

# What is art ?

## - a philosophical definition

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[London, 2012]

**Abstract:** For art to be art it has to present the viewer with a distinctly out-of-the-ordinary perspective on everyday reality. Art is to be clearly differentiated from all forms of decorative craft, which are essentially concerned only with aesthetic experiences. Art is essentially about finding ways, through the manipulation and orchestration of presentational media – such as painting, sculpture, literature, film, and performance – to bring to life strange and unusual perceptions. All these media are quasi-theatrical and poetic in nature, in that they are essentially gestural, referential, and symbolic, and they present material in a condensed and allusive form. Andy Warhol's work is an example of the theatrical manipulation of presentational media to create a strange and unusual universe.



# Introduction

It is widely believed that 'art' is impossible to define (see for example, Witcombe, 1997). This is because the sheer range of diverse objects and performances currently on display do not seem to share any common characteristics; and classical standards of beauty and form have been abandoned by modern art, making consensus difficult. There seems to be no chance of even a basic phenomenology of art, let alone any kind of theory which would not only define art itself, but also give some guidance as to how art might best be appreciated and judged, and possibly valued.

But if art is conceptually separated from decorative crafts and aesthetic feelings, while at the same time being elevated to the status of a perceptual and imaginative experience, then there is a way both to identify art proper, and to elucidate its qualities. This does not involve philosophical chicanery, or any narrowing of conceptual focus, whereby important topics are somehow reduced to dust by constant analytical assault. The idea here is to give full play to a valuable and exciting realm of human experience.

Where to begin ? Rather than build slowly and painstakingly upwards, it was decided to start with the definition itself, and then work towards justifying it. This risks a certain amount of repetition, but at least the hunt is on.

'Art' is a descriptive term which can be applied to certain presentational material that somehow manages to convey a distinctive sense of strangeness and otherness. The normal world with which we are all comfortable and familiar is not the subject or destination of art, because art derives its allure from a fascination with the strange. Art tries to persuade you to picture life as if through an unusual conceptual filter, so as to have you inhabit, at least for a time, a different mental landscape. Art wants you to recalibrate your basic outlook, so as to have you experience life through altered perceptions.

But what about beauty, and classical form, and the finer feelings generated by famous images and objects ? Although traditionally associated with art, and art at its most elevated, these notions are properly to do with appreciating craftsmanship, and with enjoying the manifestations of sublime crafterly technique. Crafterly skill can be enjoyed as an end in itself, but it does not lead to an understanding of art. Refining and educating an aesthetic sensibility will lead to a heightened appreciation of classical technique, and decorative objects, but be of no help when it comes to grasping the imaginative realm of art. Art has to be intuited directly, and is about

inhabiting an inner landscape, and empathizing with a different perceptual outlook, and is not about aesthetic likes and dislikes, and cultivating finer feelings.

How does art manifest itself ? Art is about finding ways, through the manipulation and orchestration of presentational media, to bring to life strange and difficult perceptions. Art begins with some sort of recognised craft, be it painting, or sculpture or performance, and the artist then uses these crafts to give voice to conceptions and impulses which could not be expressed through any other medium. Not all attempts at art will succeed, because strangeness and otherness are elusive qualities which cannot be called up at will, and cannot be taught as transmittable skills, either in colleges or in studios. But that which fails to achieve the level of art still exists as an example of craft, and can be appreciated as such.

‘Art’ is not that easy to pin down, in the sense that its presence has to be apprehended, or intuited, through the imagination; and this type of engagement obviously cannot be quantified in tangible terms. Art comprises both the conception underpinning various artworks, and the artworks themselves, as instances of that conception. It has to be apprehended directly by the viewer, based on a combination of the experience of an encounter with the artworks themselves, and circumstantial information which may arise when the viewer engages with the art more fully. More confusingly, it is not the artist’s conception of the inner world underpinning the artworks which counts, but rather the perceptual experiences generated directly by the artworks themselves, independently of the artist’s opinion or understanding of what they have given voice to. In this respect, the artist has a somewhat shamanistic or tangential relationship with their own creations.

The definition of art elaborated in this essay was born of a very specific line of inquiry: what would be the maximal experience an art exhibition could give you ? And which elements of this maximal experience would be quintessentially a matter of ‘art’, as opposed to a matter of anything else ? This would get to the heart of what art really is, and to the best art could offer.

## The key features of art

Art begins with presentational media (or presentational crafts) such as painting, sculpture, literature, film, performance, and so on. All these media are quasi-theatrical and poetic in nature, in that they are essentially gestural, referential, and symbolic, and they present material in a condensed and allusive form.

