

The Artist's Hand

The oldest form of self-expression

Art in the Beginning

The human hand has been at the center of visual art history not just as the main tool of creation, but also as an important focus of representation, revealing the development of artistic skills and cultural trends in key periods.

Painted hands may be the oldest form of art in human history.

Cave of Hands

Cueva de las Manos ([Spanish](#) for **Cave of the Hands** or **Cave of Hands**) is a cave and complex of [rock art](#) sites in the [province](#) of [Santa Cruz, Argentina](#), 163 km (101 mi) south of the town of [Perito Moreno](#). It is named for the hundreds of [paintings](#) of hands [stenciled](#), in multiple collages, on the rock walls. The art was created in several waves between 7,300 BC and 700 AD, during the [Archaic period](#) of [pre-Columbian South America](#). The age of the paintings was calculated from the remains of bone pipes used for spraying the paint on the wall of the cave to create the artwork, [radiocarbon dating](#) of the artwork, and [stratigraphic dating](#).

The site is considered by some scholars to be the best material evidence of early South American [hunter-gatherer](#) groups. Argentine surveyor and archaeologist [Carlos J. Gradín](#) and his team conducted the most important research on the site in 1964, when they began excavating sites during a 30-year study of cave art in and around Cueva de las Manos. The site is a [National Historic Monument](#) in Argentina and a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#)

https://www.google.com/search?q=Cueva+de+las+Manos&source=lmns&tbm=vid&hl=en-US&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi7nc3jx635AhVwKjQIHQWYDXsQ_AUoBHoECAEQBA#fpstate=ive&vld=ci:d:2c4e068b,vid:z1k4rdal-bQ,st:0

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/worlds-oldest-known-figurative-paintings-discovered-borneo-cave-180970747/> (petroglyphs in Borneo)





The Hopi

The healer's hand symbol holds significance among the [Hopi tribe](#) in Northeastern Arizona. According to the origins of the Hopi clan, the Maasaw instructed them to find their home. As a result, journeying the earth in search of their center place while cultivating the land became a common practice among the Hopi tribe. Some clans went clockwise and the other counterclockwise and placed the insignia as hieroglyphs wherever they went, representing where they were along the journey.

Many Pueblo tribes, including Hopi, consider Chaco to be the ancestral ground of their people and the center the Maasaw talked about.

It holds importance as a cultural hub for the people who traveled here, promoting the sharing of knowledge and beliefs. Knowledge of [healing](#) practices and ceremonies was perhaps one of the subjects discussed upon at Chaco.

A possible explanation for the healer's hand symbol can then be reserved for shamans who have navigated the tumultuous journey of life and gained spiritual knowledge of the universe.

Shamans are not necessarily healers but rather those individuals who have mastery of some form of knowledge.



Mississippian Native American Symbol

The Mississippian culture was a Native American civilization that flourished in what is now the Midwestern, Eastern, and Southeastern United States from approximately 800 CE to 1600 CE, varying regionally. It was known for building large, earthen platform mounds, and often other shaped mounds as well.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8fg9orvPsg>







Ikenga (Igbo people)

- <https://smarthistory.org/ikenga/>

Ghana

The Symbol of an Egg in a Hand **depicts an Asante Proverb that cautions "The Powerful Rulers to be Firm but Prudent in their Rule:**
"To be a Ruler is like holding an Egg in the Hand; if it is pressed too hard it breaks, but if not held tightly enough it may slip and smash on the ground."





Hamsa

The hamsa has been variously interpreted by scholars as a Jewish, Christian, or Islamic amulet, and as a pagan fertility symbol. Yet even as the magical form remains shrouded in mystery and scholars debate nearly every aspect of its emergence, it is recognized today as a [kabbalistic](#) amulet and as an important symbol in Jewish art.

As the references to Fatima (Mohammed's daughter) and to [Miriam](#) (Moses' sister) suggest, the amulet carries significance to both Jews and Muslims. One of the most prominent early appearances of the hamsa is the image of a large open hand that appears on the Puerta Judiciaria (Gate of Judgment) of the Alhambra, a 14th-century Islamic fortress in southern Spain.

