

# A Foundation for Understanding Art and Its Difficulty of Definition

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**Edward J. Bateman**

[www.xmission.com/~capteddy](http://www.xmission.com/~capteddy) · [capteddy@xmission.com](mailto:capteddy@xmission.com)

## Introduction

When I began my studies as a graduate student, it was only natural to ask myself why I was undertaking this endeavor. Unlike a field of study such as engineering or law, there would be no high paying job offers awaiting me when I graduated. There was to be no great increase of prestige (except perhaps in an academic setting), no title added to my name. I made art before graduate school, I would continue to make art after. Why were my graduate school cohorts and I here? What was it we here to learn and why? In essence, why do people make art? This, of course, begs the question: What is art? These questions came up again on the first day of class in *The History of Art Criticism*. We were asked what we think art is. A few of us were brave enough to attempt an answer. All of us fell short. The debates in class soon showed that we were not to be provided a definitive answer here. However, this class would give me tools to begin to more fully understand the scope of the question and perhaps begin to find an answer that might at least satisfy myself.

## How and Whys

Is there an essence that we can point to and say that is art? A little over a hundred years ago a work of art was identified by its physical form. It was either a painting, sculpture, or other accepted medium. In the past hundred years the description of art has expanded to include a diversity of media and works from other cultures and times. Why do all people seem to make art?

As I began to think about this immensely complicated question, I was well aware that the foundation of this inquiry hinges on the question of what art is. Nearly every major philosopher has written on the subject of art. It is a topic that has inspired writing by evolutionary psychologists, anthropologists, and neurobiologists. Despite volumes that have been written on the subject, no definitive answer exists. Some philosophers (such as Morris Weitz) feel that art cannot be defined because it has no essence. Others maintain that since art is a cultural

phenomenon, it cannot be discussed except as an artifact of its own history beginning at the point where that descriptive history starts. Others feel that is in the nature of art to always expand beyond its boundaries. If someone circumscribes a boundary for what is art, artists will immediately take up the challenge to go beyond that. A definition always seems to remain just out of reach.

Most attempts to define art have been based on finding common traits in groups of artifacts that have been accepted as art. Some of these common traits were notions of beauty, examples of remarkable skills, or highly refined senses of perception or moral value. Most of the philosophical discussion of art rests on the metaphysical grounds and assumptions of its age. Scientific writers on art often have a limited understanding of art's history. They frequently see art as a purely sensate phenomenon and have difficulties with art's tumultuous last century. None of these limitations should invalidate them; they must be considered in looking at the whole of art. My work attempts to push the discussion back one step and ask the question in a different way. What innate traits in humans might lead to the class of artifacts and practices that we call art?

Two points seem clear. First, art seems to be a uniquely human activity. Although some animals create interesting artifacts (such as the elaborate nests of bowerbirds) few people go so far as to classify these objects as art, except perhaps, in a metaphorical way. And second, because art is a human product, any concept of art must take as its starting point the capacities and abilities of the human mind.

The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead put this well:

Whatever theory you choose, there is no light or color as a fact in external nature. There is merely motion of material. Again, when light enters your eyes and falls on the retina, there is merely motion of material.... Then your nerves are affected and your brain is affected, and again this is motion of material... Nature is a dull affair, soundless, colourless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.<sup>1</sup>

Where, then, does the beauty of nature that poets and artists extol come from? Whitehead replies:

Nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent, the nightingale for his song; and the sun for his radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind.<sup>2</sup>

I feel that it is obvious that we must look for this artistic capacity within innate abilities of the human mind. It is not my intent to define art, but rather to propose a different

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<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures* (New York: Macmillan, 1926) 79, 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

foundation to look at that question. I propose breaking down this complex phenomenon into three inter-related elements to better understand art and how these artifacts arise. And I hope to provide an answer as to why formulating a definition has been so difficult. I have drawn upon observations from the biological sciences, art theory, as well as the history of art. I will now discuss the three distinct yet interconnected capacities that I believe intersect in the production of art.

