

Landscape & Spiritual Experience

Dawn Nicole Hamby

GRADE LEVEL

High School Visual Arts

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How did the landscape of the Gobi desert influence Buddhist monks in creating the Mogao caves?
2. What materials & techniques did artists use to create the 1,000 Buddha motif?
3. Why did artists choose to paint so many images of the Buddha on the ceilings of caves at Mogao? What religious/spiritual significance does repetition have?

INTRODUCTION

In 366 AD, a Buddhist monk named Yuezun found respite from the Gobi Desert near a stream running along the base of a cliff. Looking out at the setting sun, Yuezun had a fantastic vision of the Buddha's halo and its colorful light casting the image of 1,000 Buddhas across the landscape. Transformed, he dug the first of the grottoes at Mogao to mark the holy site.

The Mogao Grottoes are also known as the 1,000 Buddha Caves for the use of a distinctive pattern of images of Buddha painted on the ceiling of many caves. The motif recalls the origin story of the grottoes and represents the omnipresence of Buddha and all those who have achieved Enlightenment across the ages. Many stamps and stamped-images were found in the Library Cave, leading scholars to conclude that the act of stamping was part of the religious practice of monks, patrons, and pilgrims at the Mogao Caves. The repetitive action is seen as a spiritual ritual whereby the participant gains karmic merit in the quest toward Enlightenment. Ultimately, the 1,000 Buddha motif exists as a powerful symbol of hope for a better life (if not now, then in the next reincarnated state) in the desolate landscape of the Gobi desert.

This lesson engages students in imagining how the stark landscape of the Gobi desert formed the creation of the Mogao Grottoes and the 1,000 Buddha motif. Students will also explore techniques used to create the cave murals and utilize printmaking techniques to create their own pattern.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will **discuss** how the landscape of the Gobi desert influenced the creation of the Mogao caves and the 1,000 Buddha motif.
- Students will **analyze** the use of repetition in the 1,000 Buddha motif and its intended meaning.
- Students will **compare & contrast** the 1,000 Buddha motif to the work of Andy Warhol.
- Students will utilize stenciling and/or printmaking techniques to **create** an original composition utilizing repetition.

UNIT LESSONS

Sample lesson may be taught with a simple step-by-step printmaking activity or extended into a longer, student-driven creative project.

1. Introduction to Mogao Grottoes & 1,000 Buddha Pattern
2. Practicing Printmaking Techniques & Intro. to Project
3. Brainstorming & Sketching (Preparing for Original Pattern)
4. Creating Original Artwork
5. Reflection & Critique

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

“Landscape & Spiritual Experience” PowerPoint (created by Dawn Hamby)

Andy Warhol's Marilyn Diptych Explained. (Video.) Tate Modern.
<https://youtu.be/QUoqetH1iJo> Accessed July 9, 2016.

Cave 320 Panorama. Dunhuang Research Academy.
<http://public.dha.ac.cn/quanjing/vr/320/vtour/tour.html> Accessed July 20, 2016.

Cave Temples of Dunhuang: Art, History, and Conservation. (Video.) Getty Research Institute. <https://youtu.be/-Lbyuli9BYI> Accessed July 20, 2016.

Fraser, Sarah. *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618-960.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004. Print.

“Marilyn Diptych 1962.” <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/warhol-marilyn-diptych-t03093> Accessed July 9, 2016.

Ryan, Tina Rivers. “Warhol, Marilyn Diptych.”
<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/pop/a/warhol-marilyn-diptych> Accessed July 9, 2016.

Zhou, Yubin. “Face to Face with Visions of Ancients.”
<http://www.idealshanghai.com/focus/1538/> Accessed July 9, 2016.

STANDARDS

California State Standards: Visual Arts, 9-12 (Proficient)

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design

1.4 Analyze and describe how the composition of a work of art is affected by the use of a particular principle of design.

Skills, Processes, Materials, and Tools

2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.