The Alhambra hand of Fatima seems to draw upon the Arabic word "khamsa," which means "five," a number that itself is identified with fighting the Evil Eye. The Alhambra motif, as well as other Spanish and Moorish hand images, hints at the five pillars of Islam (faith, fasting, pilgrimage, prayer, and tax) in the five fingers of the hand.

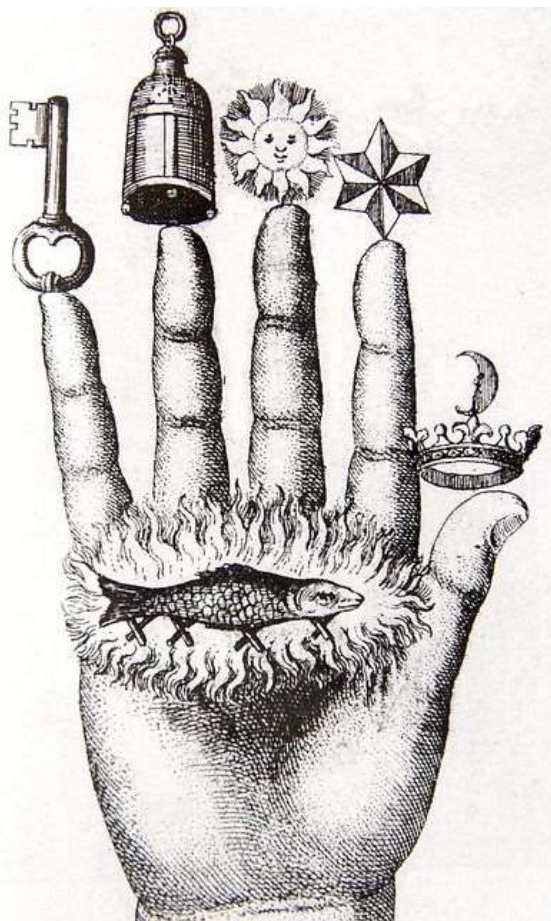
According to Islamic folklore, Fatima's hand became a symbol of faith after her husband Ali came home with a new wife one day. Fatima, who at the time had been cooking, dropped the soup ladle she had been using. Yet she was so preoccupied by the new arrival that she continued stirring using her bare hand, hardly noticing that she was burning herself.

<https://www.jewelryshoppingguide.com/the-hamsa-hand-meaning-in-jewelry/>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKob1IFyzYE> contemporary hamsa art