## The Sensate

I see the Sensate as primarily a non-verbal, pre-rational, instinctual process. In brief, we respond to what we see. This is the level of art that most biologically-trained writers concentrate on and, in fact, many who have no formal training in art think of this as art's primary function. This basic "gut-reaction" has long been a factor in many forms of art and is at least part of what most people think of when they talk about beauty. In artistic terms, this is the notion of the "innocent eye."

The whole technical power of painting depends upon our recovery of what may be called the innocency of the eye: that is to say, of a certain childish perception of those flat stains of color, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify, as a blind man might see them if suddenly gifted with sight.<sup>3</sup>

This purist attitude would, to a large degree, shape the approach to abstract works in the late 1940s and 50s. Artists wanted their works to be about the "real" qualities of paint and its use rather than illusions or representations.

At its simplest level, it can be stated that people get pleasure from looking at things. "The primordial sources of aesthetic experience can be said to inhere in reflexive general responses to biologically significant stimuli."<sup>4</sup> Pleasure is a hallmark of psychological adaptation. There are evolutionary-shaped reasons why we find some things appealing.

We seem to get pleasure when the different modules of our complex seeing apparatus of eyes and brain function optimally. A simple example of this would be going to the movies and finding the image on the screen to be blurry (such as with an inattentive projector operator.) When the picture is out of focus, it is disconcerting. When the focus is restored, there is a sense of relief.

Our brains have developed a variety of modules to help us identify objects and separate a figure from the background. This can work even when faced with hidden or camouflaged items such as predators or prey. It seems that these various modules for seeing connect into

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<sup>3</sup> John Ruskin, *Elements of Drawing*, Dover Ed. (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1857; New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen Dissanayake, *What is Art for?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 150.

the brain's limbic areas where we get pleasurable 'rewarding' sensations. That moment of discovery of a hidden object is accompanied by a small tickle of pleasure. This is the brain's way of reinforcing a behavior that might help an individual evade a predator or locate food.

Our brains have several components dedicated to detecting and extracting edges. Important environmental information primarily exists in regions of change (edges), and so our brain allocates more attention to these areas. It finds them more interesting. Line drawings would be an instance that would activate these regions of the brain in an especially strong way. It's not just the act of seeing that can give a small tickle of pleasure. The brain seems to reward identifying object that it finds interesting.

Humans are able to contrive their own visual stimulation— they create images.

Everyday photographs and paintings (remember— think “motel rooms” not museum of modern art) depict plants, animals, landscapes and people. ...the geometry of beauty is the visible signal of adaptively valuable objects: safe, food-rich, explorable, learnable habitats, and fertile, healthy dates, mates and babies.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most prevalent (or clichéd) forms of art is the landscape painting. Frequently these images seem to be of the type of environment that would have high survival benefits for people living there. The researchers Orians and Heerwagen<sup>6</sup> surveyed gardeners, photographers, and painters as well as gathered people's reactions to slides. Regardless of age or cultural background, it was found that people preferred landscapes with common elements: views to the horizon with good sight lines (to see the approach of predators or human threats), semi-open areas with trees (for shelter but not a place for threats to hide), paths (for movement or escape) and resources such as water. Indeed, these savannas may resemble the environments in which our hominid ancestors developed.

Humans differ in that they have conscious awareness of both their environment and their responses to it. They have the capacity to recognize their pleasurable responses and create situations that accentuate these triggers. Psychologists call this the peak shift effect. “If a rat is rewarded for discriminating a rectangle from a square, it will respond even more vigorously to a rectangle that is longer and skinnier than the prototype.”<sup>7</sup>

For example, Pinker (1997) speculates:

We enjoy strawberry cheese cake, but not because we evolved a taste for it. We evolved circuits that gave us trickles of enjoyment from the sweet taste of ripe fruit, the creamy mouth feel of fats and oils from nuts and meat, and the

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 526.