Role and Development of the Visual Arts

3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

Derive Meaning

4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

SAMPLE LESSON

Printmaking as Spiritual Experience

TIME REQUIREMENT

2+ CLASS PERIODS (85 minute-period)

This lesson may be taught with a simple step-by-step printmaking activity or extended into a longer, student-driven creative project.

EQUIPMENT

Laptop w/PowerPoint, A/V digital projector, air-dry clay, needles/toothpicks, scissors, copies of possible patterns (i.e. Buddhas, “hope” characters, etc.), pencils/pens, paper, or other printmaking materials, if desired

TEACHER PREPARATION

1. Familiarize/Study the Gobi Desert, Mogao Caves & 1,000 Buddha motif.
2. Backwards Design: Complete the example activity or other printmaking technique to align with your curriculum.
3. Gather supplies & make copies of pattern images (i.e. Buddha, “Hope” characters, etc.)

LESSON PROCEDURE

1. Aesthetic Scanning – Cave 320 replica (or Other)
 - a. Photosphere/Panorama Option – *Students will access the 360-degree photosphere of the Cave 320 replica on their iPhones or iPads. (Choose a panorama at <http://tour.dha.ac.cn/quanjing/flash/index.html>) This will allow students to tip & tilt their device to view the cave in every direction, giving them control over their perspective and what they notice. The purpose is to simulate the visually rich experience of entering the cave and discovering the multitude of*

images. Allow students 2-5 minutes to virtually explore the cave (quietly if possible) before sharing interesting things they notice.

- b. **Print Option** – *As an alternative, print images and details of the Cave 320 replica (available from Getty images). Students will quietly practice close looking for 2-3 minutes then share interesting things they notice. While not as experiential as the photosphere option, this method also engages students in taking in the rich imagery, noticing details, describing what they see, and analyzing artists' choices.*
- c. **Strategy Procedure:**
 - i. Students access photosphere or look at printed images.
 - ii. Introduce cave by having students imagine they have just discovered a painted cave in the middle of the Gobi desert. (Option: Tell students about Wang Yuanlu, Aurel Stein, Paul Pelliot or other 20th century explorers.)
 - iii. Students look silently for 1-2 minutes, mentally noting what they see/find interesting in the cave.
 - iv. "Whip" around the room – Each student shares 1 thing they see. (Focus on direct observation, like playing "I Spy.")
 - v. Ask: Why do you think this cave was created?

2. Landscape: Mogao Caves, Dunhuang & Gobi Desert

This lesson is designed to lead students into the experience of traversing the Gobi desert along the Silk Road so that they can imagine why the Mogao Grottoes & the 1,000 Buddha pattern were created.

- a. Intro. Location (Gobi Desert, Dunhuang, Silk Road)
- b. Yuezun & the Mogao Grottoes
- c. 1,000 Buddha Motif – How was it made?

3. Printmaking Activity – Poke-Transfer Technique

Directions:

- a. Roll clay into a smooth ball between your palms. Smooth out any wrinkles with fingertips.
- b. Place clay on table and flatten to about ½ inch thick using palm. (If it gets too thin, the clay could break.)
- c. Gently pinch into desired shape. (Raindrop shape show to recall hope of water in the desert.)
- d. Use straw or pencil to make a hole.
- e. Cut & place stencil on clay.
- f. Use needle to poke holes. (If using toothpick, space holes to avoid ripping paper).
- g. Use pencil to smooth out transfer lines. Repeat on other side if desired.
- h. Air dry clay takes 2-3 days to harden, then paint or seal to protect it!