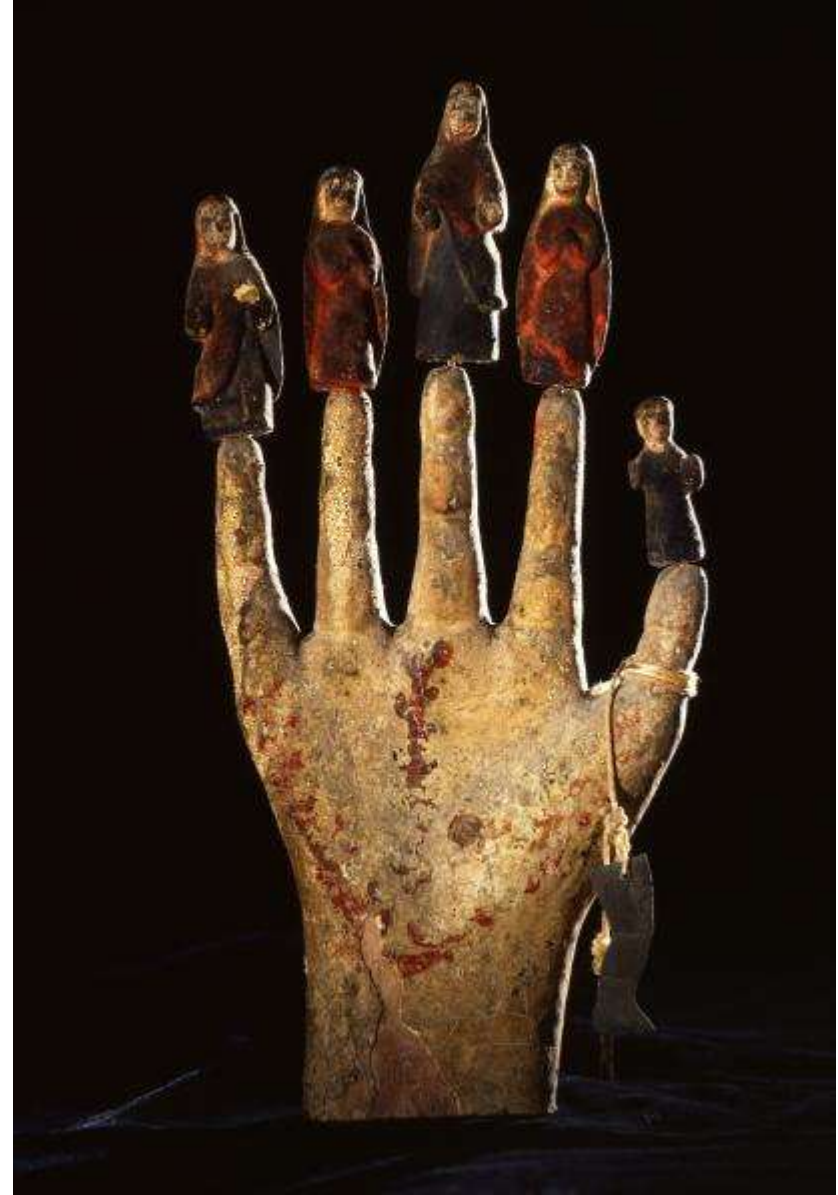






La Mano Ponderosa

The All-Powerful Hand symbolizes the wounded hand of the crucified Christ. On its fingertips are representations of the Holy Family. The infant Jesus' position on the thumb represents his importance, since much of a hand's function depends on the thumb. The Virgin sits atop the index finger followed by St. Joseph, as well as St. Anne and St. Joachim, Mary's parents. The inclusion of the extended family reflects the Latin American and Spanish regard for the family above the individual. In this santo, the red marks on the palm represent Christ's wounds. The two metal offerings in the shape of a leg and a human chest attached to the thumb were placed there by a worshiper whose ailments were healed. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-americas/latin-america-after-independence/art-of-mexico-in-the-18th-and-19th-centuries/v/retable-all-powerful-hand>