A work crafted within one of these presentational media can only be said to have achieved the level of art when it presents the viewer with a distinctly out-of-the-ordinary perspective on everyday reality. This experiential perspective is quasi-

vicarious, as opposed to directly immersive, and is doubly mediated, not only by the presentational medium itself, but also by an essentially theatrical element of 'pretense', in that the viewer is a witness to a pretended scene as opposed to an actual one, and this allows the viewer to treat 'art' – even that containing distressing material – with the distantiation normally associated with an entertainment. It is at least theoretically possible to 'turn off' art at will, by refusing to remain a member of the audience. Compare watching a person being executed in a news report, with a cinematic representation of the same event: in the latter one is able to treat the event with a certain pleasurable detachment. Warhol's *Big Electric Chair* (1967) may be something of a grim image, but it has had some of the sting removed from it by its treatment as a casually decorative object; and this fictive repositioning is part and parcel of the attractiveness of the art experience, in that it represents ideas in such a way that they can be contemplated – from a distance – as a form of entertaining fiction.

In addition to their essentially fictive and theatrical pretense, all crafted works announce themselves with something like an initial posture, or opening gambit. In the case of painting, for example, this initial posture may be implied, or taken for granted, or hard to read, but it is an essential part of the total performance all the same. Put simply, all crafted material, whatever the discipline, is part of a larger quasi-theatrical performance, and as such derives its meaning not from what can be read of its content as a single item, but from the larger context of the total performance in which it is situated. In other words, the substantive meaning of a painting is not to be found in a reading of the content of its image, but rather in the fact that the image is an expression of a larger idea, and it is to this larger idea that we must look to find the realm of art.

For example, a conventional painting may seem to be an end in itself, and a completely self-contained statement, but this is not the case. Any form of crafted material always comes with a context, and this context is more important to the meaning of the work than the apparent subject of the image. A painting of a vase of flowers may appear to be self-evidently no more than an image of a vase of flowers, to be appreciated in terms of its aesthetic qualities, and the skill, or lack of it, employed in its completion, but this is a very superficial understanding of presentational crafts, and one locked into a conservative understanding of art. Flowers by Andy Warhol would have only a distant relation to flowers by a post-impressionist, and almost nothing to do with flowers by a weekend painter. This is because each image has to be understood from within its presentation as part of a particular worldview, and each worldview is making completely different demands on the viewer.

The context within which presentational material is situated may not be immediately apparent, or it may be hard to read, and even harder to inhabit imaginatively, but this is where the viewer needs to begin any encounter with art. Art resides in this larger context, and not in the individual artworks, except by implication. In other words, the art of an artist is the totality of the inner landscape they have given voice to – relative to certain of their artworks – and not the individual artworks themselves, although, of course, having given voice to the inner landscape, the individual artworks then become instances of it, and they act as access points to it. To know what an individual artwork is all about, you have to know the inner landscape it represents. Failure to grasp the inner landscape is a failure to appreciate the art.

This requires an engagement on the part of the viewer that is generally counter to the norm. Conventionally crafted material does not require of the viewer that they inform themselves as to the perceptual landscape which the artwork is attempting to represent, because a conventionally educated viewer is able to interpret imagery and performances as a matter of common knowledge. The symbolism is straightforward and undemanding, but in the case of modern art many conventions have been disrupted, and a simple reading of any apparent symbols no longer delivers appropriate results. The viewer is required to search for the mental landscape – the perceptual mindset – which would lend the symbols an appropriate lived world. Only then can one view these items from the proper vantage point. To apply conventional rules of interpretation to modern art is to make a categorical error, and to miss the point of the presentation entirely.

Though even at this advanced level, further difficulties arise. More problematic still – and this is often the case – the artist themselves may not have a clear idea as to what it is they are giving birth to, and their artworks may be articulating experiences which they themselves will never fully understand. In other words, the artist, if they are honest, may be as much bewildered by their artworks as any interested observer. The idea that the artist, as primary spokesperson for an artwork, is in some privileged position with regard to meaning, is much mistaken.

This last point requires careful explanation. A key feature of created material is that, once created, it takes on a life of its own. This is as true for sexual reproduction as it is for items of crafted material. The craftsperson stands in a privileged position to the crafted creation only as a matter of various social and legal conventions, but it does not mean that the craftsperson understands or has special access to the meaning and significance of their creation any more directly than other interested observers of the same material. This is not to deny the craftsperson a say in the matter, but if the comments of many artists on their own creations is anything to go by, most of what artists have to say can safely be disregarded.

