

Richard Gay, Narrator and Editor: Welcome to 30 Brave Minutes, a podcast of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 30 Brave Minutes we'll give you something interesting to think about. You can now subscribe to our podcast on iTunes and Pod Bean, making it even easier to join us. The topic for today is great works of art. In this episode the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Jeff Frederick is with UNC Pembroke Art faculty: artists Colleen Ringrose and Robert Epps, and art historians Nancy Palm-Puchner and yours truly, Richard Gay. Now get ready for 30 Brave Minutes.

Frederick: According to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 24% of the US Adult population visited a museum or an art gallery in 2017, representing a slight growth over the previous year. In 2016, 14% of eighth graders visited an art museum, gallery, or an exhibit with their class. Students were even more likely to have visited an art museum or exhibit on their own, other than just with their class. In short, we want art in our lives and in the lives of our children and we take positive actions to make this happen. Why do we go? Why do we hope that our children go? Art transcends so many critical areas of a life well-lived. Art comforts and calms, it soothes, it inspires. Just the same art provokes and angers. It takes us to places we don't want to go but maybe should. It takes us away from where we are to someplace else we'd like to be, providing us an outlet, an escape, a diversion, or a trip to somewhere new and different. Art gives us permission to think differently. It creates questions and sometimes offers answers. It's beautiful and unnerving and luxurious and necessary. Art provides an opportunity for us to expand our horizons, to pause, and to consider. And all of these characteristics, and a thousand more serve to support a person's own quest to define their own sense of self and their own vision of a society as it could be, or as it should be. That, at least in part, is why we go to museums and galleries. Maybe that's even why we make art. From my admittedly lay perspective, going to an art museum is like cracking open a cold frosty can of imagination. I want to know what the artist was thinking, what they were responding to and what they want me to see and to think. Much of the time I leave without clear answers to these questions, which is half the fun of the entire visit. Lunch or heading off to get a beverage of your choice after leaving the gallery gives you and your museum companion an opportunity to talk about what you liked, or didn't, what seemed impossibly hard to create and what didn't, and how certain works by the same artist fit together into a mosaic of her or his collective work. My wife and I never actually agree. Maybe I should say it this way: we rarely agree on what was most interesting. That discussion though, helps me to learn something from her perspective about a piece of art or an artist, or perhaps she occasionally learns something from me. The art we see, hear, or observe, then leads to new vistas of thought. For us, it was a great museum trip if a day, a week, or a month later something else crosses our minds eye and draws us back to that painting, that drawing, that work of digital art, that tapestry, maybe even that architecture or ceramic, or some other form of art that we saw in the gallery. But for me, personally, admittedly I lack the depth of understanding to distinguish great works of art from each other on a higher plane, but fortunately we have some experts with us today. They can talk us through what makes a work of art great, and how their trained eyes

consume the material, and what we might learn from them. Joining me today are Robert Epps, Richard Gay, Nancy Palm Puchner, and Colleen Ringrose. Welcome everybody.

All: Thanks.

Frederick: So, let's start at the beginning. What makes a work of art great, and how would you define that?

Palm-Puchner: Well, Jeff that's a very big question. There's a quote that I came across a few years ago for a class that I was teaching on contemporary art that has really stuck with me. It's a quote by Damien Hirst, who's a British Artist who became wildly popular in the 90s for submerging animals, namely a shark, was the one that he was best known for, in formaldehyde. He wrote this quote a number of years ago. He says great art is when you come across an object and you have a fundamental, personal, one-on-one relationship with it and you understand something you didn't already understand about what it means to be alive. And what I love about that is that it's broad enough to not define what specific stylistic or conceptual characteristics of work of art needs to have, but it also demands that a work of art has some sort of fundamental effect on you and your understanding of the world around you. I think what also is so great about that goes back to what you said in your introduction about the fact that you and your wife are going to have varying understandings, interpretations, reactions, but you can be open to those and you can learn from each other, which is exactly what I try to do with students in my classes. And then it's also something that stays with you, that a month later you can be looking at something completely different and unrelated and you somehow understand it through the lens of that work of art that you saw. I think that's what great art is. I don't think it fits any specific mold. I think it's something that sticks with you and is something that somehow changes you and that change can be huge like, you know, realizing how rampant racism is in America or it can be tiny in terms of how you experience one minute aspect of your life, but I think that change is the thing that's really fundamental and necessary.

