

the warhol: resources & lessons

Unit Lesson Plans / Critical Thinking / Aesthetics / Lesson 4 / Handout 4.2

Aesthetics Handout 4.2 Historical Theories

Theory

Artwork

Quotation

Representation (imitation, realism, mimesis): The essence of art is to picture or portray reality. Good art is an accurate mirror on the world, imitating nature or some ideal form.

Martin Johnson Heade is considered a great painter of the Hudson River School of artists because he is able to represent nature's beauty realistically.



Image 1
(All image credits are on last page of this handout)

"The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Idealism*, VI, 3

"The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life."

William Faulkner

Expressionism

(emotionalism): The essence of art is expression of the inner emotions, feelings, moods, and mental states of the artist. Good art effectively and sincerely brings these inner states to an external objectification.

Franz Kline was a painter of the Abstract Expressionist movement whose large gestural canvases were evocative of immense feelings.



Image 2

"It is not sufficient to see and to know the beauty of a work. We must feel and be affected by it." Voltaire

"Art is made to disturb. Science reassures. There is only one valuable thing in art: the thing you cannot explain."

Georges Braque

Formalism

The essence of art is "significant form"—lines, shapes, colors, and other formal properties of the work; representation, expression, and other subject matter are irrelevant. Good art uses formal elements to trigger an "aesthetic emotion" in sensitive observers.

Donald Judd's sculptures are linked to the Minimalist art movement that proposed eliminating representational imagery and reducing painting and sculpture to the essentials in color, form and space. Judd is well known for his "shelf-like" sculptures made of machine fabricated, industrial materials that emphasized pure form and eliminated evidence of the artist's hand.

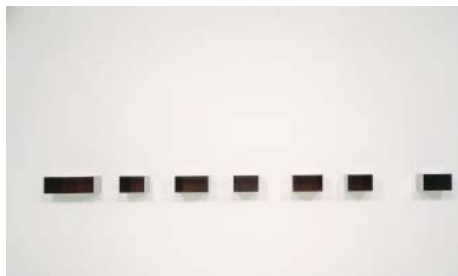


Image 3

"The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree."

Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.), *Metaphysics*, Bk. XIII, Ch.3, 1078a, 33 ff.

"Pay attention only to the form; emotion will come spontaneously to inhabit it. A perfect dwelling always finds an inhabitant."

Andre Gide, *Pretexts: Reflections on Literature and Morality*, Published by Meridian Books, 1959.

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(Aesthetics Handout 4.2 Historical Theories Continued)

Theory

Artwork

Quotation

Moralism

The essence of art is the communication of important moral and religious values from the artist to the observer. Good art is sincere communication by the artist, which “infects” the observers with those important moral ideas.

Simon Bening places Saint Gertrude de Nivelles at the center of this painting to portray the moral virtues of this Catholic saint. Gertrude refused marriage at a young age (defying her father’s wishes) wishing to be faithful to Christ and the Church alone. She became the patron saint of travelers and is often depicted with field mice. For more information: [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_\(1913\)/St._Gertrude_of_Nivelles](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/St._Gertrude_of_Nivelles)



Image 4

“Art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which men have risen.”

Leo Tolstoy, in his study,
What is Art? (1898)

Symbolism (nonverbal communication)

The essence of art is the communication of important ideas and other knowledge through symbolic (nonverbal) languages. Good art communicates its meaning effectively in this nonverbal language.

This 17th-century Dutch genre painting can be interpreted symbolically. The finely dressed woman with a globe upon her head symbolizes Dame World, an emblem of the vanity and foolishness of worldly people. She is teasing a lap dog, symbolizing devotion. The silver jug and plate in the right foreground symbolize female purity and moral duty. The image seems to celebrate luxury but actually presents a complex picture of society trying to reconcile its growing wealth with its moral faith.



Image 5

“Art addresses itself to the mind, and not to the eyes. It has always been considered in this way by primitive peoples, and they are right. Art is a language, instrument of knowledge, instrument of communication...”

Jean Dubuffet from “Anticultural Positions” Lecture presented at the Arts Club, Chicago, 1951

“Great art can communicate before it is understood.”

T. S. Eliot

(Aesthetics Handout 4.2 Historical Theories Continued)

Theory

Artwork

Quotation

Instrumentalism

(pragmatism, experience): The essence of art is its usefulness in helping us to comprehend and improve our overall life experiences. Good art is always a means to some important end.

Romare Bearden's used his paintings and collages to portray stories about the African American experience in the 20th century, to break down barriers of understanding between races and to draw attention to the social conscience of his viewers. This painting is about living in his grandmother's boarding house in Pittsburgh in the 1930s and 40s. (check for accuracy)



Image 6

"Art does not solve problems but makes us aware of their existence. It opens our eyes to see and our brain to imagine."

Magdalena Abakanowicz

"I think of art as a glue, a cultural and social glue. It's one of the means that has served to show us the things we believe in and the things we celebrate; it has served to reinforce our relationship to each other."

Eric Fischl

Institutionalism

Art is determined by status conferred upon it by the institutions of the art world not by an observable property in the artwork itself.

Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes are considered art by the assertions of the artist, by critics and by their placement in art establishments. The visible test of their worth as art was put into question when they were shipped as art to Canada, but thought to be commercial products. See last page of lesson plan for article.



Image 7

"It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance . . . and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process."

Henry James

[Image1]

Martin Johnson Heade, *Thunderstorm at the Shore*, c. 1870-1871, oil on paper mounted on canvas attached to panel 15 3/4 x 23 3/4 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Howard N. Eavenson Memorial Fund

[Image 2]

Franz Kline, *Siegfried*, 1958, oil on canvas, 102 15/16 x W: 81 1/8 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Gift of Friends of the Museum

[Image 3]

Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1974, stainless steel and Plexiglas, 8 x 194 1/2 x 14 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Purchase: gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Denby, by exchange

Image4]

Simon Bening, *St. Gertrude de Nivelles*, from the Hours of Cardinal Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490-1545), Archbishop and Elector of Mainz c. 1522-1523, opaque water-based paint mounted on board 7 x 5 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Bequest of Howard A. Noble

[Image 5]

Jacob Ochtervelt, *Lady with Servant and Dog*, c. 1671-1673, oil on canvas, 27 1/8 x 22 7/8 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Henry Lee Mason Memorial Fund

[Image 6]

Romare Bearden, *Pittsburgh Memories*, 1984, collage on board, 28 5/8 x 23 1/2 in. Carnegie Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald R. Davenport and Mr. and Mrs. Milton A. Washington

[Image 7]

Andy Warhol, *Brillo Soap Pads Box*, 1964, silk-screen ink and house paint on plywood, 17 x 17 x 14 in. ©AWF

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