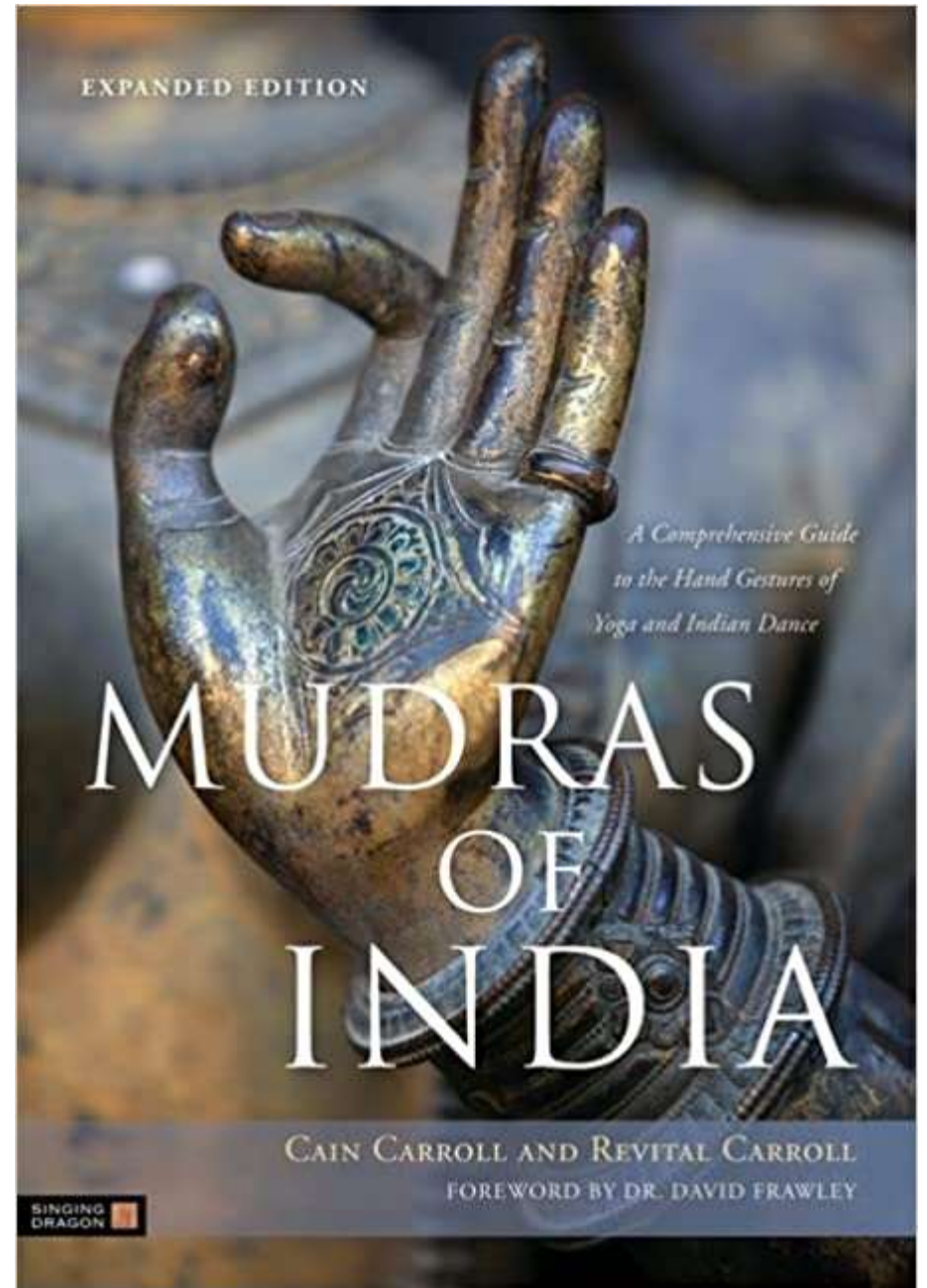
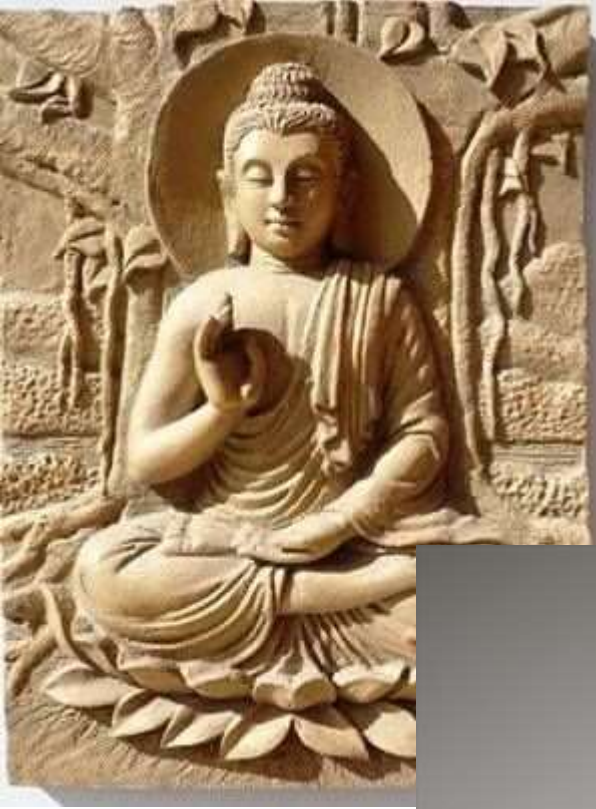


