

ART

First, a brief history of your Human Art:

ART has not always been what you now think of it. An object regarded as Art today may not have been perceived as such when it was first made, nor was the person who made it necessarily regarded as an artist. Both the notion of "art" and the idea of the "artist" are relatively modern terms in your Human history.

Many of the objects you identify as art today -- Greek painted pottery, medieval manuscript illustrations, and so on -- were made in times and places when people had no concept of "art" as you now understand the term. These objects may have been appreciated in various ways and often admired, but not as "art" in the current sense. The idea of an object being a "work of art" emerges, together with the concept of the Artist, in the 15th and 16th centuries in Italy.

During the Renaissance, the word Art emerges as a collective term including Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, a grouping designated by the Italian artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari in the 16th century. Subsequently, this grouping was expanded to include Music and Poetry which became known in the 18th century as the 'Fine Arts'. These five Arts have formed an irreducible nucleus from which have been generally excluded the 'decorative arts' and 'crafts', such as pottery, weaving, metalworking, and furniture making, all of which have utility as an end.

In the latter half of the 16th century the first academies of art were founded, first in Italy, then in France, and later elsewhere. Academies took on the task of educating the artist through a course of instruction that included such subjects as geometry and anatomy. The institutionalizing of art in the academies eventually provoked a reaction to its strictures and definitions in the 19th century at which time new claims were made about the nature of painting and sculpture. By the middle of the century, "modernist" approaches were introduced which adopted new subject matter and new painterly values. In large measure, the modern artists rejected, or contradicted, the standards and principles of the academies and the Renaissance tradition. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, artists began to formulate the notion of truth to one's materials, recognizing that paint is pigment and the canvas a two-dimensional surface.

In the early 20th century all traditional notions of the identity of the artist and of art were thrown into disarray by [Marcel Duchamp](#) and his [Dada](#) associates. In ironic mockery of the Renaissance tradition which had placed the artist in an exalted authoritative position, Duchamp, as an artist, declared that anything the artist produces is art. For the duration of the 20th century, this position has complicated and undermined how art is perceived but at the same time it has fostered a broader, more inclusive assessment of art. One of your well known art historians, Thomas McEvilley, maintains that today "more or less anything can be designated as art."

Now, an assessment of Human Art:

As with many of your endeavors, you have taken a creative, inspiring, thoughtful Human process and turned it into a greedy, over-analyzed, over-priced business endeavor. Art is a very individual experience that should be (at best) delightful to the senses and (at the least) thought provoking and interesting. There should be no such designation as “good” or “bad” art. Certainly, as far as Realism goes, you could judge art as to how closely it resembles the real object. But as soon as you break into the realm of abstraction, then there should be no rules. Some of your children’s drawings do not look much different than many of your highly priced Picasso’s. **Interestingly, three abstract, tempera paintings were auctioned at Bonhams in London for \$26,352. They were painted by a Chimpanzee---Congo the Chimp.** (Congo, born in 1954, produced about 400 drawings and paintings between ages 2 and 4. He died in 1964.) Pablo Picasso is reported to have hung a Congo painting on his studio wall.

Another interesting item: **Assoc. Press., 1999: Kansas City, Mo.---A collection of watercolors attributed to Georgia O'Keefe that had fetched millions of dollars is not the work of the world-famous painter, art experts say.** This is evidently a very common problem in the art world. Would that not imply that the counterfeiters were equally skilled as the original artist? Yet, their own individual paintings would not fetch the millions that the so-called “masters” would attain. And why do pieces of art sell for such outrageous sums? **April 1987--A van Gogh painting (Sunflowers) sold for \$39.9 million at an auction (Christie's) in London.** To discuss a reason for this price is to imply that on some level, the price was rational--there is no rational price for a work of art. That price is solely an index of desire, and nothing is more manipulable than desire, a fact as well known to auctioneers as to hookers. All works of art are worth exactly what someone can be induced to pay for them as fictions of uniqueness. Certainly, there is some historical and antique value to older art. But would not this money be better spent to feed the millions of starving children around your Earth?

If the value and origin of the Mona Lisa, or perhaps a Picasso painting, were not known, how many of you would actually choose these paintings to place on your wall? All else being equal, you would probably place a pleasing sunset, or tropical, or pastoral scene on your living room wall--- as opposed to many of the works by the “Masters”. Even the aforementioned *Sunflowers* by van Gogh is actually rather plain and boring. If mixed in with dozens of “off the shelf” paintings found in a typical Walmart selection—it would probably be one of the last ones chosen.

All historical art should be in your museums. Individuals should stop playing this foolish game of paying millions for a piece of art merely for “bragging rights”. It is a greed and ego-driven practice that should have no place in the world of art. The pretentiousness, avarice, and manipulation that define the art establishment is incredibly un-enlightened and counter-productive. When your race has finally polluted and extinguished most of your resources, then these multi-million dollar pieces of art will be reduced to its actual value---as kindling for survival.

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