4. Conclusion – 1,000 Buddha Pattern as Spiritual Hope in the Desert

5. Extension Activity: Andy Warhol

- a. Does the 1,000 Buddha motif remind you of any famous modern artist? (Andy Warhol)
- b. Compare & contrast techniques & concept

AFTER-LESSON ACTIVITIES

- Compare & Contrast with Andy Warhol's work (Explore visual similarities & conceptual differences)
- Brainstorming & Sketches for Personal Pattern
- Student-teacher conference or small-group review of project ideas
- Creative Project utilizing Transfer-method (or other printmaking technique) in Person Pattern Artwork
- Student work-time
- Written Artist's Statement & Reflection
- Summative Critique of Pattern projects

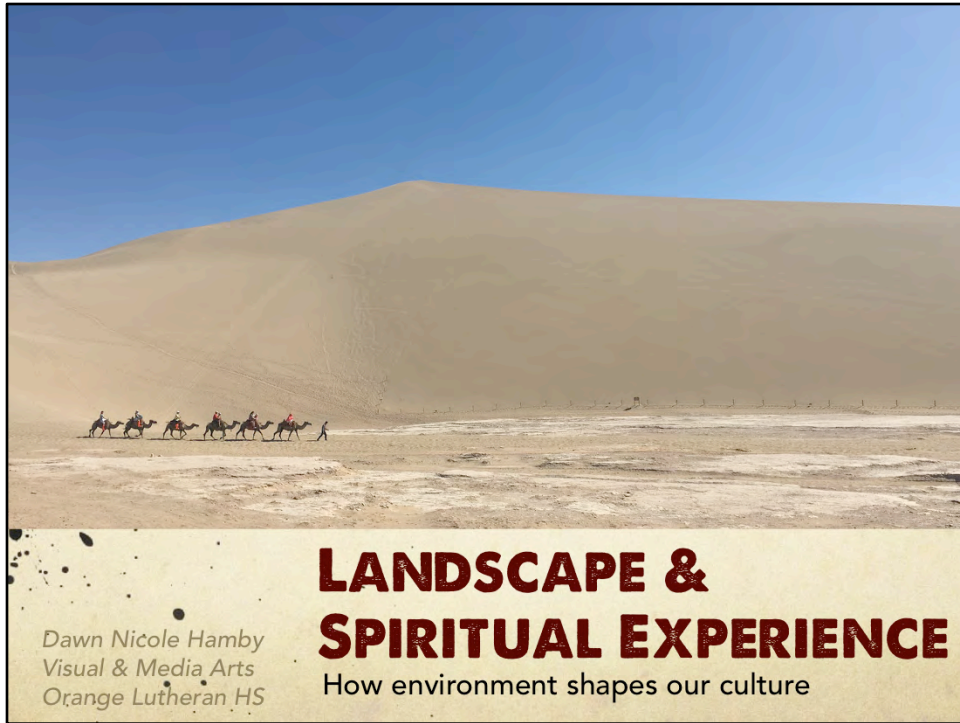
ASSESSMENT

- Students will write an Artist's Statement about the significance of their use of repetition and reflect on their process in creating the work.
- Students will create an original artwork utilizing a printmaking technique in a personally significant pattern. (Quality criteria determined by teacher for appropriate level)

WARM UP

- Take out your object that represents something you did this summer.
- If you forgot your object, draw a quick sketch or get ready to pantomime (act it out)!
- Show & tell with your Cohort about your object/summer experience. (1 min./person)

On the first day of school, I will assign my Sculpture/Ceramics students to bring in one object that represents an experience they had this summer. I will use this Warm Up on Day 2 as an Ice Breaker and a way to share my experience traveling to Dunhuang to see the Mogao Grottoes.



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LANDSCAPE & SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

How environment shapes our culture

Photo Credit: Dawn Hamby

OBJECTIVES

- 9-12th Visual Arts, 85-min. periods (1 class – 2 wks)
- Discuss how landscape and our environment shapes the way we do things (culture) and what we make (art).
- Investigate Cave 320 from the Mogao Cave sites & discuss how & why it was created.
- Brainstorm ideas for an original artwork.
- Use printmaking techniques to create an original artwork.

Background:

I designed this lesson for my Sculpture/Ceramics 1 course, which is a 9-12th grade mixed, introductory course. Some students will have taken another Art or Design course, but for most, this is their first Art class in high school. So, I start with the basics. This lesson integrates printmaking & basic pinching techniques while introducing students to the conceptual & historical significance of art objects.

