

Art 1

Name _____

Modern to Contemporary Art

Due Date _____

You earned _____ out of 25 possible points.

Methodology Matrix 1

Using History and Biography as Methodologies

A matrix is an environment or material in which something develops. With that definition in mind, think of these assignment as a means of learning how to use new interpretive tools. To begin, read Laurie Schneider Adam's "Approaches to Art" which defines and demonstrates the seven most commonly used art historical methodologies. You may also find the website, www.writingaboutart.org/ helpful. Remember, the analyses that you develop in the matrix assignments constitute the beginning of your Research Paper.

As a discipline, art history has aimed to combine the study of art and the context under which it was made. Before we are able to interpret a work's context, we must first understand the terms listed in the left column below. Define these terms using www.artlex.com/, then match the question on the right with the appropriate definition.

Artlex Definition		
Artist	_____ _____	What was it made of?
Chronology	_____ _____	How does it look?
Media	_____ _____	Where was it made?
Style	_____ _____	Who made it?
Provenance	_____ _____	When was it made?

Define "context" and describe the three arenas of consideration to a work's context.

Context - _____

Arenas of consideration when examining context:

1. _____ - _____

2. _____ - _____

3. _____ - _____

Now consider this short Life Magazine article from 1949 introducing the Abstract Expressionist painter, Jackson Pollock. Highlight or underline the text where the author uses the artist's personal context, or his biography, to better understand his works.

Jackson Pollock: Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?

Recently a formidably high-brow New York critic hailed the brooding, puzzled-looking man shown above as a major artist of our time and a fine candidate to become "the greatest American painter of the 20th Century." Others believe that Jackson Pollock produces nothing more than interesting, if inexplicable, decorations. Still others condemn his pictures as degenerate and find them as unpalatable as yesterday's macaroni. Even so, Pollock, at the age of 37, has burst forth as the shining new phenomenon of American art.

Pollock was virtually unknown in 1944. Now his paintings hang in five U.S. museums and 40 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 12 out of 18 pictures. Moreover his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one man show in avant-garde Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked of and controversial U.S. painter. He has also won a following among his own neighbors in the village of Springs, N.Y., who amuse themselves by trying to decide what his paintings are about. His grocer bought one which he identifies for bewildered visiting salesmen as an aerial view of Siberia.

How Pollock Paints (with enamel, sand and a trowel)

Jackson Pollock was born in Cody, Wyo. He studied in New York under Realist Thomas Benton but soon gave this up in utter frustration and turned to his present style. When Pollock decides to start a painting, the first thing he does is to tack a large piece of canvas on the floor of his barn. "My painting does not come from the easel," he explains, writing in a small magazine called Possibilities 1. "I need the resistance of a hard surface."

Working on the floor gives him room to scramble around the canvas, attacking it from the top, the bottom or the side (if his pictures can be said to have a top, a bottom or a side) as the mood suits him. In this way, "I can... literally be in the painting." He surrounds himself with quart cans of aluminum paint and many hues of ordinary household enamel. Then, starting anywhere on the canvas, he goes to work. Sometimes he dribbles the paint on with a brush (above). Sometimes he scrawls it on with a stick, scoops it with a trowel or even pours it on straight out of the can. In with it all he deliberately mixes sand (below), broken glass, nails, screws or other foreign matter lying around. Cigarette ashes and an occasional dead bee sometimes get in the picture inadvertently.

"When I am in my painting," says Pollock, "I'm not aware of what I'm doing." To find out what he has been doing he stops and contemplates the picture during what he calls his "get acquainted" period. Once in a while a life-like image appears in the painting by mistake. But Pollock cheerfully rubs it out because the picture must retain "a life of its own." Finally, after days of brooding and doodling, Pollock decides the painting is finished, a deduction few others are equipped to make.

Using the sections that you've identified as employing biography as a model, practice interpreting a work of art from lecture or in your textbook using historical context and biography. What elements of the artist's life may have inspired them to create this work? Under what historical context was the work made? How was the work received initially? What does the artist's biography, or things that they said about their artistic practice, reveal about the work? What associations or themes do we identify in the work that may be associated with its historical context or the artist's biography?

Your short answer essay must include:

- One MLA citation and the source's full bibliographic information
- Minimum of three paragraphs

Title, artist, date - _____

Provenance and media - _____