Mudras

In Hindu and Buddhist art, **a hand gesture used to express the meaning of an image of a divinity**. While some mudras involve the entire body, most are performed with the hands and fingers. Mudras denote specific behaviors, actions or states of mind.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSl4uDa-VEc>
- <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-complex-meanings-hand-gestures-buddhist-art> (mudras outlined)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yU4jHoWLGCK> (Buddhist sculpture)





Mehndi

Mehndi is a form of body art and temporary skin decoration from the Indian subcontinent usually drawn on hands or legs, in which decorative designs are created on a person's body, using a paste, created from the powdered dry leaves of the henna plant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3AQ8U2wqYc>

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qra-14dpsTk>









Heart in Hand

The Heart in Hand emblem has a rich symbolic heritage in the Northeast. Traditionally, it is said to emblemize charity, or selfless action that originates in the heart: "Whatever the hand may find to do, may the heart go forth in union."

The **Heart in Hand** or **Heart-in-Hand** is a [symbol](#) of a [heart](#) in an open [palm](#),^[1] and is symbolic of charity, given from the heart.^[2] It is an easily recognizable symbol in the [Northeastern United States](#) and used by the [Shakers](#)^[1] as a pictorial reminder of the words of Mother [Ann Lee](#), the founder of the Shaker sect, who promoted a simple life of hard work and spirituality, "Put your hands to work, and your hearts to God."^{[1][3]} The image is typical of the Shaker attitude, and also implies a loving welcome. Also used by the Odd Fellows:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhDzcKY1Q6I&t=53s>