But if the artist is not to be trusted to interpret their own art, how do we arrive at the inner landscape, the inner vision, which gives meaning to the artworks themselves? Simply, by intuiting directly the world which the artwork implies, and inhabiting it imaginatively, and then judging the artwork as both an instance of, and a symbolic reference to, that world. For example, a Warhol print, be it a Marilyn or a Mao, refers us to the Warholian world, an astonishing experiential conception, where such images have their significance as decorative counterparts to say, the grandiloquence of paintings by Rubens or Titian, which in turn have at least some of their meaning as decorative items for grandiloquent buildings. To judge a Warhol merely as an aesthetic or crafty statement of the same type as a Rubens is to miss Warhol's larger artistic creation, and to fail to see the inner landscape of which the prints are but a tiny part. Individual crafted items act as lobby cards to a greater imaginative reality, and it is in this greater reality, and in this wider imaginative vision, that the art itself is located.

'Art', then, is to be found in an inner landscape, instanced by, but not restricted to, individual crafted items, be they paintings, or performances, or any other instances of presentational media. To know the art, you have to enter into the imaginative realm which gave rise to the presentational item, and then you can grasp its significance and meaning from within its proper environment. But as has been stated earlier, not every inner landscape is worthy of the label 'art', because art requires that the inner landscape be essentially different, and strange, and other than that which we ordinarily participate in. To be offered the same world as the one with which we are already familiar is only to be offered a reflection, or a mirror image, without adding anything to what we already know, and this would not require special identification as a distinct imaginative category. 'Art', on the other hand, as identified in this essay, is a distinctive conceptual addition to our everyday imaginative perception, in that it locates in that we are being presented with artistically a different perceptual reality from that with which we are familiar, and one which we could not have accessed or discovered in any other way. Art opens up different conceptual worlds, different inner landscapes, through the presentation of crafted material, and in this regard it is a special achievement, not replicable under other conditions, or present in other realms of imaginative experience.

To summarize: art is achieved when crafted, presentational material opens up a different perceptual world from the one with which we are already familiar. Crafted material reflecting the same world as the one we already live in may be crafted to a sublime level, but it is not 'art', merely highly skilled craft. The true realm of art, that is, the perceptual, visionary world underlying and underpinning individual artworks and crafted items, has to be intuited directly by the viewer, using available resources, which might include a number of direct and indirect sources of information. The

artist's account of their own work ought to be treated with scepticism, as they do not necessarily have a privileged understanding of their own creations.

And in answer to the question, set at the beginning of this essay, as to what the maximal experience an art gallery could deliver would be, one would have to say: an encounter with 'art'. This would not be about indulging in trivial likes and dislikes, such as might be experienced when one simply casts one's eyes over various shapes and forms, delighting in some, while dismissing others. The encounter with 'art' would instead be all about coming into contact with a strange and difficult take on life, one that might make you feel as if someone had invaded your thoughts, and was reorganising your mind.

## **Art, crafts, and aesthetics: crucial distinctions**

Understanding and appreciating art from within its own authentic category requires the drawing of a very clear distinction between art and craft. This distinction is of course by no means new to the philosophy of art, but it is seldom applied in art criticism with much enthusiasm, because sublime craftsmanship – of the type displayed by the old masters in museum pieces – is always being granted special status, and allowed to occupy centre stage, even though it has no place there. Art transcends decorative skills and fine art technique, and has almost no direct connection with them, though this is a fact most critics and aesthetes find almost impossible to accept. Art is about imaginative vision, not about the application of technique.

Craftsmanship has its meaning and purpose in decoration and design. There are any number of purposes items of craftsmanship can be put to, and these purposes will have a direct effect on the evolution of the skills employed to realise the desired item. For example, if painted portraits are used as a historical record of a person's appearance, then craftspeople will strive to develop skills which increase the accuracy and verisimilitude of their representation. And while skilful accomplishment is always a delight in itself, and can be appreciated on its own account, it has very little, if anything, to do with the ability to convey visionary perspective, and unusual states of mind; in other words, with the ability to create art. Art is an overarching, inclusive quality, which transcends the accomplishments contained within individual artworks, and for this reason is not at the mercy of technique. Presentation and content is never confused in literature, in that no one thinks that a sumptuously printed book means that it will read well, yet this is always something of an elemental confusion in the visual arts.