<sup>6</sup> Orians, Gordon H. and Heerwagen, Judith H. “Evolved Responses to Landscapes.” In *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, Barklow, J. H., Cosmides, L., and Tooby, J., ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein, “The Science of Art, A Neurological Theory of Aesthetic Experience” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6, No. 6-7 (1999), 15.

coolness of fresh water. Cheesecake packs a sensual wallop unlike anything in the natural world because it is a brew of megadoses of agreeable stimuli which we concocted for the express purpose of pressing our pleasure buttons.<sup>8</sup>

Artists frequently know how to intensify the effects generated by their mediums in ways to achieve maximum impact. Often we will have a similar response to a representation of an object as we would have to the original. An artist may use his skill to heighten that response. But there are some instances where that response might be completely different. Aristotle writes in the *Poetics*, "...we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us such as the forms of the vilest animals and of corpses."<sup>9</sup> The process of imitation or mimesis may be the most basic form of model-making, which takes us to our next topic.

## Model-Making

"First a fundamental principle: The brain exists in order to provide an internal representation of 'reality.' "<sup>10</sup>

We are surrounded by a near infinity of stimuli. The brain must sort out what is relevant for the organism's survival. Predators must be identified and avoided. Food must be located. Creating internal models is the way our minds deal with the diversity and variety of the world. It is a process of abstraction and simplification. It is the nature of the underlying order of the universe that makes this process both possible and practical.

Even our process of seeing is based on modeling. Our brains take a two-dimensional projection of light onto the retinas of our eyes and assemble that flat information into a detailed three-dimensional model in our heads. This is a mathematically impossible task, but the brain works on probabilities and likelihoods to devise the most likely and useful depiction of reality that matches the stimuli. It is because of these built-in filtering mechanisms that optical illusions work.

Model-making also includes the capacity for symbol, metaphor and consequential thinking since both rely on carrying a mental picture of the world (or sub-parts, both accurate or contrived) in our head. Children learn by playing and trying out various models of the world. A writer models an entire universe and presents it as a work of fiction. A painting may be a model of a deity, the feeling of a mood, or even a philosophical system. Even art itself can be modeled leading to manifestos and schools of art. The human mind seems to enjoy constructing models of every conceivable nature. Even things it may wish to avoid, such as war, it will enjoy from the safe distance of a model in the form of a game such as chess.

The word model is a pervasive term in art. The (often human) subject for a work can be referred to as a model. The way forms are rendered and depicted is referred to as modeling.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 525.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle *Poetics* 4.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Restak, M.D., *Brainscapes* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 3.

Often we forget that the model is not the thing represented. It is in this way that mere bits of paint can give rise to works that may be considered shocking and controversial. It is seldom the material alone that is shocking but the metaphors created in the minds of the viewers that bring up issues of censorship or social divisiveness.

Eventually the practice of art developed its own internal models, which became the basis of a history of art. I believe these grew from observations of what art was already doing, became codified, and then became the subjects for art in the form of feedback loop. These early models of art would define the appropriateness of both form and content of works. Art was identified by prescribed forms such as fresco, painting or sculpture. Art was seen as having a developmental history of ever increasing virtuosity at depicting reality. During the Enlightenment, art was believed by philosophers such as Kant to have at its core, meanings centered around topics such as beauty, truth, and morality, which at the time easily mingled philosophically.

The two most influential early historians were Giorgio Vasari (1511-68) in Florence and the Prussian Joachim Winklemann (1717-68). About Winklemann, art historian Donald Preziosi, writes:

Like Vasari, he was concerned with articulating what he perceived to be the historicity of artworks: the idea that an object bore within its very form certain identifiable traces of its temporal position in a unilinear and developmental historical system (his word)—a coherent evolutionary sequence of artistic style modeled (as all histories of art had been for some time) upon an organic metaphor of birth, maturity, and decline.<sup>11</sup>

In short, they built models. Part of the nature of models is that they are always simplifications. Just as the human eye has a limited angle of view, this simplification process of creating models represents a point of view by what it accepts or excludes. For instance, the work of the historian Vasari was not just a model; it was a model with an agenda: to expound the glories of Florentine art. Which takes us to our next topic.

## Status.

A viewer of an artifact may accept it as art because it is popularly considered a masterpiece and an example of the highest achievement of culture. The same (or a different) viewer may also see another artifact and reject it as art on the basis that “my child could do that.” Both of these are examples of how the concept of status can play out in art.

The term art is by definition a status label. The philosopher Arthur C. Danto in “The Transfiguration of the Commonplace” states “work of art...is an honorific predicate.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Donald Preziosi, ed., *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 31.