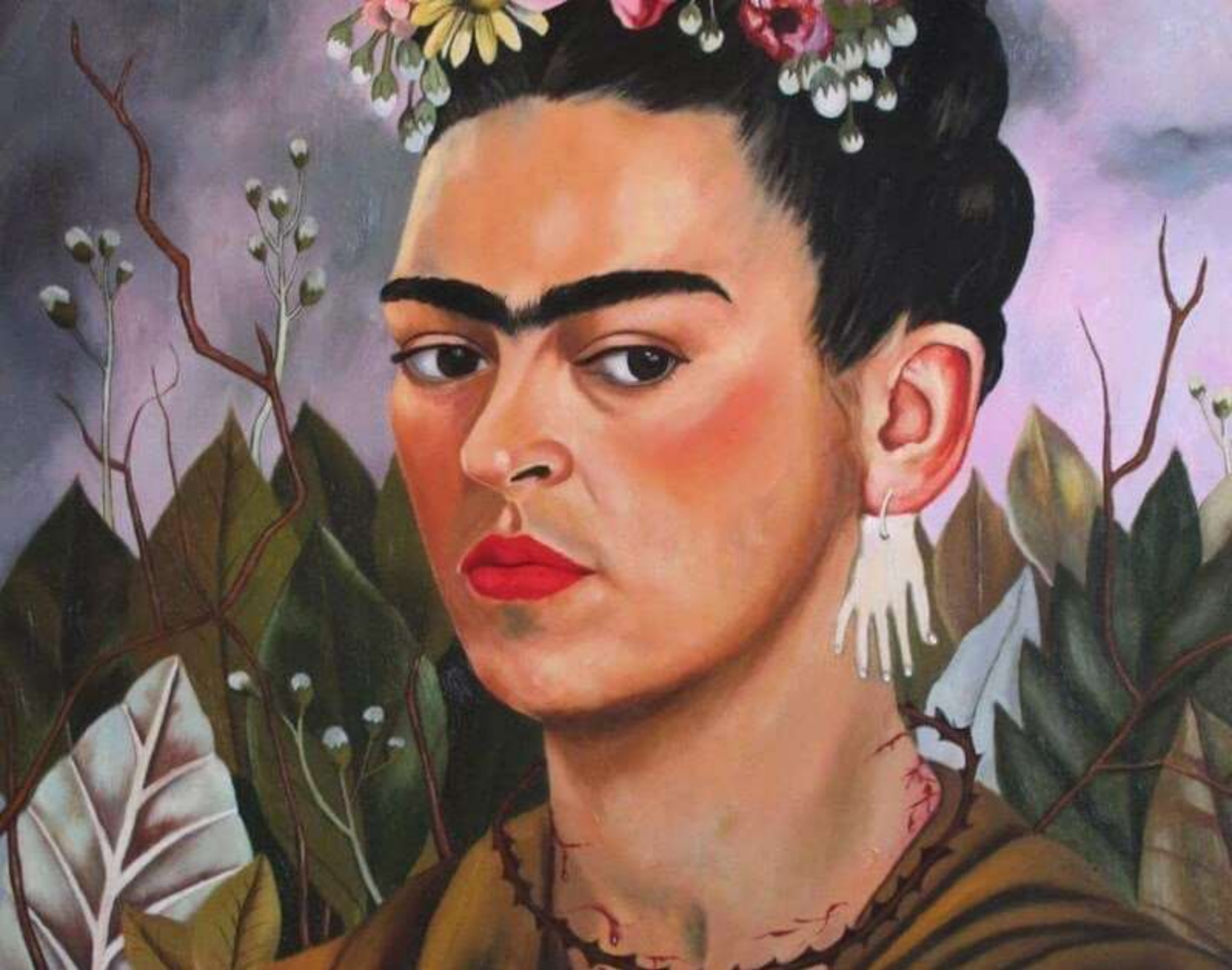


Hand Motif in Mexican Folk Art

The hand motif in Mexican jewelry probably increased after Pablo Picasso's gift of the silver hand-shaped earrings to Frida Kahlo in the 1930's or 40's. She painted herself in them and many nicho boxes and retablos created around Frida's image contain those famous paintings. Some Mexican artisans make beautiful hand-shaped earrings.

- <https://zinniafolkarts.com/blogs/news/12957621-what-is-the-significance-of-hands-in-mexican-folk-art>
- <https://artradarjournal.com/2021/11/17/who-were-pablo-picasso-y-frida-kahlo/> (in Spanish)











Henry Moore

In these drawings Henry Moore describes the aged body. He made a series of drawings of his own hands when he was eighty-one and suffering from ill-health, and he did more of Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin's gnarled joints. 'Hands can convey so much' he said, 'they can beg or refuse, take or give, be open or clenched, show content or anxiety. They can be young or old, beautiful or deformed'.

Moore believed his prints were part of a larger history of sculpture and painting, in which artists have shown feelings through their portrayal of hands.

<https://www.facebook.com/henrymoorestudios/videos/an-introduction-to-this-living-hand-edmund-de-waal-presents-henry-moore/2971663899827926/>