Decorative crafts – painting, music, architecture, sculpture and so on – are all presentational, and quasi-theatrical, but art makes extra demands of its initial quasi-theatrical pretense. A portrait in oils is not much of an invitation to the imagination; and as an historical record or symbol of authority it will possess a radically different functionality from that of a painting which begins with the conceit, ‘let us imagine this is real, and representative of a world in which it is real.’ Velazquez’s *Portrait of Innocent X* (c1650) is a representational likeness, and an example of fine craft as well as an astonishing technical achievement, though the specific world it symbolises is very much understood to be the normal and everyday (as opposed to the supernatural); whereas Francis Bacon’s *Study after Velázquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) takes us into a profoundly different imaginative realm, and as such is very clearly a work of art.

Crafted material, whether decorative, or functional, or entertaining, can be assessed on their own terms, as isolated items, and don’t require the exploration of a larger context. Yet to mistake an artwork for a mere crafted item, is a common mistake, and demonstrates one avenue where simple misjudgement leads to a complete misunderstanding of not only the artwork, but art itself. Art requires an investigation into the experiential realm that the artist is attempting to create, and failure to make the effort to inform oneself will result in a failure to understand all aspects of the art.

The ability to create art is not a function of classical training, or of skilled craftsmanship: because art is an elusive and mysterious quality which manifests itself at certain points in an artist’s orchestration of their chosen media, and it can just as easily fade from an artist’s oeuvre for reasons seldom apparent either to the artist or to the artist’s audience. Art – as a mysterious achievement – is never under the direct control of an artist, even when it appears to have favoured them massively with its presence. Art resists containment, and cannot be taught as a skill; some artists have an instinctive feel for it, while others, for all their sublime craftsmanship, have not the merest notion of it. By the same logic, art can be accidental, appearing despite the efforts of the craftsperson to produce something purely decorative and aesthetic.

There exists the idea that a successful definition of art [cf Wittgenstein, in Hanfling, 1992.] will somehow diminish art’s numinous power, and render it less interesting, and less characteristically appealing. This is mistaken, as the numinous power of art to fire the imagination does not depend on viewing it through a conceptual confusion, but rather on the fact that appreciating art on its own terms genuinely opens up new realms of imaginative experiencing, which are themselves open-ended, and not limited even to the artwork which inspired them. The same is true of the effect of illuminating art criticism; it cannot diminish the work, as the



work is not a cryptic puzzle which would be devalourised by knowing its secret; the work is a portal to a hidden kingdom which expands in depth the more it is explored.

Why is art so poorly understood ? Some people are simply psychologically incapable of responding to its siren call, and cannot venture beyond an aesthetic sensibility – that is, the tendency to view all crafted material in terms of classical variations in form and beauty. This goes hand in hand with the desire to view presentational media in terms of crafterly technique, whereby a presentation is judged favourably if it displays technical accomplishment, and dismissed if it does not. Many modern artists have only a fraction of the technique of the classical museum masters, and yet they have produced infinitely more compelling and disturbing work: art is not a decorative or technical skill, it is all about the ability to open a window into fascinating and disquieting realms of perception.

The ability to appreciate subtle variations of form and beauty is a necessary refinement in any psychological development, and in the classical tradition it has always been closely associated with skilled craftsmanship, and this in turn with the highest standards in art. Art becomes a question of the attainment of technical proficiency, and then of employing this proficiency within narrow confines such that the technique can be admired for its own sake. Full appreciation of classical technique requires some considerable aesthetic refinement, and in those who cannot see beyond the vagaries of form and beauty, this is the virtuous circle within which art has its meaning and purpose.

Art is elusive, changeable, and not always easy to elucidate, even where it is clearly present. Art can also work retrospectively, applying itself to objects and items which did not warrant the label when they were first conceived. This property of retrospectivity is more common than might be supposed, because ‘art’ as a quality generally emerges over time, and does not suddenly appear fully fledged as the result of a single work.

## **Application: Andy Warhol**

All of the difficulties and complexities associated with applying ‘art’ as a descriptive term are well illustrated in any attempt to elucidate the art of Andy Warhol, and suffice to say it will not be possible to do justice to the subject here, other than to identify a few salient features.

When it comes to considering Warhol’s achievement is not a question of whether one ‘likes or dislikes’ his art, but rather a question of acknowledging both his singular vision as well as the compelling world that he created, and then of using these facts to explore the nature of art itself. What kind of a visionary perspective was

it that he managed to achieve ? And can we recalibrate our imaginations so that we can inhabit and explore his world in the way he invites us to ? This is where his art begins, and where his achievement comes into its own.

