



ART I: UNIT TEN

ART APPRECIATION

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I. THE PURPOSE OF ART

The science of **aesthetics**, or the study of beauty and art, began in ancient Greece as “the philosophy of art”. Greece’s great thinkers mulled over the purpose of art in society, deciphering if its purpose was primarily a moral catalyst or historical documentation. But back then, the discussion was informal and tagged on to other philosophical disciplines. This science was finally given its name and formal acceptance in the academic world in the late 1700s.

THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Art primarily achieves two goals. First, it gives the viewer pleasure. Second, it communicates truths, ideas or concepts about reality, typically inspiring a deeper understanding or insight into humanity and morality. The fusion of these two experiences in a work of art is known as the **aesthetic experience**.

Creating art requires both a mastery of **form** and **concept**. The artist’s objective is to take concepts and present them in a well-formed creation which results in both pleasure and learning for the viewer. Put simply, art comes out of the synthesis of concept and form.

Concept. In days of old, art was typically built around beliefs based in religion, morality, heroism, military conquest, or the greatness of states or kings. In more modern times, the attention has focused itself increasingly upon personal world views and emotions. Either way, art is a record of the images, impressions and world views of the artist.

Much of the long-lasting value of art is found in its concept, for it can be used to express emotions, teach ourselves about, and make a record of, other times and cultures. For example, a great deal of the current knowledge of Ancient Egypt comes from hieroglyphic writing. Much of our understanding about the Christianity of the Middle Ages can be seen in the iconographic way biblical figures are portrayed, to be consumed by the commoners. The Bible was only for the clergy. Therefore, images were used for veneration.

Form. A work with little “to say” is still pleasurable simply because of the form that it is in. For example, some forms of modern dance, as well as works in the Minimal Art movement (studied later) have little obvious “message” behind them, but are rather a study of shape or movement itself. Even without explicit content, the work is pleasant, interesting and beautiful.

Form is the beauty of design and order, placing images in a manner that is easily recognizable and succeeds in clear communication. For example, this Unit is written in a format for clarity. If random patches of text were deleted, the font size changed every two lines and all of the artwork upside down, we would fail to clearly communicate the content of the book. Therefore, this text is bound to a certain form because it is a carrier of important content.

In the fine art world, the tools of form are line, shape, texture, color and value (the **elements of art**) as well as balance, proportion, rhythm, dominance and unity (**elements of design**). Remember that the concept will always define how these elements are used. The old adage of “form always follows function” is the rule. For example, if you want to communicate the concept of “fear” in a painting, it is unlikely that you want to paint a pleasant scene of warm color. Even in those previous examples (Minimal Art) where little concept is obvious, the form itself *is* the concept. For example, in an orange statue of a simple cube, the artist likely desired to communicate the concept of an orange cube!

 **Exercise 1.1**

1.1 Define aesthetics.

1.2 Where did the “philosophy of art” get its start?

1.3 What are art’s two goals?

1.4 What is the artist’s objective?

1.5 Art comes out of the synthesis of what two elements?

1.6 Where is most of the enduring value of art?

1.7 Define form.

1.8 List the five elements of art.

1.9 List the five elements of design.

1.10 Is a study of shape or movement alone, art?

CRITICISM

Deciphering whether a work of art is “good” or not (a.k.a. **criticism**) is not a simple task. It requires a certain amount of personal opinion, and a great deal of historical knowledge. However, at least three basic questions help to serve as a guide.

1. How good (well-thought, deep, etc.) is the concept?
2. How well (according to the elements of art and design i.e. form) is it executed? To put it another way, is the concept clear?
3. Do you like it?

If a work ranks high before all three of these questions, it is likely to be “good” even “great.” But art evaluation doesn’t end with simple questions. A work may be excellent, but historically insignificant or vice versa. Reevaluate works throughout your lifetime, for there is often more to a work than is apparent at a first glance.

 **Exercise 1.2**

1.11 Define criticism.

1.12 What three questions serve as a guide when evaluating art?

a.

b.

c.

1.13 Are all excellent works of art regarded in history as such?



Review the material in this section in preparation for the Self Test. This Self Test will check your mastery of this particular section as well as your knowledge of the previous section.

SELF TEST 1

Answer these questions (each question 5 points).

1.01 Why do you enjoy art?

1.02 For what three reasons do we create art?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

1.03 Define the aesthetic experience.

1.04 Art comes out of the synthesis of what two elements?

1.05 Whose images or world views does a work of art inevitably contain?

1.06 Where does much of the enduring value of art come from?

1.07 List the five elements of art.

1.08 List the five elements of design.

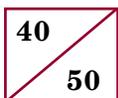
1.09 Define criticism.

1.10. What three questions serve as a guide when evaluating art?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____



Score _____

Instructor Check _____

Initial

Date