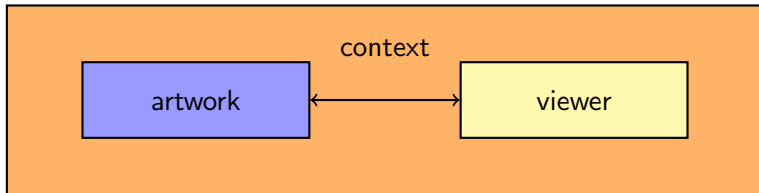
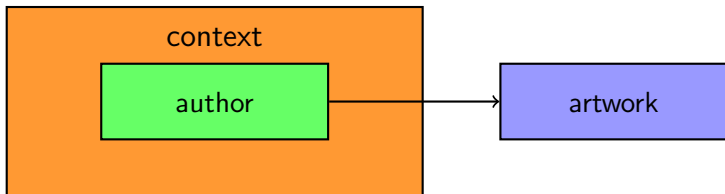


# How Visual Arts Convey Meaning

Songtianze Huang

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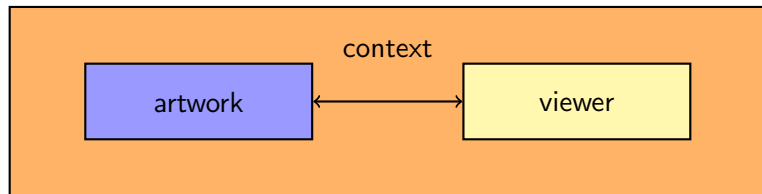
# How art conveys meaning



## Which meaning?

We are narrowing down the problem to: **How does an artwork convey meaning as an independent object?**

Which is the following diagram:



# Four main context

1. Symbolism accepted by art historians.
2. Art theories adapted by the audience.
3. Environment where the artwork is displayed.
4. Pan-context: society.

## Symbolism: the answer is in the apple



(a) *The Arnolfini portrait* (1434),  
Jan van Eyck.



(b) *The Fall of Man* (1628–1629),  
Peter Paul Rubens.

## Art theories adapted by the audience

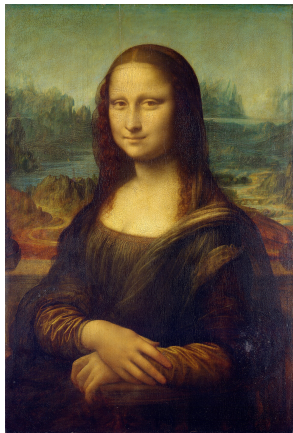


Figure: *Fountain* (1917), Marcel Duchamp.

# Different art theories

**Institutionalism** (how museums affect our view of art?),  
**formalism** (literally),  
**historicism** (focus on historical context),  
**anti-essentialism** (art is just a interconnecting similarity),  
**instrumentalism** (art is used for a specific purpose),  
**mimetic theory** (art imitates reality),  
etc.

# Environment



(a) *Mona Lisa* (c. 1502–1506),  
Leonardo da Vinci.



(b) *Mona Lisa on Display*, photo by  
Songtianze Huang.

# Environment



(c) *Mona Lisa Being Admired*, photo by Songtianze Huang.

# Environment



(c) *Mona Lisa Being Admired*, photo by Songtianze Huang.

(d) *Screenshot of a Figure with Caption*, screenshot by Songtianze Huang.

# Society: massive reproduction



Figure: *Marilyn Diptych* (1962), Andy Warhol.



## Beyond symbols?



(a) A herd of sheep.



(b) A group of workers.

**Figure:** Two frames from *Modern Times*. This is a famous and one of the earliest examples of *Montage*.



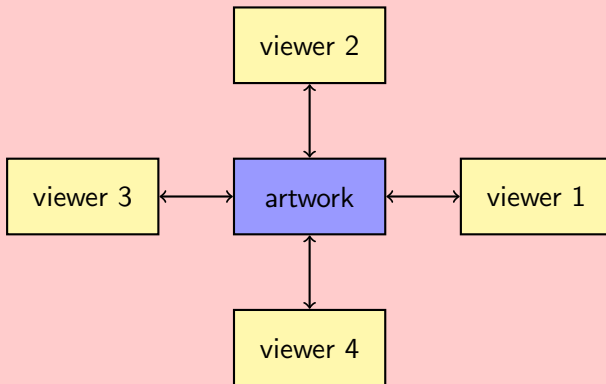


# Subconsciousness

- ▶ Subconsciousness is nonsymbolic.
- ▶ Using subconsciousness, we feel instead of think.
- ▶ We believe, meaning is observer-dependent.

subconscious

the field of meaning



# References

1. *Mythologies*. Roland Barthes. London: Vintage. 2009.
2. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Fredric Jameson. Durham: Duke University Press. 1991.
3. *Ways of Seeing*. John Berger. London: British Broadcasting Corporation. 1972.