The actual date at which the Warholian universe emerges with substantial force – relative to various exhibitions and the public display of certain works – is an issue which is best dealt with by art historians, and need not concern us here. We can simply take as a given the images of the Campbell's soup cans, Brillo boxes, Marilyn prints and the like, and work outwards from there. If we simply interpret them as a satirical attack on consumer culture, or as an inquiry into materialism, we miss the inner landscape they represent, and risk misunderstanding much else of what Warhol produced. In short, we miss the art itself. Warhol was not satirising, or condemning, or holding up signs for our intellectual reflection, he was presenting us with windows into his world, and inviting us to share in his own distinctive perceptual landscape.

Basically, Warhol was using his imagery to say, 'This is what I see; this is what is important to me; these images are the keys to my universe. Brillo boxes and soup cans are to me what high cultural artefacts and grandiloquent paintings are to others. My universe is my universe. I invite you to join me through my work.' If one fixates on the aesthetic primitivism of the imagery, or on the supposed lack of profundity in the cultural references, then one fails to enter the Warholian universe, and one fails to experience the fascinating and almost pathological emptiness at the heart of his creation. You don't have to endorse it to be mesmerised by it.

The basic features of the Warholian universe were further reinforced by his films, and by a myriad of projects in which he engaged, and by documented evidence of his own strange thought processes from interviews. It is clear that he was – deliberately or unconsciously – presenting us with an overall vision, and that his individual artworks represented mediated access which allowed the rest of us to participate in that vision, at least in our imaginations.

This brings up further issues, all related to an understanding of the fluid nature of art. For instance, does it matter whether or not Warhol knew that he was creating art, or, more pointedly, would it matter if he was expressly trying *not* to create 'art' – as defined in this essay – but simply trying to manufacture commercial prints and popular films ? Oddly enough, no; despite the fact that Warhol himself was a crucial figurehead to his artistic project, and that all his artworks derived an extra boost from their reference to him as the incarnation of an apparently affectless, numbed, dim-witted, drug-addled, high camp and transgendered anti-universe, where a potent superficiality reigned supreme. A Warholian imprimatur is not required for the Warholian universe to exist in its own right, or for it to retain its own

fascination, and its own peculiar allure. It might even have served to consolidate the Warholian universe if Warhol himself had somehow been able to repudiate it, as this might possibly have prevented it from being weakened and eroded by ill-conceived later additions and accretions. It is yet another paradoxical feature of art that the integrity of an artistic achievement can be damaged by later interventions, either by the artist creator or by someone else. Unforeseen future events always threaten any brand.

Warhol has been castigated by, for example, the critic Robert Hughes (Carms2k, 2009), for supposedly having ‘nothing to say’, meaning that Warhol’s art lacks substantial content, and is therefore, by classical standards, empty and disposable. But the manifest vacuity of the Warholian universe is one of its most fascinating features, and is as provocative a realm of the lived world as is any region centred on cultivated refinement, preciousness of taste, and a pompous profundity. The Warholian universe may be the polar opposite of say, Oxbridge society, but it is still worth acknowledging – if not celebrating – for its own peculiar take on life.

The task of interpretative commentary is to elucidate an artistic vision without distorting it through the application of reductionist ideas. This is a harder task than it might seem because, for example, Warhol’s flat and emotionally hollow landscape is not a subspecies of sociopathy, or acedia or stupefaction; it is manifestly its own domain, and any exploration of its peculiar singularity would be very poorly served if it were simply obfuscated by conservative prejudice.

## Application: Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas

If one of the necessary conditions for art is that it act as a window on to an imaginative realm characterised by otherness and perspectival strangeness, then an acclaimed artist who looks to fall outside this category is Tracey Emin. Emin’s central subject is herself, and her work appears to be entirely autobiographical and declamatory, framed as a sexually charged, multi-media case study, very similar in content to many of the case studies to be found in all types of confessional literature. There are occasional stylistic features to her presentation, such as photographs of her in exotic locations, but the ongoing subtext is devoid of any invitation to otherness or singularity. She also employs a theatrical televisual persona, which can range from drunken rants through to more mature musings, but once again, none of these performative personae point to an unusual take on life, or to any sort of recalibration of normal experience. All of which reduces works like *My Bed* (1998) and *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995) to the status of somewhat oblique stage props, or didactic exhibits. Performance – as a presentational medium – does not necessarily result in art, even if it cloaks itself with artistic tropes and the demand that it be understood as art; and unless it can give voice to some kind of otherness, it

remains within the limitations of ordinary theatrical craft. It must be repeated, of course, that this interpretation is provisional, in that Emin may yet transform her work into art, and in such a way that would act retrospectively at the same time.