AESTHETIC SCANNING

- 360° Photosphere of Mogao Cave 320 Replica



Panoramas available from Dunhuang Research Academy at <http://tour.dha.ac.cn/quanjing/flash/index.html>
Cave 320: <http://public.dha.ac.cn/quanjing/vr/320/vtour/tour.html>

Strategy Procedure:

- Students access photosphere or look at printed images.
- Introduce cave by having students imagine they have just discovered a painted cave in the middle of the Gobi desert. (Option: Tell students about Wang Yuanlu, Aurel Stein, Paul Pelliot or other 20th century explorers.)
- Students look silently for 1-2 minutes, mentally noting what they see/find interesting in the cave.
- “Whip” around the room – Each student shares 1 thing they see. (Focus on direct observation, like playing “I Spy.”)

Ask: Why do you think this cave was created?



Photo Credit: Getty Images

Technology Alternative: Print static images of Cave 320 replica. Have students look closely in pairs.



Photo Credit: Getty Images

MAP



Cave 320 is one of nearly 500 Buddhist shrine caves called the Mogao Caves. The Mogao Caves are located 16 miles southwest of the ancient city of Dunhuang, an important oasis on the Silk Road in the middle of the Gobi desert. While neither just one road nor just for trading silk, ancient trading routes stretched from Antioch on the Mediterranean coast to Cha'ang (now Xian), the ancient capitol of China. Dunhuang lay at the crossroads of routes skirting north and south of the Taklamakan desert and stretching south into India. Try to imagine what it would have been like to reach this tiny oasis town after months of crossing the desert on camel back...

Turn & Talk – What's the longest journey you've ever been on?

Antioch trivia – the term "Christians" was first used in Antioch



Photo Credits: Dawn Hamby, Nancy Sato

Dunhuang lies in between the Gobi & Taklimakan deserts, two of the driest places on earth. You know Tatooine, the desert planet in Star Wars? Well, that was actually filmed in Tunisia, but I'd swear that George Lucas came to Dunhuang for inspiration!

- desolate, no rocks, no plants, just sand for as far as the eye can see
- Camel ride

Turn & talk – What is the hottest, driest place you've ever been?



Photo & Video Credit: Dawn Hamby

Crescent Moon Lake in Singing Sand Mountains

So try to hold on to those memories of a long journey and the hottest place you've ever been. Now try to multiply that over weeks and months of travel... How would you feel?

In the modern world, we are far separated from the natural environment. From the moment the alarm clock wakes us, we move and live in a world mostly constructed by human hands and managed through technology. Think about it – you brush your teeth with a tool of technology and medical science, made of man-made materials with a chemically-derived paste and water transported via a mechanical wonder over a mountain range from a river two states away. From our homes to our cars, from the streets we drive on to cities we live in, from toothpaste to iPhones – our world is one we have built and largely control. Try to name one thing that you do during the day that is a wholly natural experience – one determined by geography, weather & nature alone. **Can you think of any? Raise hands!** (e.g. running, surfing, watching sunrise/sunset)

Now, imagine a world wholly beyond your control, one in which the natural elements

YUEZUN & THE MOGAO GROTTOES



Video Credit: Dawn Hamby

Note: Video shows a few unpainted, unprotected caves on the edge of the Mogao site as you would discover them in riding in on a (very fast) camel.

From <http://www.idealshanghai.com/focus/1538/>:

According to legend, near sunset more than 1,600 years ago, a monk named Yuezun was traveling to Sanwei Mountain near Dunhuang, in today's Gansu Province. Exhausted, he decided to take a short break. As Yuezun rested, a vision appeared in the setting sun before him: Buddha's halo. The color-filled phenomenon on the horizon over the Gobi Desert cast its light onto Sanwei Mountain, revealing a thousand Buddhas bathed in a golden glow. Awestruck, Yuezun fell to his knees and began to pray. Convinced that the area was a holy place, the monk raised money and dug the first grotto in the cliff face opposite the mountain, dedicating it to the Buddha.

