* (Fig. 1). Painters often achieve a desired effect through the addition of actual textures like newspaper cutouts and pasted-on surfaces, that is **collage**, a medium invented in the twentieth century. See, for instance, Georges Braque's *Still Life: Playing Card, Bottle, Newspaper, and Tobacco Packet (Le Courrier)* (Fig. 2).

Many artists have abandoned traditional uses of brush and paint to create new tactile effects. **Abstract Expressionists** in the mid-twentieth century worked with heavy, irregular strokes as they became involved with the physical process of painting, following the lead of Pollock, who poured paint from the can directly on to prepared but unstretched canvas. The preparation of canvas (or wood, or other surface) is a coating of **gesso** (thinned plasterlike composition) primer in the technique traditional since the Renaissance. Helen Frankenthaler, in contrast, has chosen to work on unstretched canvas surfaces that are not prepared. Therefore, her paints sink into the unprimed canvas, creating pools of deep color. The

variations in dyed surfaces of *Tutti-Fruitti* (Fig. 3) were achieved by sponging thinned acrylic dyes onto her large canvas areas. Such textures were new to the twentieth century.

An example of texture with essential images (Wucius Wong's classification)

This is an example taken from Stella Russell's book, but following Wucius Wong's classification of materials used to create visual texture under the subtitle "Collage" (see p. 3 in the summary, and p. 81 in the original). However, this is no traditional collage as Russell describes the work.
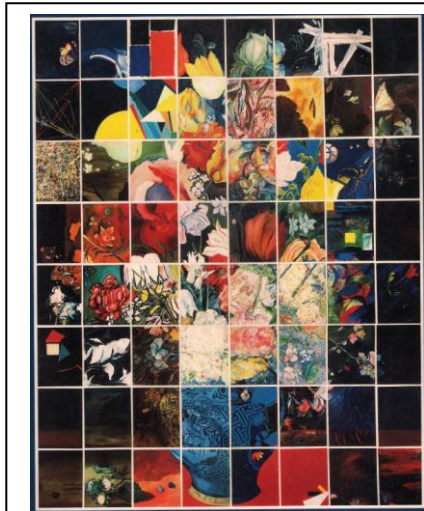

Fig. 3: Helen Frankenthaler. *Tutti-Fruitti* (1966).

Fig. 4: Pat Steir. *The Breughelt Series (A Vanitas of Style)* (1982-1984).

Pat Steir introduced the *Brueghel Series* in 1984 (Fig. 4). Based on the minimalist grid, the vast work is a 64-panel assemblage. Laying a grid over a Brueghel still life of a blue vase bursting with flowers, Steir painted each section (72 x 57 cm) in the style of a different historically familiar artist, progressing through a great number of eras (see key to styles in Fig. 5). According to Michael Brenson, *New York Times* art critic, "Steir has made it seem as if all the artistic voices that began speaking when she took the lid off Brueghel's still life were both shooting her down and giving her the energy and will to persevere." A poet as well as an artist, Steir explained her work: "I feel there's very little difference between the stylistic modes of art historical periods… The difference is in the scale, in the use of space… Scale up Van Gogh's color and mark it's De Kooning. All art making is research…"
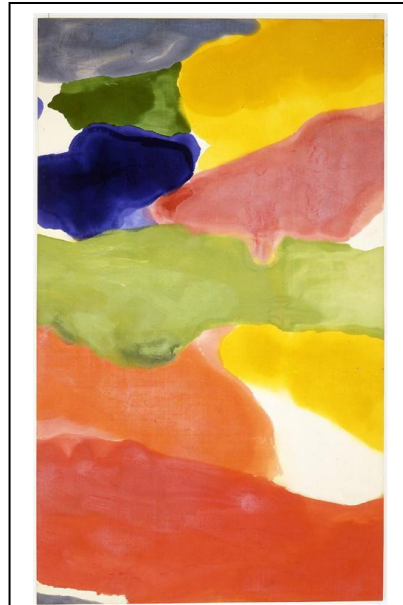

COVER:
Pat Steir, The Brueghel Series (A Vanitas of Sty
8 x 8 grid, polychromes. 1982-84, oil on canvas.
64 panels, each 25.25 x 21.5 inches.
See text reference on page 458.

1. 1984/85
2. Art Nouveau
3. School of Mondrian
4. Botticelli
5. Brueghel
6. Max Ernst
7. Kline
8. Reinhardt
9. Sol Lewitt
10. Ellsworth Kelly
11. late Marsden Hartley
12. early Marsden Hartley
13. Picasso
14. Ryder
15. Chardin
16. Watteau
17. Pollock
18. Whistler background
19. Dove
20. Jawlensky
21. Cézanne
22. early Matisse
23. Diebenkorn
24. Twombly
25. Still
26. Odilon Redon
27. O'Keeffe
28. Byzantine
29. Ingres
30. Carpaccio
31. Hofmann
32. Malevich
33. Gorky
34. Guston
35. Beckmann
36. Degas
37. De Kooning
38. Monet
39. Synchronism
40. Baselitz
41. De Stijl
42. Abstract Expressionism
43. Courbet
44. Monet
45. De Kooning
46. Van Gogh
47. Japonisme
48. early Pat Steir
49. Rothko
50. Turner
51. Rembrandt
52. Cubism
53. earliest Matisse
54. Kandinsky
55. Futurism
56. Marden
57. Flemish 15th C.
58. German 14th C.
59. Gauguin
60. David
61. late Matisse
62. Malevich
63. Terry Winter
64. Basquiat

Fig. 5: Key to Pat Steir's *The Breughelt Series (A Vanitas of Style)* (1982-1984).