



Mark Tansey

FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

CLASSROOM CONNECTION

- » Some of Tansey's source material for this painting are monuments and memorials. What are the purpose of these sculptures, and whom do they represent?
- » Read *Ozymandias* by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Imagine if you were to come upon *Landscape* what would you see? What would you know from this scene about the society that had come before? Write a poem from the perspective of this visitor.
- » Respond artistically to this work. What are the aspects of your local state or town that should be part of your Mark Tansey-like creation?

Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley
[poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/46565](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/46565)

Mark Tansey was born in 1949 in San Jose, California. Tansey grew up in a family of artists; his parents were both art history teachers, and his mother also worked in a library.

After graduation from the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles in 1972, Tansey experimented with an artistic style known as "Funk Art." Funk Art was primarily based in the San Francisco Bay area and was a departure from Abstract Expressionism. While the Abstract Expressionists generated work in the 1950s that was heavy with personal expression or socio-political themes, Funk artists of the 1960s began creating art that was often light-hearted and shared some elements of both Pop Art and Dada. Tansey always wanted to be a representational painter, and so he combined this style with influences from the Funk Art movement to create his own unique vision and process.

Tansey's process includes the use of the photocopier as a tool of his art making. The photocopier, and Tansey's picture library, arose from a desire for more versatility in the picture-making process. The photocopier has the ability to duplicate any flat image, and allows the artist to lighten or darken it, as well as to manipulate the image's size and create multiples. Tansey paints using a single, mixed color that is applied to the entire surface of a gessoed canvas. The paint is then removed through a variety of means, and Tansey describes it as somewhere between finger painting and watercolor.

In working this way, Tansey must always keep in mind the varying characteristics of the paint as it dries. He said: "In the first fifteen minutes fluid washes and gradations can be achieved. Human figures can be painted in the first two hours. After three hours tacky paint can be blotted and smudged to create such naturalizing effects as atmospheric perspective and obscure dusting. After five hours only scraping or abrasion is possible. To accommodate the drying process, I block the pictures out into compositional areas that can be achieved in one sitting, taking care that the paint notations and drying times correspond." (Danto & Sweet, 1992)

Although titled *Landscape*, Mark Tansey's painting has little to do with nature. Although at first glance the work looks like a landscape with a horizon line and what appears to be a mountain, as we look more closely the scene is revealed as created and imaginative. The mountain is no longer a mountain, but a heap of crumbled sculptures.

The figures have likenesses to famous men and monuments, including the Sphinx, Constantine, George Washington, Stalin, Hitler, Lenin, Augustus, and Julius Caesar, along with assorted pharaohs and Mayan kings, among others. They have been placed together in this discarded heap in a barren landscape. (Serwer, 1996) The message is contradictory—leaders' legacies are preserved through art, but whose legacies will escape the dustbin of history?



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Mark Tansey, *Landscape* (detail), 1994,
oil on canvas, 71 3/4 x 144 1/2 in.

Danto, A. C., & Sweet, C. (1992). *Mark Tansey: visions and revisions*. New York: Abrams.

Serwer, J. D. (1996). *American kaleidoscope: Themes and perspectives in recent art*. Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Sims, P., & Tansey, M. (1990). *Mark Tansey: Art and source*. Seattle: Seattle Art Museum.