From this starting point in AD 366, hundreds of grottoes were built on the site over more than 1,000 years; the vision seen by a weary traveler led to the creation of one of the largest and greatest cultural and historical sites in the world: the Mogao Grottoes.

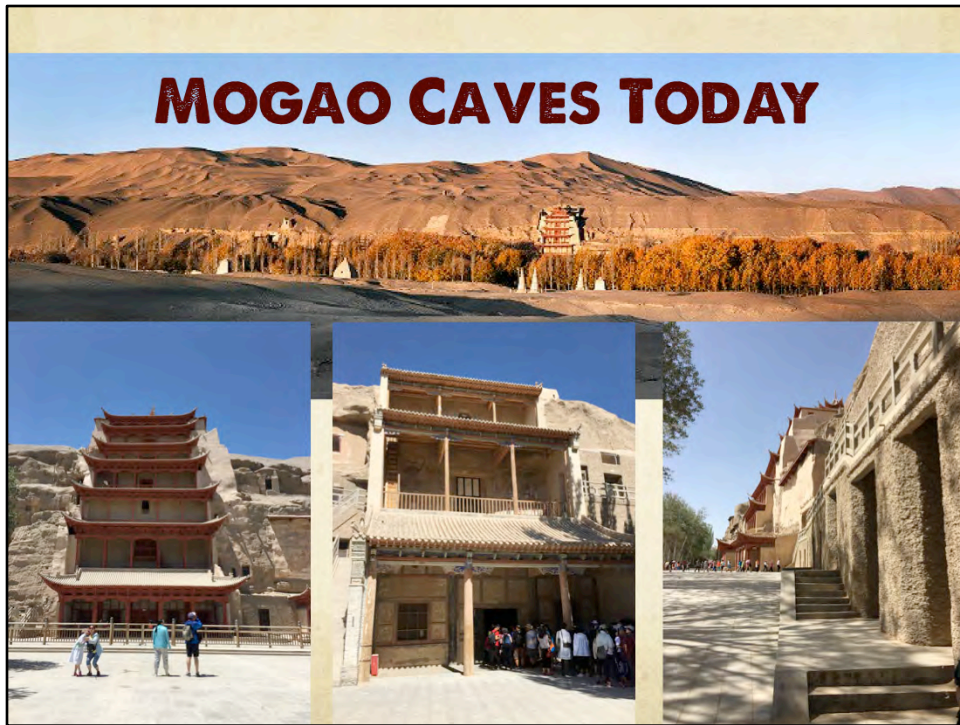
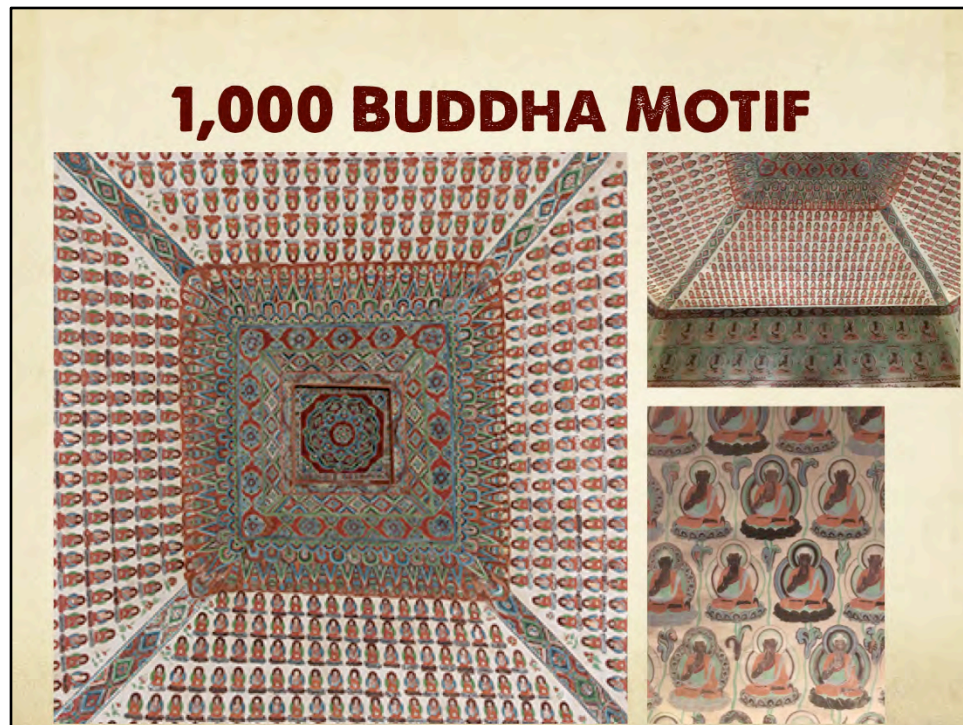