Ringrose: Yeah, I think that when I was thinking about this question, it came down to: it wasn't just the history, the context, the talent, but it was that ineffable thing in art that you cannot actually say, it's the *je ne sais quoi*, that gestalt of it, that you were basically needing to talk about a thing that exists but it doesn't exist. You can't pin it down and that that makes great art.

Gay: We tend to think of art and define art as professionals very broadly and when we teach a survey class for students, on the first day of class, we tend to spend a lot of time with them talking about what is a work of art? How do we define it? And, of course they tend to think of the more traditional media such as painting and sculpture and so a part of the challenge is to get people to accept new forms of artwork, which is invented every day. And so we tend to have a very broad definition of art. I think in the past people thought of Art as something that was very ennobling of the individual. It left us profoundly changed in some way, and perhaps led towards

an improvement of society, but today we don't always think of it in those terms because we don't see things as linear. So many things are happening all at the same time, but I do think a really broad definition is very important. This is particularly important when we're talking about earlier periods of time because of how people interacted with the objects was very different than it is today. I mean when we think about art with a capital A we think of stuff, usually, this is an idea growing out of the Renaissance, right, in earlier stuff, it was more about craftsmanship and how the object functioned and what was its role. Was it something that helped man communicate with the divine in some way? Was it an object that showed the importance of a great individual? So I really encourage everyone to take a really broad definition as we think about looking about art.

Epps: So, yeah. I love that you brought up the kind of historical man or humanity and such and as I love Scott McCloud. His looking at defining art, which is also extremely broad, which basically, the simple definition for him is anything that doesn't have to do with reproduction or self-preservation. And he gives a whole little comic strip, because he's a Comics historian and analyst, and what not, and creator. He even has a caveman running away from a saber-toothed tiger, diving out of the way at the last minute as the Saber-toothed Tiger goes over the cliff. And so the thing is, okay, what does the guy do now? Does he search for food? Search for a mate? No, he sticks his tongue out at the now dead tiger off the cliff and that becomes art in and of itself.

Gay: Well, I think another thing that's important for us to think about as we talk about art in a general way is, you had mentioned the idea of meaning, where's the meaning coming from? What did the artist mean? And this is something we talk to our students about a lot. Do they have intentions for the work of art and how successful they are in communicating that to a general public can vary greatly? And some of them just don't care. There many artists that don't care if you get their personal notion, and that brings us to this thought about where's the meaning generated? The object itself doesn't have meaning. It only has the meaning that we give it as viewers. So everyone's reaction, I think, to a work of art is very valid and it's very personal. I think there's some distinction we should make as we think about art. There's the appreciation of art that everyone has, that they may or may not have when they see that object initially and have that gut reaction to it, or they may just gloss over it, and it might not resonate with them at all. And then there's the way professionally trained people think about works of art and how they put them within a broader context. And I think back to our podcast that we had a while back on great books, many people have read Moby Dick and people have their own interpretation of Moby Dick and they enjoy Moby Dick for the narrative, but somebody who's trained in literary criticism and theoretical approaches to addressing a text are going to have a very different read of that object. And I think it's the same with works of art. I think it's very important as we work with students to encourage them to hang on to that initial reaction that they have. They love or they hate of it, but then also encourage them to move beyond that into a more academic thinking of the work and a bit more inclusive and perhaps different way that they've never considered.

Frederick: So maybe even one of the defining traits of art is its versatility, is that it can become organic, it can grow on you over time. Your ability to appreciate it or not can change over time and the same work of art could appeal or not appeal to lots of different people for a list of reasons as long as your arm.

Ringrose: I was visiting the Guggenheim Museum in the 80s and it's a long winding thing and I'm winding down with my friend and it's on Modern Art and there's this family behind me, a husband, a little kid and a mom. He walks up to nine tiles that are laid out in a grid. And he goes: "That's it, honey. We're out of here." (Everyone laughs)

Ringrose: and they marched out of that museum. To this day I remember that and I thought, he felt so excluded and made fun of by these tiles. I just wanted to say, it's like when you arrange your books on the shelf, it's just about the color and the form and the quiet. Just watch it and see the space between it. It's not trying to make fun of you.

Frederick: As a historian, we are often thinking that to understand a historical actor or interpretation sometime later, we need to know that moment. What's the moment that person was living in and why she or he was doing what they were doing. Is that true of the Artist as well? Do you need to know the moment in time that the artist is working and what she or he is reacting to?