Given two objects with identical visual appearance but only one is labeled as art, the one so labeled will have the greater status.

Status can reside both in people and in objects. The status of an objects is almost never a fixed value since status is a conferred property. It is an interpretation of value of importance placed upon it by the human mind. One object can acquire status in a number of different ways. It can be scarce or rare, a one of a kind. It may be novel or unique. It can be made out of materials that are rare or difficult to obtain. It can be old and has survived through time (it may have been preserved on account of its status— in essence its age has enhanced its status). Its inordinate size (both large or small) may increase its status— usually through additional labor or rareness. It may have been produced through the expenditure of large amounts of labor or skill (if a painting doesn't look labored over, it should at least show virtuosity). It may be associated with an individual who possessed status himself and that production confers status on the object (such as by the work of a recognized master). It may come about because of our first two categories. It is perceived as beautiful or it embodies an especially powerful metaphor. An object may even acquire status through fiat by individuals empowered by position, training, or skills to confer some of their prestige on an object (as in found art, "ready-mades," or outsider art recognized by a curator).

Because of the complexities of the human heart and the vagaries of social interaction, the hows and whys of status can be an extremely complex interaction. The status of a work can build upon its own reputation through time and become a cultural icon that defines an age or a culture. The status can also diminish. A work that is found to be a forgery may lose much of its monetary and historical worth. Multiple copies may diminish a work through loss of uniqueness. An object can go through a complex chain of status elevation.

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp appropriated a men's urinal basin as a 'ready-made' work of art. Its status as a mass produced piece of utilitarian hardware was negligible. This work, titled *Fountain*, was rejected from a show by the Society for Independent Artists in New York that was open to all works of art. Neither its form nor materials were significant or interesting.

Duchamp claimed his choice "...was based on a reaction of visual indifference and at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste, in fact a complete anesthesia."<sup>13</sup> On the part of Duchamp, this was an exercise of conferring status to claim that this particular urinal was art. He wasn't trying to have us look at the urinal with fresh eyes to see the beauty in this mundane object. Nor was he trying to imbue it with a new meaning like Picasso making a bull from bicycle parts. He was saying that art is a property conferred by an artist. At the time, it's status was so negligible that the original was lost. Because of his prestige in the Artworld, the work was able to be accepted as art and eventually became an important historical instance in art's development and history. By 1964, it had acquired enough status that finely crafted reproductions, based upon historical photographs, were made in a limited edition (another operation of status through imposed scarcity.) Because of the notoriety of its creator and its importance, even as a copy, to the history of art, the work was to reach a price of over \$1,185,000.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Michel Sanouillet & Elmer Peterson ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1989), 141.

Within the Artworld, Duchamp's *Fountain* brought up important philosophical considerations that would play out over the next century. Part of the reason that Duchamp was able to accomplish the act of having an ordinary urinal accepted as a work of art was a carrying over of the Renaissance elevation of status of artist as inspired genius. To the population as a whole, this work was troubling since it attacked many widely held notions about art such as uniqueness, beauty, and nobility. This work was to raise serious questions about how art was to be distinguished from other objects.

No doubt cynics have always suspected that the distinction between the arts, on the one hand, and crafts, entertainments, and hobbies, on the other, has no firmer basis than the declaration of its existence by some institutionally entrenched, protected, and isolated elite who wish to distinguish their concerns and pastimes from those of their slaves and the *hoi polloi*.<sup>14</sup>

Although there are many more nuances, this is the foundation of the institutional theory of art: a work is pronounced as art by a member of the Artworld. The Artworld is seen as being comprised of artists, dealers and galleries, museums, and patrons and purchasers of artworks in a loose-knit coalition that over time develops broad consensus. Or, if the individual has enough status, unilaterally.

Status may not be just the reason for creating art but be instrumental in the development of stylistic changes. Ernst Gombrich, in his essay "Style," proposes that all stylistic developments stem from changes in technology or pressures for status.