Photo Credit: Dawn Hamby

Rediscovered in the early 1900s, the complex includes 735 caves where Buddhist monks once lived, worked, meditated and prayed. 487 painted shrine caves have survived, many in excellent condition. A protective structure and doors on each cave were constructed in the 1960's and the Mogao caves were named a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1987. 70,000 visitors a year flock to Dunhuang and the Mogao caves to get a glimpse of life on the Silk Road.



Images of the replica Cave 320 at the Getty Center

The caves at Mogao are known for the use of the 1,000 Buddha motif. The motif recalls the origin story of the grottoes and represents the omnipresence of Buddha and all those who have achieved Enlightenment across the ages. While the pattern is remarkably consistent, upon close inspection, you can see that each Buddha image was individually painted! So, how did they do it?



Making the plaster ground – The Grottoes were dug out of the loosely-structured sandstone aggregate that is vulnerable to collapse. The rough cave surface was not good for painting and had to be thickly covered with a plaster ground before painting.

1. Coarse Mud layer – Made from local sandy-earth mixed with straw and water. This layer was several inches thick.
2. Fine mud layer – made from local washed clay mixed with fibers and water.
3. Powder layer – the fine mud layer was covered with a thin, smooth layer of powdered kaolin – a fine white clay used to manufacture porcelain – or lime or gypsum, mixed with water.
4. Gridding – For patterns like the 1,000 Buddha motif, the surface was then gridded with a red pigment.
5. Drawing – Images were then drawn by hand or stenciled using a pounce.
6. Painting – The images were painted in brilliant colors using a side-by-side technique. Paints made with mineral pigments are still as brilliant today as the day they were painted while paints made with natural, plant-based pigments have faded or oxidized.
7. Linework – Finally, line-work was skillfully added to give each image crisp definition. Some artists even used gold leaf to make their work shine!



Highly skilled artists used several methods to create the intricate mural paintings in the Mogao Grottoes. Preliminary sketches found in the Library Cave (148) show that artists drew conceptual sketches before starting a cave to determine what images would be included. However, it seems like these were for brainstorming ideas only as the sketches don't match the final compositions in the caves themselves. (It's natural for the idea and imagery to change throughout the artistic process!)

Many images were drawn then painted freehand on the wall from the artist's experience in drawing similar images. This took a great amount of skill and practice! More regular patterns like the 1,000 Buddha motif were gridded to ensure a consistent composition.

For very detailed and important images, artists would use a type of stencil. The image was drawn on paper and perfected, then small holes were poked in the drawing. Finally, the paper was placed on the wall, and a cloth pouch filled with pigment, called a pouch, was tapped over the holes. Dots of pigment all along the stencil would transfer to the wall, creating a perfect print of the image.

Notes:

Preliminary Sketches from Cave 148 – preliminary sketches, less like plans to scale and more like concept sketches



Today, we will use a similar method to transfer an image onto a clay pendant.