Palm-Puchner: I think in some regard that it is very important, especially when we're talking about, you know, different historical periods that are centuries apart. But many contemporary artists argue that their meaning is incredibly important and if you're not open to their meaning then you're just not going to experience the work of art in the way that you should, but there are, equally, a number of contemporary artists that also argue that you can't control that meaning, that there's a separation between what an artist conceives of, what an artist creates, and what a viewer experiences. Those things are distinct from one another and that there's no fundamental relationship between them, that what the person creating the work conceives of exists completely independently of what the viewer experiences. I think that to some extent meaning or perhaps more importantly context, because work of works of art are such a great way to sort of understand what issues the world is facing at any given moment in history, but I think the actual experience of the work is not as heavily dependent on the intended meaning of the artist because everyone brings their own, you know set of experiences and understandings to the work of art that's going to drastically change what that experience is.

Epps: We get the whole death of the author, yet again, in the idea.

Frederick: Is it true in visual art the same way it might be with the written word or with music that someone who produced something years later will say what in the world was I thinking at

that time. I used to think this was great. But now I've decided that this is not who I am or what I was.

Gay: There are examples of artists destroying their early work. They just rip it up and get rid of it and they don't see it as part of their legacy and actually want to erase it, if they're sort of conscious of their image that they're wanting to produce of themselves.

Epps: Even the pop artist Frank Frazetta was notorious for running down into his own museum and grabbing his paintings and working on them and his wife had to stop him and say no! No! These are done! It's there and it's for sale. Yeah. He just kept wanting to go at it. More practitioners are rarely satisfied with what they've done. You always hate your old stuff.

Palm-Puchner: There's a Lumbee artist that I've been writing about a lot lately - Hattie Ruth Miller. And I love her work and I adore her as a person but I will look at her work and you know, take notes and take pictures and go and write and do all of this work and then I go back and see her again and the paintings have completely changed and it drives me nuts. I love what she does and I love how she's constantly working and everything is always in flux and there's constant progress and change but as a writer it makes my job a little bit more difficult.

Gay: But going back to your initial question, Jeff, about the idea of the importance of the historical context of the object. I think if we're trying to understand how an object functioned when it was new, it's essential. The way that we view a Renaissance object today is very different than what would have been viewed in the past. For one thing we have access to it. In the Renaissance my family would have never had access to any of this beautiful art, or very little access. Perhaps in a church or something. But I do think the context is essential when we were looking at earlier works of art and we are trying to understand them when they're initially created. One of the interesting things about studying art is that the art and its meaning doesn't stop after it's created, right? It continues to evolve through time.

Ringrose: We can compare it to culture of that time.

Gay: Yeah, we can compare it to the culture of the past or we can also compare it to culture today. Things resonate today in different ways than they have in the past and then there's the whole trajectory of the history of art. I mean, for the longest time we kept looking at art as we studied what's new? What's being done new? And who's the first to do this? And the first to do that? We don't do that as much as we used to in the past I don't think as art historians. We're much more inclusive and we cast a much broader net, but for a long time that was the important narrative of who is advancing art, who is purifying art to its pure essence that's going to lead us into some type of spiritual realm. One of the things we don't always think about when we look at abstract art that was produced in the mid-twentieth century. A lot of it has a lot of very religious connotations to it. Even things like black squares.

Ringrose: Rothko is incredibly about the body and the spirit and when you stand in front of those works, it's speaking to your whole body. It's not just a process.

Gay: And part of this because of the size. It is so large.

Ringrose: And the way he layered the paint.

Gay: I remember reading that Rothko was very interested in how one encountered the work of art and so he would manipulate how they were shown in the gallery so that you're confronted with them - in your face, large objects. So, I think it's there. That's one of the wonderful things about art is that you can approach it from so many different ways. You can approach it from the personal perspective. You can approach it from the perspective of a Marxist, or a Feminist, or post-structuralism or somebody who's studying post-colonialism.

Ringrose: And you can deconstruct it formally as well, as an artist.

Gay: Completely. And hopefully we'll talk about that a little bit more too because I think that's one of the great skills that I would encourage everyone to develop is the idea of slowing down and looking at a work of art so that you can actually see it. We're so bombarded with images today. Going down the freeway there are images everywhere and that's just wasn't the case many years ago. Right.