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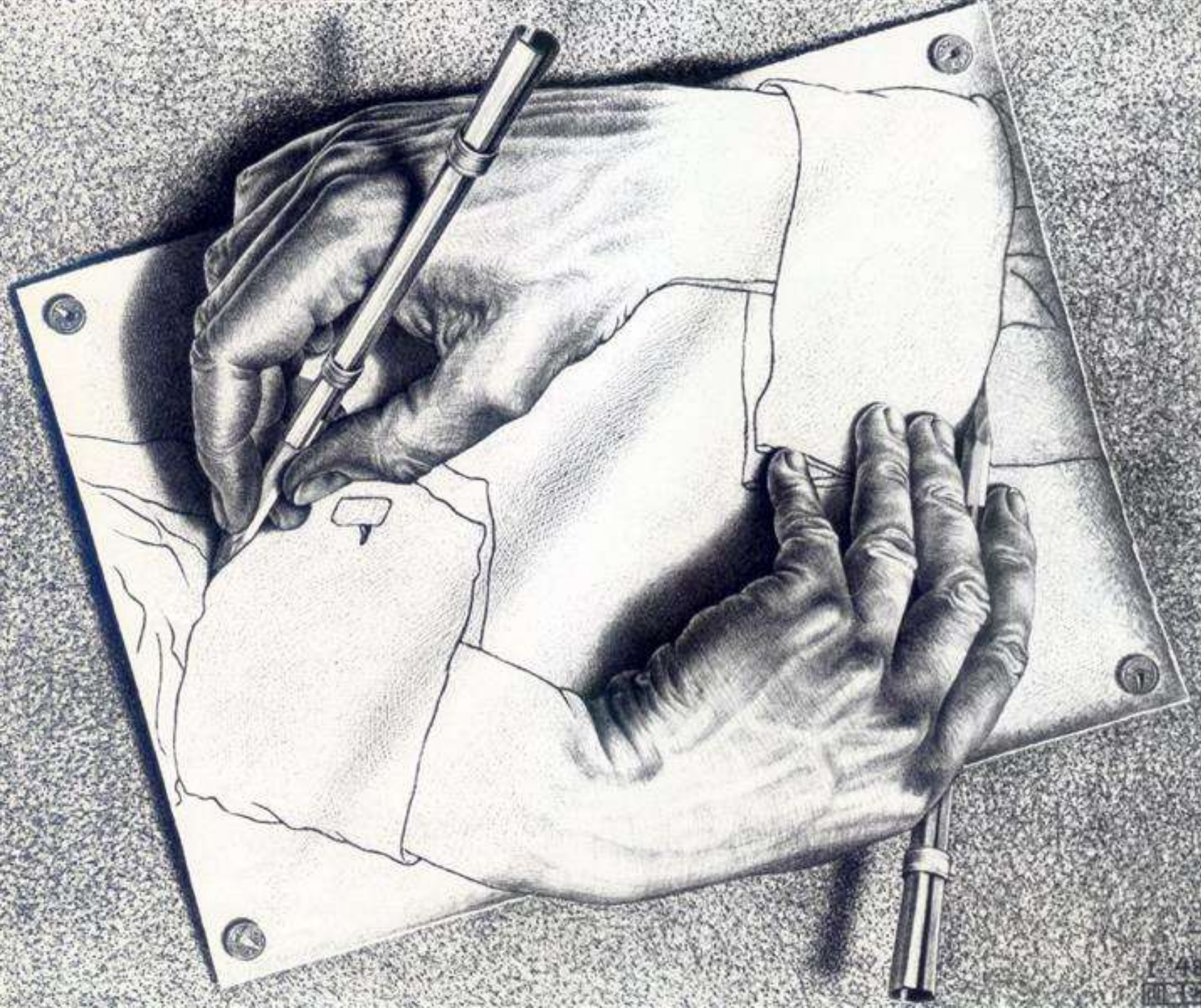
MOORE



M.C. Escher

Drawing Hands is a lithograph by the Dutch artist M. C. Escher first printed in January 1948. It depicts a sheet of paper, out of which two hands rise, in the paradoxical act of drawing one another into existence. This is one of the most obvious examples of Escher's common use of paradox.

https://www.google.com/search?q=escher+hands&source=lmns&tbm=vid&bih=757&biw=1600&hl=en-US&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj37eD1K35AhVUKzQIHUY_DcIQ_AUoBHoECAEQBA#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:8c3f171e,vid:DFjksnfoWSA,st:0



The Shaman's Hand (Healer's Hand)

The healer's hand symbol depicts the palm of one's hand with an open spiral originating from the center of the palm and running towards the fingers.

The direction in which the spiral runs depends on the hand depicted such that it opens between the index finger and the thumb.