- Pass out materials – clay, needles, & image handouts
- Students choose an image and cut it out of the handout then follow steps:
 1. Roll clay into a smooth ball between your palms. Smooth out any wrinkles with fingertips.
 2. Place clay on table and flatten to about ½ inch thick using palm. (If it gets too thin, the clay could break.)
 3. Gently pinch into desired shape. (Raindrop shape shown to recall hope of water in the desert.)
 4. Use straw or pencil to make a hole.
 5. Cut & place stencil on clay.
 6. Use needle to poke holes. (If using toothpick, space holes to avoid ripping paper).
 7. Use pencil to smooth out transfer lines. Repeat on other side if desired.

Air dry clay takes 2-3 days to harden, then paint or seal to protect it!



So, let's return to why the caves were created.. What do you think?
Remind students of Gobi desert experience.

Notes:

- Patron's desire for social status
- strong belief in Buddhism/karmic merit
- HOPE for a better life/reincarnation

Many stamps and stamped-images were found in the Library Cave, leading scholars to conclude that the act of stamping was part of the religious practice of monks, patrons, and pilgrims at the Mogao Caves. The repetitive action is seen as one of spiritual ritual whereby the participant gains karmic merit in the quest toward Enlightenment. Ultimately, the 1,000 Buddha motif exists as a powerful symbol of hope for a better life (if not now, then in the next reincarnated state) in the desolate landscape of the Gobi desert.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

- What has been your “desert?”
- What is your “oasis?”
- What do you return to again & again for refreshment & hope?



Brainstorming for personal project (or reflection on lesson)

WRAP UP

- What were the 3 methods artists used to draw images in the caves?
- What are the two deserts bordering Dunhuang?
- Who was the monk who created the first cave?



Ticket-out-the-Door / Closure:

What were the 3 methods artists used to draw images in the caves? Freehand, grid, pounce

What are the two deserts bordering Dunhuang? Gobi & Taklamakan

Who was the monk who created the first cave? Yuezun

AESTHETIC SCANNING



Extension Activity:

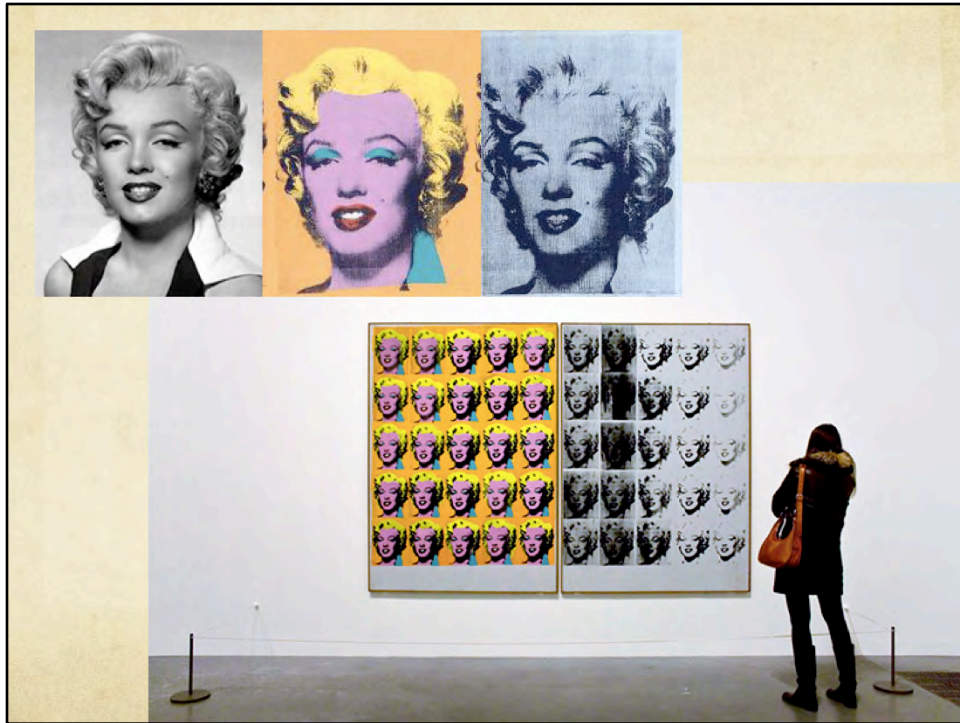
On Day 2 or later in Unit, use Aesthetic Scanning to look at the work of Andy Warhol. While students have probably seen this motif or style, they may have never thought about *why* Warhol chose to use repetition in this way. Ask students about fading imagery, intentional distortion, use of color vs. black & white, use of gold background, etc. to draw out their thinking. Then, compare to 1,000 Buddha motif.