Frederick: Well, let's pick up on that in a second, but I want to follow up on something that many of you guys have talked about which I would loosely describe as themes of continuity and change. So what is the timeless immutable fact or reality of how one views and enjoys and appreciates art and what are some of the things that are different in the way artists both produce and enjoy today versus what you're talking about as recently as mid-century.

Epps: Well, the post-modernist in me totally disagrees with that statement or any universality.

Gay: I think we need a pause in here to tell us what is truth and everlasting. That's a much larger question than we can address.

Ringrose: I think the internet has also opened art up to a lot of people. It's flattened the playing field for a lot of people because they'll go on and they'll see somebody just posting things that are art and the idea of a masterpiece gets very leveled out because while I love that and I love that... it is not the museum and the museum telling them what high art is. So, it's very different for the people coming up today in terms of art and what they think of art.

Gay: I think, though, to try to answer your question, Jeff, I would return back to Nancy's comment early on about how an art object impacts us and some ways these have changed. It's encouraged us to think about something in a different way. We might not understand what our

thoughts are about it, but it's having a true impact upon us. And a lot of its interpretation, too. I think that's something we really have to think about it and a lot of the contemporary art world and art over the 20th century becomes more about interpretation instead of the ability to fabricate a natural-looking object. It becomes more about meaning and concepts and less about being able to draw a beautiful hand perfectly.

Epps: Yeah, it interesting that we brought up Damien Hirst and what's he doing now? He's doing drip and splatter painting and I see how many folks have an Etsy shop or whatnot where they're pouring acrylic paint. It's become a hobby, as well, at the same time and so here's

Ringrose: High and low art.

Epps: exactly. Brought together, as you said, flattened. Yeah, it's really interesting to see that at the same time we still throw how much importance on the Mona Lisa which was drawing that hand and getting that smile, among other things.

Gay: And I would add, not the best painting from that period.

Frederick: Well, talk through your process a little bit as trained artists and art historians and people who live in the world of art every day. Where does your eye go first when you look at a work of art? Maybe start with one that you haven't really observed before and then where does your eye go when it's a very familiar piece of work that you're encountering all over again?

Gay: I think my eye goes where the artist tells me that it should go. (Everyone laughs) And I'll let them explain their technique.

Epps: Visual hierarchy.

Ringrose: Well, for me, if it is a familiar painting it's like a giant just hug. It's like the whole thing just hugs me. It's like I go into the painting and I get to live there, because I know it and can explore it and little things here and there. It's just like an old friend who talks to me and might say new things. Something I haven't seen before. I generally look at. I have a more abstract brain so I tend to look at the color and the form and the movement. Sometimes I forget that it makes something. Occasionally my students have to actually tell me that it makes something. Oh, yeah. Yeah, that too.

Gay: I feel like artists are great manipulators. When I say my eye goes where the artist tells me to go is that the artists are just manipulating those elements that you just mentioned among many others to encourage me to look in specific places.

Ringrose: Yeah. Some pieces are for the head, you know, and some for the heart and some for the body, for me. That's how I respond.

Gay: But things like line, Jeff, can move your eye around a composition, either actual lines or implied lines with things are sort of staggered along in a composition to suggest depth or not. Also contrast is very important. Things like a bright warm color or like the color red might pull your eye, particularly if it's contrasted against other colors that are much cooler, whereas if the entire work is red, red is not going to attract your eye, but in a painting that is pale blue a little spot of red is going to pull your eye towards it. So there's lots of things that artists do to manipulate our eye, both consciously and subconsciously. You know artists are working in the subconscious level and one of the things I encourage our students to do is to slow down and look and try to figure out how the artist is manipulating us.

Ringrose: The hardest part is slowing down, really.

Epps: You are so eager to get that visceral reaction because the surface is what we see so quickly and sometimes it's hard for folks to get past that. So, the idea of really thinking about the craft, thinking about the structure and getting all the way back to the idea and purpose behind the work is so important as opposed to only reacting to the surface.

Ringrose: where people tend to be in a symbolic realm - house, person, travel, landscape, sunset, and it's all in the symbolic part of your brain and you have to slow down to go in to the part where, oh, it's a particular house.

Frederick: Leave your watch and your phone at home and take it all in.

Ringrose: Yeah. It's hard for everyone to slow down, even artists.