The spiral symbol can be seen throughout ancient traditions across the world, including cave drawings and petroglyphs in the south of America. Some believe that it is derived from [hieroglyphics](#) depicting the sun, which holds significance among Native Americans as the source of [life](#) and [Energy](#).

The hand symbol is believed to represent hand-to-hand combat. It should be noted that the weapon of choice for Native Americans was the bow and arrow.

Having proficiency in hand-to-hand combat meant that you excel in the form. Hence, a loose translation can mean that you're an expert.

The two symbols combine (the hand and the spiral) to create the main symbol, however its meaning does not literally translate to a healer's hand.

Ruth Faison Shaw

Ruth Faison Shaw was an American artist, educator who is credited with introducing finger painting into the USA as an art education medium. She developed her techniques while working in Rome, Italy, patenting a safe non-toxic paint in 1931.

https://www.google.com/search?q=ruth+faison+shaw&source=lmns&tbm=vid&bih=757&biw=1600&hl=en-US&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjZ1N69z635AhVZKjQIHsyXBzYQ_AUoA3oECAEQAw#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:e3362dc8,vid:M_yks98qmCw,st:0 (use this)

<https://www.facebook.com/capefearmuseum/videos/dr-jans-favorite-things/464337607804290/>







Iris Scott

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cobe33cTbPs&t=63s>





Quasi

The roof of City Gallery Wellington is now home to a "kinda creepy" five-metre-tall [sculpture](#) of a hand with a face called Quasi, by New Zealand artist Ronnie van Hout.

The hand, which stands on two fingers and features an unsmiling face, was winched onto the roof of the gallery yesterday by helicopter. It is scheduled to remain in place for up to three years.

Made from steel, polystyrene and resin, the hand is named Quasi, after Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre-Dame in French author Victor Hugo's 1831 novel of the same name.

The back of the hand features a face described by [City Gallery Wellington](#) as a "partial self-portrait" of Van Hout.

https://www.google.com/search?q=quasi+sculpture&source=lnms&tbm=vid&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiqtqfd9rD5AhXBK0QIHRfLAXAQ_AUoBHoECAIQBg&biw=1600&bih=700&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:91fa3fc7,vid:wF692TN88PY,st:0





Support

The 30-foot sculpture was installed by the artist on May 12 as part of the Venice Biennale 2017. It shows two giant white hands rising up out of the water, seeming to clutch at the exterior of the luxurious Ca' Sagredo Hotel.

But it's not just something to Instagram and walk away from. The arresting sculpture is part-art, part-stand from Italian-American artist Lorenzo Quinn against climate change.

It is no secret that Venice, a UNESCO World Heritage site dating back to the 5th century, is disappearing under water.

<https://www.standard.co.uk/insider/style/artist-takes-on-climate-change-by-installing-giant-hands-sculpture-in-venice-s-grand-canal-a3547486.html>



Giant Buddha's Hand China

It is carved out of a cliff face of Cretaceous red bed sandstones that lies **at the confluence of the Min River and Dadu River in the southern part of Sichuan province in China, near the city of Leshan.**

- <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/452259987586965670/>





Mano del Desierto

The Mano del Desierto is a large-scale sculpture of a hand located in the Atacama Desert in Chile, about 60 km to the south and east of the city of Antofagasta, on the Panamerican Highway. The nearest point of reference is the "Ciudad Empresarial La Negra".

<https://publicdelivery.org/hand-of-the-desert/>





Golden Bridge

The most publicized (and oversized) hand sculpture introduced in recent months can be found in Danang, Vietnam. The so-called Golden Bridge is propped up not by poles and posts, but by two giant “stone” hands. However, the feeling of precariousness which this ethereal-looking structure might provoke is actually unfounded. In actuality, the Golden Bridge’s hands are remarkably robust, made not from stone but from fiberglass and steel mesh.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbCUeMh2_wk&t=8s



Assignment Suggestions...

- Contemplate your own hands and incorporate some aspect of them in an artwork
- Create an artwork inspired by ancient hand symbols
- Paint with your fingers