Notes:

Marilyn Diptych, Andy Warhol, 1962, acrylic silkscreen on silver canvas

- Created after Marilyn Monroe's death from a publicity photo from the film Niagara
- Death & the cult of celebrity
- Ubiquitous presence in media
- Fading image
- Warhol = Byzantine Christian
- More than 6x9 ft
- All over composition, no focal point

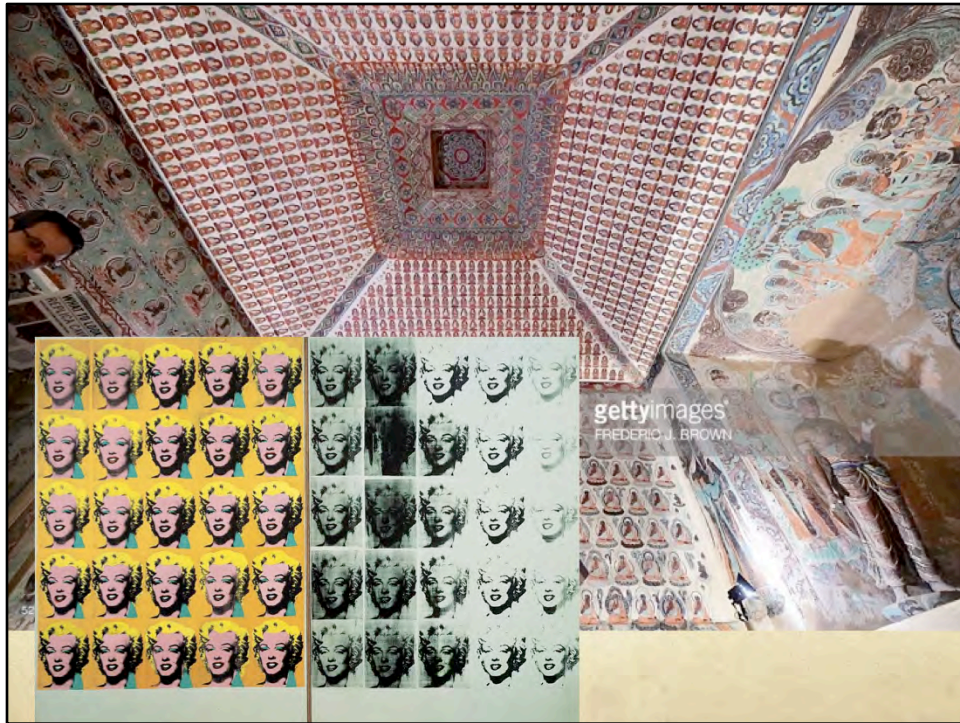
WHY did Andy Warhol create this artwork?



Marilyn Diptych, Andy Warhol, 1962, acrylic silkscreen on silver canvas

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WHY did Andy Warhol create this artwork?



There are several obvious **visual similarities** between these works. ***What are they?*** (grid composition, repetition, lack of focal point – except Cave 320 has a statue niche, even the process of creation was somewhat similar)

BUT it is vital to recognize that these works are separated by more than 1,200 years and 6,800 miles (11,000 km)! Each artist had unique reasons for using these visual devices... Discuss or have students compare/contrast in writing.

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