Gay: I encourage people to take time to sort of look at something and ask themselves how did the artist do that? It makes me feel sad or this work of art may make me feel sad or happy and you can ask yourself well, why does this work of art make me feel happy or sad? What are the elements in the work that suggest happiness or sadness? You get that gut visceral reaction, but there are things that are in the work or that you associate with the work that could lead to that feeling of joy or sorrow and I think part of slowing down is to really reflect on what those things are.

Ringrose: Inside of them. Like what is that? And then the person is more expanded just by the art. They know more about themselves.

Chancellor Robin Cummings: This is Chancellor Robin Cummings and I want to thank you for listening to 30 Brave Minutes. Our faculty and students provide expertise, energy, and passion, driving our region forward. Our commitment to Southeastern North Carolina has never been stronger through our teaching, our research, and our community outreach. I want to encourage you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the College of Arts and Sciences at the

University of North Carolina at Pembroke. With your help we will continue our impact for generations to come. You can donate online at [uncp.edu/give](http://uncp.edu/give). Thanks again for listening. Now back to more 30 Brave Minutes.

Frederick: You are listening to 30 Brave Minutes, a broadcast service of the College of Arts and Sciences at UNC Pembroke. I'm Jeff Frederick and our panel includes Nancy Palm-Puchner, Richard Gay, Robert Epps, and Colleen Ringrose. We are talking about great works of art today. When did you individually know that art was important to you and that you might want to spend your career in the middle of it?

Palm-Puchner: Well, I didn't really grow up going to art museums and art was not really a significant part of my life, which I, you know, that's unfortunate for many reasons. I feel like I've made up for it in my adulthood, though, and nothing, you know, nothing against my parents. That just wasn't a big part of our upbringing. When I went to college and I was bouncing around different majors and I think I started out in accounting and, at some point I ended up in industrial design and for a design degree I had to take a certain number of art history classes, and I absolutely hated every aspect of the design part of it but I loved my art history classes. The thing that always sticks out to me and I ended up writing my thesis about it. I was also taking a course on American history and I was learning a lot about Native American genocide and learning a lot about the way that the United States was settled. And then I was also taking a course learning at the same time about the art that was being created while all of that was happening. So I was learning about Hudson River School landscape painting and these very beautiful pastoral calming paintings of vistas and these beautiful expanses of horizons and I just wondered why the artwork of the time didn't fit with the politics of the time and I ended up writing my thesis about it as an undergrad and I think that was the moment for me where I realized that art was a very significant part of history that tells us a lot about history but also often also tells us about the history that perhaps the dominant society or dominant culture wants to be told. I think that was really the moment for me where I decided I didn't want to design anything. I didn't want to study history. I didn't want to, you know, add numbers. I wanted to learn more about art and learn more about what it tells us about all of these different moments in history, but then how those things that also seem to be hidden and sort of covered up will also kind of surface in interesting ways if we just sort of tease them out a little bit.

Ringrose: Well, my trajectory. I grew up with parents who built things. They weren't artists but they would build things and make things and my mother would learn to play instruments by ear. And so I grew up in house where people just made things. That's just what you did and I would always like we had a junk drawer. I would take it apart and I would make sculptures and frame them and I put them back away in the junk drawer, but I think the defining moment was probably when I was in high school and I told my biology teacher because we were learning the periodic table and I said that's interesting and I can see really quickly that this is important. However, I

would like to organize the world through color and form and so that's not meaningful to me, so this is the way I think and I'll hope I get past your class. I was good at labs.

Frederick: It's a great story.

Ringrose: That was pretty much the death knell. I was just going to be an artist.

Gay: It was in your bones, so to speak. I took a gen Ed course as an undergraduate and it just changed my life. Many people complain about a gen ed curriculum and how it can slow down one's trajectory towards one's career goal and stuff, but I find it extremely important to a quality liberal arts education. And I took one art history class as a requirement and it literally just changed my whole life. It was like, I want to do that! And part of the reason I loved it is for some of the reasons we've been talking today about how we can learn about ourselves and learn about other cultures and we can study art of the past and art of today and I really believe that if there's a topic you're interested in, you can find a work of art that in some ways engages that topic, and if doesn't exist we should make it. Right? I truly believe there's something in the study of art for absolutely everybody. How about you Robert?

