

VIRTUAL DATE NIGHT

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

CONVERSATION STARTERS



At first glance, these two paintings don't seem to have much in common. One is from 1750; the other is from 1964. One is painted in great detail; the other is an abstracted screen print. But these two works of art share a common thread. They are both history paintings, a genre of art that has been around for centuries and was long considered one of the highest art forms.

The painting on the left depicts Alexander the Great after defeating Persian Emperor Darius III, a very popular subject in painting at the time. The painting on the right presents aspects of life in the mid-1960s through images from popular media like television and magazines. Notice images of John F. Kennedy, NASA astronauts and trajectories, urban construction, and highways.

- Which painting do each of you like most? Why?
- How does the concept of “history being written by the victors” come through in each painting?
- Context matters. The painting of Alexander is thought to have been made for an aristocratic home, while *Skyway* was commissioned for the outside of the American Pavilion at the 1965 world’s fair. How does the context of each painting affect the message it sends?
- What do you think each artist is trying to say about the moment in history they are depicting?
- *Skyway* is composed entirely of images from magazines like *Life* and stills from televised JFK speeches. How do you think mass media has changed the way history is recorded?
- If you were to collaborate on a history painting about this moment in time, what kinds of imagery would you include?
- Which style do you think is better suited to capture a moment in time?

Images: Robert Rauschenberg, *Skyway*, 1964, oil and silkscreen on canvas, Dallas Museum of Art, The Roberta Coke Camp Fund, The 500, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. Mark Shepherd, Jr. and General Acquisitions Fund, 1986.8.a–b, © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; Francesco Salvator Fontebasso, *Family of Darius Before Alexander*, 1750, oil on canvas, Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Colonel C. Michael Paul, 1964.110

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