It might be argued that these developments belong to the realm of fashion rather than style, just as the improvement of method belongs to technology. But an analysis of stability and change in style will always have to take into account these two influences.<sup>15</sup>

And

...various activities, which since the eighteenth century, have gradually been grouped together under the name of art once served a variety of practical purposes in addition to increasing prestige.<sup>16</sup>

When photography was first introduced, some (such as Paul Delaroche) pronounced that painting was dead. Photography could easily out-represent the detail and textures of reality better than most paintings, and with much less effort. But painting had a tradition of status—a hand-made painting can require a lot of labor by a person, either trained or talented. It could be argued that to enhance the distinction between (and hence status of) painting versus photography, it was essential to exaggerate these differences, and thus painting began its movement away from mimesis to other styles at an accelerated pace. I feel that the reluctance

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<sup>14</sup> Stephan Davies, *Definitions of Art* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), 79-80.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst Gombrich, "Style" from *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 15 (New York: Macmillian, 1968), 355.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

to accept photography as an art form was based on status grounds at least as much as on esthetic grounds. Early photographers developed hand-worked, unique printing styles, such as gum bichromate prints, as a way to elevate the status of photography. As one style becomes ubiquitous, it's necessary to go further. This doesn't have to be just a bidding war between patrons fueled by galleries. Artists have always competed within their own art world for status, both within and without the system. Stories of public contests of artistic virtuosity go back to ancient Greek times.

In people, status can come through skills, abilities and especially possessions. One of the things that artists do is to produce labor-intensive, precious artifacts that can lend status to the possessor. In humans, the ability to possess becomes a hallmark of status. The type of art that one owns or displays can be a symbol of economic status or of education level (another form of status). Like money, a codified symbol of wealth, art allows extreme amounts of human labor to be placed within tangible forms. Art even allows those things that cannot be possessed to find a form for acquisition.

... it has been widely held that the aesthetic sense is disinterested and is content with mere contemplation. But this thought may derive from the fact that certain paradigms are used with regard to which no serious alternative to contemplation may be available—say sunsets. But wanting to paint or photograph—or to remember—these things is not misleadingly thought of as a way of possessing them; and though one cannot own a sunset, the history of taste and the history of acquisitiveness run pretty much together, and men are pleased enough to own the beauties of the world.<sup>17</sup>

The very uselessness of art that makes it so incomprehensible to evolutionary biology makes it all too comprehensible to economics and social psychology. What better proof that you have money to spare than your being able to spend it on doodads and stunts that don't fill the belly or keep the rain out but that require precious materials, years of practice, a command of obscure texts, or intimacy with the elite?<sup>18</sup>

The real question is how did this state develop? Ellen Dissanayake, who looks at art from an evolutionary biology perspective, believes that art is “based on a universal inherited propensity in human nature to make some objects and activities special.”<sup>19</sup> This, of course, leads us to the next question. “Why would anyone expend time making ordinary objects special? Why dance when walking takes so much less energy? The answer is that walking does not attract the attention of others.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 98.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 522.

<sup>19</sup> Ellen Dissanayake, *What Is Art For?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 107.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy E. Aiken, *The Biological Origins of Art* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 172.

Biologists call this display. They believe that for a trait to develop, it must serve some benefit for the organism. Although first predicted by Darwin, the kind of elaborate displays we see in the tails of peacocks and in the elaborately built nests of bower birds remained baffling to biologists because it seemed to be an impediment to 'survival of the fittest.' In the last few decades, biologists have returned to Darwin's original idea. Sexual selection emerges from competition within each sex to attract partners. This leads to two options: aggressive rivalry and mate choice. Rivalry leads to an arms race of horns, claws, teeth, and increased size and strength as opponents try to drive off competition. Mate choice leads to ornamentation, vivid coloration or plumage, and other forms of display in an effort to win approval from the opposite sex. These displays aren't just about aesthetic choice, they are about fitness. In recent years, biologists have found that many sexually-selected traits function as reliable indicators of reproductively important traits such as age, health, fertility, social status, and genetic quality. An important aspect of these display traits is the "handicap principle":<sup>21</sup> they must have high costs in order to be reliable. "Cheap, easy-to-grow, easy-to-maintain indicators could be faked too easily by unhealthy, unfit individuals, so the indicator would lose its value as a signal, and receivers would evolve to ignore it."<sup>22</sup>

For example, the peacock's tail works as a fitness indicator because unhealthy, weak peacocks cannot grow very large, colorful, symmetric, well-preened tails. Even if they could, their encumbering tails would make it even more difficult to escape predators such as tigers. The result is that the size of a (surviving) peacock's tail correlates positively with the peacock's age, health, and heritable fitness. By mating with a large-tailed peacock, peahens are getting good genes that will give their offspring survival and reproductive advantages.