Epps: Okay. Thinking about the idea of letting college give you that time to get all that information, to spread out and see all those different things, and spread your vistas is such a great thing. I taught a long time ago at a for-profit college and everything was so much about get this done, or what's the end result? Nothing else, and no room for anybody to expand, especially at such a critical time in their student life. So that the idea of being at a university where you can do that is a great thing. Sorry for the tangent there, but we're going back to a kind of strange thing. My father worked with a summer camp down on the coast. It was all about sailing but they had arts and crafts and every summer for me became more about going into that arts and crafts place, getting a sketchbook and drawing in that sketchbook all summer long. Kind of the opposite of what the whole camp was supposed to be about but that's what was there for me, so it was kind of ingrained all the way along, always making something all the way along. The idea of actually doing it and pursuing it as a career probably didn't make it until college, because my undergraduate degree was actually music education. So I even went ahead and finished a whole other degree in something completely different, but in the midst of that got into group of guys that first wanted to make films and then all of a sudden were like we're going to start a comic book company because we were crazy like that and what not and that turned it over.

Frederick: Time for a pro tip for us lay folk. Give us a thought about how we should engage art. Maybe one small thing that each of us who are listening can take into the next gallery or museum we go to.

Ringrose: I forget who said this but I was listening to a lecture, so many things I'm sure, but it was a critic and he said when he goes into a show and he really is having a hard time getting

something from the show. He said ask yourself the question, if I was the artist, why would I ask me this? What would I have been trying to say or think or feel? And I've always thought that that was very useful.

Palm-Puchner: I would say let go of taste, that it's not really that important whether you like it or hate it or love it. Try to move past that and think more about what it means and why it was made and how you can possibly let it change the way you think about one aspect of your life.

Gay: I would just say slow down. Slow down and take time to look. That's so important and we just don't do it enough.

Epps: Yeah, I think what Nancy said is the key to the idea of appreciation. Getting away from just taste and like, what you like, what you don't like, and try to get to appreciation and that probably entails knowing a little bit more about processing, creation, study, and context, and all of those different things. Then go to the slowdown that Richard said.

Ringrose: I know a lot of them wear iPods and ear buds. I sound like a grandma. If they would sit and look at a piece of art for the length of time it takes them to listen to their favorite song, they might get more from it.

Gay: Oh, yeah, that's nice.

Epps: There you go.

Frederick: Well who are some of the individual go-to artists that you just really appreciate or you just totally find interesting? Who is at the top of your Mount Rushmores?

Palm-Puchner: I think there are artists that I appreciate on the level kind of like what Colleen mentioned, like it just feels so good to see their art. Kehinde Wiley, who does giant contemporary portraits of African American figures in the sort of guise of sort of 17th 18th century portraits on a huge scale, and I was just to the North Carolina Museum of Art recently, So it's all the works in their permanent collection that keep jumping out at me, but Bill Viola and his digital work, his video.

Gay: Talking about slowing down there.

Palm-Puchner: Right. It just feels really good to look at their work and just be able to appreciate it on that visceral level, but then there are other artists that I appreciate and have never from the moment that I learned what they were doing, have never lost that appreciation simply because there are so thoughtful. Sherry Levine in the 1980s started to do the series that she became most famous for. After Walker Evans, where she created a series of photographs of already existing photographs that were part of a photo essay book that Walker Evans created in the 1930s.

Epps: Let us now praise famous men...

Palm-Puchner: Exactly. The part of the FSA photography projects that were funded by the federal government. And her philosophy. There are a lot of things that go into the concept of the work but one of the main kind of driving components of the work is about the idea of originality and the idea that we have become so inundated with images that there's no such thing as complete originality anymore. She takes so far as to just directly appropriate an already existing artwork and there are other types of critique that she's doing with this project, but that idea has just stuck with me and I find it so conceptually gratifying and so powerful to think that there is no originality, that everything is somehow derivative. It also lends itself to a lot of really good dialogue with students because it's one of those pieces and it's one of those ideas that they will slowly come around to. They initially just want to attack her for doing nothing more than photographing someone else's work and then they start to think about her ideas and start to think about what she's really trying to communicate with that, and it really gets them thinking and it really gets them thinking about their own originality and the ways that they appropriate in their work without perhaps even thinking about it. So I think there are a couple of ways that I will experience and really have go-to artists. When I want to think and when I want to talk and when I just want to walk into a gallery and just experience, you know, the five people moving in incredibly slow motion that just feels like that very visceral, you know, like you're being physically gratified by experiencing that work of art.

