

Analyzing the Effect of Technology on Art Production

Objectives of the assignment

1. Students will think concretely about how technology affects the ability of economic agents to produce things, how changes in production technology affect economic arrangements, and how changes in the economy affect the nature, rate, and timing of the development of new technologies and their application in particular uses in a context they might not have considered—the production of art.
2. Students will look at art in a new way—seeing it as a product of the economy, produced by individuals who are embedded in a particular economic and social system and whose creativity is influenced and channeled by their historical and geographic circumstances.

Specifics of the assignment

1) First class visit: The class will visit the Spencer Museum of Art during a regular class session, where Museum staff will show them a selection of images/objects that help to understand the way in which technology affects art production.

Possible examples include:

1. The role of printmaking in changing and democratizing the production of printed images, and the associated changes in the way artists could support themselves
2. Photography—changes in the cost have altered the use of this tool and led to a proliferation of images; this has also influenced the nature of images reflected in photographs
3. Porcelain—reflecting European efforts to imitate a Chinese technology for producing it
4. Computers have had myriad effects on the production of art and given rise to new modes of production, e.g. purely digital art

- 2) Independent visit: Following their visit, students will be broken into groups of 4 or 5. Each group will select an object in the museum collection and analyze it.
1. Groups will consider the object in order to identify what technologies were used in producing the object and how the technologies influenced the object's subject matter, purpose, production, and characteristics.
 2. Teams may work on this assignment at any time, but they will have the opportunity to use a regular class meeting time.
- 3) Second class visit: The class will return to the museum and each group will have 10 minutes to present a report about the object it selected.

Works of art associated with the assignment

The works of art selected for this assignment are suggestions based on previous class visits. It is possible that some objects may not be on view in a given semester. With sufficient advance notice, it is possible that objects that are not on view may be able to be displayed in the Stephen H. Goddard Study Center or Jack & Lavon Brosseau Center for Learning. Contact Kate Meyer (kmm0045@ku.edu) for availability and scheduling of the Study Center and Center for Learning.

You can also search the Spencer Museum of Art website (www.spencerart.ku.edu) for works that are currently on view by clicking on Art>Collection>Search, and then clicking on Collection at the top left to access the advanced search tool. The last text box gives you the option to search only for works on view. For additional help selecting works of art on view for your class visit, contact Celka Straughn, the Andrew W. Mellon Director of Public Practice, Education, and Research, at straughn@ku.edu, or the Academic Coordinator at academic@ku.edu.

Adapting the assignment

While this assignment is designed as a multi-visit assignment beginning with a guided visit, it can also be adapted as:

- ✓ a guided class visit
- ✓ independent student work
- ✓ a long-term project
- ✓ a multi-visit assignment

And could take place in:

- ✓ the Stephen H. Goddard Study Center
- ✓ the Jack & Lavon Brosseau Center for Learning
- ✓ a special exhibition
- ✓ the galleries