This is not to say that artists themselves are necessarily the most biologically fit members of society. Remember that in human society, status becomes the primary fitness indicator. Status can accrue to the owner of the artifact as well as (if not more than) the creator since artistic possessions are just one small part of the big picture. Status can also accrue to the group or society. Governments recognize the tradition of status and will spend public money for museums, public works, and artist grants.

Although it is not the most discussed aspect of art, artists are well aware of the issues that status brings up. Too great a concern for status, which can be financially rewarding with the general public, can work against the artist within the art community with charges of trivialization and selling out. Some artists have deliberately acted against ideas of status and possession and created works to play against these notions. These include conceptual art and performance art (where there is no object for possession), earthworks (which are too large to be possessed and may exist in inaccessible locations, far from the status structures of galleries and museums), and Arte Povera (that rejects expensive materials and often physical virtuosity).

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<sup>21</sup> Zahavi, Amotz & Avishag. *The Handicap Principle*. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey F. Miller, "Aesthetic Fitness: How sexual selection shaped artistic virtuosity as a fitness indicator and aesthetic preferences as mate choice criteria." *Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts* 2(1), (2001): 20-25. Special issue on Evolution, Creativity, and Aesthetics.

# The Big Picture

I believe that one of the reasons that we see art as being the quintessence of human endeavor is because it functions in all of the primary realms of human concern: the sensate, the intellectual, and the societal. In essence, these categories represent the primary areas of human experience. I don't pretend that this is a definition of art. None of these properties is exclusive to art. But for me, I find these categories useful when approaching a work of art. I use them to see what part of human experience an artist or viewer finds interest.

We can imagine a variety of people going to see a work of art—the Mona Lisa for instance. Each may have an experience primarily, although probably not exclusively, limited to one of our categories. One person, for instance a passionate art lover, may see the painting and be emotionally moved to tears and, if queried, may not be able to explain it beyond its immense and sublime beauty. Another viewer, perhaps a serious student of art history, may look at the same work and see the embodiment of the Renaissance and the embedded values and beliefs of the work's particular location and that moment in time. It might still be a profound experience for this viewer. A third viewer, this time a tourist with no special knowledge, may stop for a few seconds to see the Mona Lisa—after all, he traveled all the way to Europe! He may wonder what all the fuss was about with this rather small painting. However, he is not likely to fail to mention seeing it when describing his trip, but it will seldom be seen as a transforming experience. It is much more likely a viewer will experience a blend of these aspects. An educated, artistic viewer may admire the beauty of the work, be aware of what it represented to the renaissance mind, and perhaps be amused at its history of becoming described as the most important painting in the world.

Likewise, we can imagine artists finding their motivations in these categories. One artist may want to have paint create the kind of enjoyment that we might get from viewing nature and may even feel offended if you were to ask him to explain his work. Another artist may create from an underlying philosophy that the work tangibly illustrates. To this artist the metaphor or model may be more important than the technique. Yet a third artist may be mostly interested in creating works that will be valuable to his social group (which may be other artists and critics or a naive viewing audience). More than likely, an artist will work in a complicated mix of these concerns that never can be separated.

Just as in many aspects of human nature, these categories both blend into and contradict each other. We probably should be surprised if this isn't the case since humans are such complicated, contradictory creatures. Because of this, a single unitary definition will always to remain out of reach. I think that we wouldn't want it any other way if art is to move us in so many areas of our lives. These aspects are deeply rooted within us. They lead to cultural distinctions. They unite and define societies with the works they create. They divide communities through disagreements over what is acceptable. These creations will continue to arouse passions as these human drives strive for outlet.

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