Ringrose: Yeah, I agree with Bill Viola. I love his installations and just walking into the room. It's like they're happening to you in that quiet space. I also happen to like Rothko. He is one of my favorite artists. And I just love that space that he creates and it's just so simple with color, veils of color and just the rough edges and allowing you to go into that painting and become part of it. As far as looking at something if I had it on my wall. I really like Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings. There's not a lot of action right now, but I like.

Gay: Very sculptural. You mentioned sort of go-to paintings. I think it depends on what point we are trying to make as Educators. It depends on the point I'm trying to get across. When I think about your question though, there are some works of art that I just truly love and have really touched me personally as I've looked at them. One of them is a work, which is kind of funny, because people know me know that I'm not a particularly religious person, but one of my favorite works of art is a work of art The Descent from the Cross by Rogier van der Weyden, who is a 15th century painter and I actually was privileged enough to go to The Prado to see the painting and it was just incredibly transformative. It's beautiful in reproduction, but in the flesh and the actual painting, it's truly amazing. It's like almost 9 feet long and it's an image of Joseph of Arimathea and his servant removing Christ's body from the cross and his body is sort of collapsed and they're the cradling him in his arms and it sort of forms the shape of a cross bow. The painting was actually commissioned by guild of archers and up in the corner there's actually a tiny crossbow that's depicted way at the corner, very, very small and beside this very pale, thin

body that's laying at an angle is a depiction of the Virgin Mary and scripturally she's not mentioned as having this reaction, but she's right beside him. And their arms are falling sort of towards this center of the composition and they're laying side by side with each other and his is wounded and hers is pale and she swooning and so it's about his suffering and passion and her compassion and empathy and for me the work is really about sorrow and it's extremely moving. But technically it's a powerhouse because it was done with an oil painting technique which means the artist was able to express incredible surface texture by building up layers. And so when you look at it, the eyes are puffy. The red outlines, their tears that are reflecting like rolling down their cheeks, the fur on the coats look like fur and the brocade looks like brocades and the velvets look like velvets, right? And it's all depicted in a very unreal shallow space and it's just otherworldly and it's not shown in a realistic manner in any way, I mean, even though you can show reflections using this oil painting technique in an incredible way, it's really not very naturalistic. The postures are very unnatural and they're crammed into a really shallow space and it is just an incredibly moving work and I love the composition because on either end there are figures that sort of create parentheses that sort of frame the composition. And every time I see that work of art it just really touches me.

Epps: I want to go a totally different way, and Nina Paley's *Sita Sings the Blues*, which is an animated film created basically by one woman. You know, she pretty much did everything all herself. So a feature-length animated film created by one person which is a monumental task in and of itself, that decontextualizes bits of the Indian epic the Ramayana into a breakup story and associates it with her own personal experience dealing with trying to have relationships with the animation industry and traveling with that and so it's a really interesting cultural context and a good different feminist critical eye towards the events from that ancient Hindu epic. Then, you know, anytime you want to watch something that really moves, go get a Miyazaki film get a Hayao Miyazaki film and just forget the story, even though the stories are great, but just watch the movement and watch how they're such idiosyncratic for even the smallest elements. You know, that can always be a great thing for anybody who's interested in motion and animation.

Gay: I love the variety of the things that we've brought up as well and that goes back to this notion of art can be about anything. We've gone from everything from preserved dead sharks in formaldehyde to altarpieces to animated film to traditional painting. So it's really a rich topic.

Palm-Puchner: Well, it's so interesting. While you were sharing about the Altarpiece, I was like just taken back to a similar experience when I got to see the Isenheim Altarpiece in Germany. I sat in front of it for literally hours. It was the most time I had ever spent in front of a single work of art and it was just mesmerizing. There's something about you know, 14th and 15th Century oil painted altarpieces that are just mind-blowing, but then when Rob was sharing, too, I was thinking about that I was recently at the Nasher Museum where they have a traveling show up right now called *Art for a New Understanding* that's all modern and contemporary Native American Artists and there's one piece in the show, and of course, I can't remember the name of

the artist, but it's this film that she created of her going into different cultures and performing dances with members of that culture. So she did everything from the merengue to, you know, pop and lock and you know, doing it with all of these members of different parts of American culture. The film was so powerful on so many levels because it was just playful and fun to watch and it just reminded me of how good art can make me feel and what a great form of expression it is, but it was also really powerful in that she was making this comment on the way that traditional Native American dances have been exploited and appropriated. And, you know, she was commenting on that by going into these other cultures and performing dances that she, before visiting these people, knew nothing about, so hearing other perspectives on it just reminds me, like you said, that there's really no way for me to say this is what it is for me because so many different things can speak to me on so many different levels.