Sarah Lucas on the other hand, although sharing certain similarities in style, presentation and content with Emin, has nevertheless managed to give voice, in her sculptural displays, to a startling kind of depersonalised carnal dystopia, and in the process has opened up a distinct artistic realm of her own.

## Some implications and wider issues, in brief:

Knowing that art is about entering a fictive, quasi-theatrical imaginary universe, does not mean that these fictive universes are easily found, and easily grasped, and then easily elucidated. They are beset by all kinds of forces, running at all angles, and in all directions. Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) for example, created a bizarre and singular world through live performances which were frequently obsessed with the strange semi-shamanic substances fat and felt. Beuys looked to have a wholly disjunctive and disturbing take on reality, though his explanations of what he was up to are often straightforward and logical, and go some way to undermining, and thereby spoiling, the peculiar mystery at the heart of his work. It is as if he himself didn't realise what a startling impression he made, and that he simply saw himself as just another ordinary mortal trying his level best to get a rather prosaic and worthy message across. Fortunately for us the Beuys-world didn't belong to Beuys.

Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) is often seen as the one work which puts paid forever to any attempt to define art. But this is only the case if one confuses art with aesthetics, and art with craft. If you try to find common aesthetic ground between *Fountain* and the Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, you end up in confusion; but if you look into the inner landscapes they represent, you find the *Mona Lisa* is no more than a supremely decorative item of craft, whereas the Duchamp is an invitation into a undefined realm signposted by an enigmatic object. More is needed to know where Duchamp's signpost leads, despite its initial provocation, whereas the *Mona Lisa* is quietly self-contained.

Abstract art may, or may not, refer the viewer to something like an experiential realm, or a liveable world. If there is no conceivable imaginative realm realised, in some shape or form, beyond the visual effect, then the so-called abstract art is mere decoration, and of no more imaginative substance than colour swatches at a fabric warehouse. It is not clear if Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), despite the advocacy of Clement Greenberg, was anything more than an innovative decorator, painting extraordinary canvases by the yard, though the case is there to be made, if

someone wants to do that. Bram van Velde (1895-1981) had an ideology behind his expressionism, and this can be seen as at least one way of moving into realms where the signposting to those realms is of the most demanding kind.

It is the task of those who write about art to identify and interpret artistic visions, and to find the vocabulary to assist in their exploration. Insofar as the interpreter elucidates the art at its own level – that of a window into a distinct imaginative realm – the elucidation not only enhances any experience of the artistic vision, it enhances the art itself. Elucidating art does not in any way diminish its numinous power: it increases it.

That art is an invitation to a alternative realm of imaginative experience, characteristically strange and disturbing, is most clearly and forcefully demonstrated by avant garde film. Art as expressed through painting, sculpture and other forms of presentational media, can usefully be seen as stills from avant garde films that are to be viewed in the imagination.

## Summary

Art is the revelation, by means of presentational media, of perceptual realms characterised by otherness and difference. The everyday world with which we are already familiar is not the realm of art.

Presentational media are crafts such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music, poetry, dance, theatre, photography, film, performance, digital media, literature, and so on. All presentational media are characterised by quasi-theatrical gestures of self-reference, self-importance and self-disclosure, as well as by an overall fictive pretense. Each presentational medium or craft has its own distinctive set of skills and techniques and aesthetic outlook.

An aesthetic sensibility, as a source of psychological and emotional responses to form and beauty, can be educated and refined, but cannot be used to identify the presence of art. An aesthetic sensibility can be used to enjoy the art which has been intuited, but it is not of itself the means by which art is grasped.

Art is intuited by means of the imagination which, in its engagement with certain crafted material, finds itself presented with a vision of a strange and different world. This makes art a conceptual, imaginative experience, not an aesthetic one.

Art, having been created, exists independently of the artist creator. Its meaning and interpretation is not dependent on the artist's opinions, or their understanding, of the created material.

Most crafted presentations, even those displaying the highest technical skill, fall within the parameters of aesthetic objects, and should not be described as art, because they make no attempt to reveal strange and different perceptual realms, and are content to be merely formally attractive. Art does much more than display crafterly skill: it shows you a different take on the world.

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