Frederick: Let's look at the other side of the coin briefly. What is a particular work of art that everyone has told you you're supposed to love and it's supposed to be so meaningful, but it's never ever quite clicked for you?

Ringrose: Well when I was younger, I still don't appreciate him actually, Willem de Kooning. I was introduced to him through his feminine paintings. Obviously he has a wounded female internally, but they were just so angry and cutting and I mean, I just felt them and...

Gay: But you've got to appreciate that anger he's putting on the canvas there.

Ringrose: I just wanted to take it and put it towards him, because I felt it directed towards me, but I know it's different. That was just my reaction to it. It was my visceral reaction. (Whispers) That's my hidden secret.

Frederick: Nobody will hear, I promise.

Epps: I can't stand the entire Rococo period. I hear that word and I think of a gilded toilet.

Gay: Have you seen it in real life, though? It's much better in real life.

Epps: No that's the thing. It's probably much better in real life.

Gay: It's much better because when you look at it in a textbook, I don't care for it either, but when you're in that environment that is created by the architecture and the art and how those things work together, and you imagine the lives that were lived in that space. It's quite different when you are actually in front of the actual object. I don't particularly like it either.

Palm-Puchner: Well, and when you think about it in contrast to neo-classicism and coming also after this age of enlightenment, when you frame it by what came before it and what came after it,

it is this very interesting, although somewhat nauseating, just you know fluffy, silly, absolutely ephemeral, not having to do with reality.

Ringrose: I kind of like Rococo, but I tend to overdress as well. I can go for the top that is fluffy and silly, unreal.

Palm-Puchner: Really? Rob, who is the artist who puts together the cloth and makes these big installations that often make fun of Rococo paintings? Do you know who I'm talking about?

Ringrose: Shonibare?

Palm-Puchner: Shonibare, Yinka Shonibare. He does these installations where he actually creates African textiles and creates these installations that are recreations of figures of Rococo paintings.

Gay: but often they're made with not actual fabric from the period. It's reproduction fabric. It has to do more with post-colonial things than Rococo. Yeah. I'm with you on that. I've never been a huge fan of Rembrandt. People talk about how Rembrandt is so wonderful and he is, but there are just lots of other really great painters out there. Sorry, you Rembrandt fans.

Palm-Puchner: Have you seen his self-portrait at the Met, though?

Gay: Yes, absolutely. Yeah. I've seen a lot of the stuff. I've been to his house. I can appreciate it as a skilled craftsman, but it just doesn't move me the way some other works of art do, but I can appreciate it. I mean, I don't particularly like it and that's something we've probably all had to do in our classroom is trying to convince students that Rococo is the best thing that was ever out there...

Palm-Puchner: ...and meaningful.

Gay: And underneath we're thinking, "Oh, it's not for me..." which is great. I share that with you.

Epps: And that's the beauty of it. It might not be for us, and we can still have appreciation for it.

Frederick: Well, what a rich conversation today. I feel like we should organize and sell tickets to have people follow behind the four of y'all in a museum or gallery so that we can keep the conversation going. Thanks for a great topic today on 30 Brave Minutes. Tune in next time when we talk about another interesting subject.

Gay: Today's podcast was edited by Richard Gay and transcribed by Janet Gentes. Theme music created by Riley Morton. This content is copyrighted by the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and the College of Arts and Sciences. It is to be used for educational and non-

commercial purposes only and is not to be changed, altered, or used in any commercial endeavor without the express written permission of authorized representatives of UNCP. The views and opinions expressed by the individuals during the course of these discussions are their own and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, and positions of UNCP or any of its subsidiary programs, schools, departments, or divisions. While reasonable efforts have been made to ensure that information discussed is current and accurate at the time of release neither UNCP nor any individual presenting material makes any warranty that the information presented in the original recording has remained accurate due to advances in research, technology, or industry standards. Thanks for listening and go Braves!