2024

An Attempt at an Ignatian Aesthetic

PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS FROM “WHAT IS CHRIST?”

NICHOLAS K. LEEPER, SJ

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

I am deeply thankful to SLUMA (Saint Louis University Museum of Art) for graciously hosting this exhibit and providing me with the platform to showcase my work. I'm grateful to Petruta Lipan and the Museum staff for supporting this. Your dedication to promoting art and culture at this university and in St. Louis enriches our community immeasurably.

I am indebted to my professors, especially Jim Burwinkel, for guiding me on this artistic path these past three years and giving me the gift of a creative process. I'm also grateful to my painting professors, Amy Bautz and Terry Shay, for their commitment to nurturing talent. They, and SLU's Visual Arts department, have been instrumental in my development. I'm also grateful to Dean Randy Rosenberg for supporting this project. I also thank my thesis advisor, Dan Haybron, for meeting with me throughout the year to help me clarify my thought. I'm also grateful to Michael Barber, SJ, and Jim again for taking the time to be on my committee to read this paper. I'm also appreciative to Julia Erdlen for taking the time to provide edits for this paper.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my brother Jesuits, especially those at Bellarmine House of Studies, for their support, encouragement, and patience throughout this artistic journey. I'm incredibly grateful to Fr. David Suwalsky, SJ, for helping make this show possible. I'm also grateful to the Society of Jesus and my Jesuit superiors, Steve Schoenig, John Wronski, and Joe O'Keefe, for gifting me with an education in art and philosophy. Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to other Jesuit artists for inspiring me and their fruitful conversations, especially Angelo Canta, Jonathan Wojtkowiak, and Bill Cain. I also thank my friends in St. Louis and back east for their constant support, love, and encouragement. I'm finally grateful to my family for their unyielding support.

For my mother, Sharyn Leeper, and for her brother, Frankie Milko

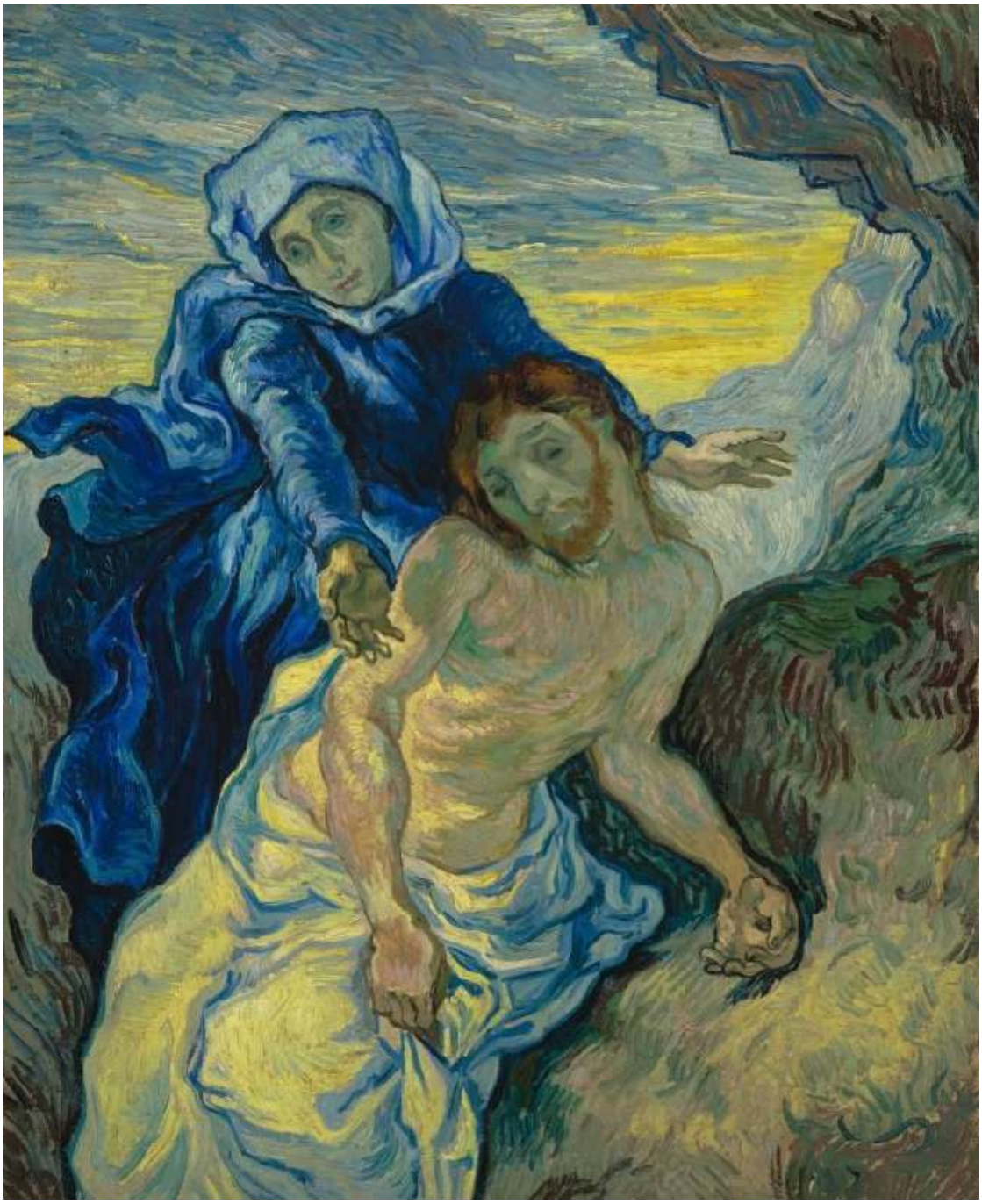
A.M.D.G.

The Annunciation

"I don't get why anyone in the Society would study aesthetics." Another scholastic once told me. To him, it seemed to be an irrelevant course for men training to become Catholic priests. Why would art – and especially the philosophy of art – be in any way significant for the Society of Jesus and the Church? I sympathize with him because I used to feel the same way. Art is not practical. Neither is philosophy. We need leaders who know how to *do* things. We should leave the metaphysics behind and learn management. Forget art and learn accounting. Quit fingerpainting and do something that matters. Yet here I am writing this tome with an accompanying art exhibit. What happened?

My reëntry into art emerged during my time in the Society these past five years. I did a lot of art in high school but gave it up in undergrad, thinking it couldn't do anything for me. It wouldn't get me a job. I couldn't be successful doing art. I mean, who is? I liked going to museums and looking at art. But I only went if I had a date. Or I went with someone who I wanted to be my date. I was an artist as a little kid, too. I recall drawing a castle in kindergarten and a lighthouse in the 1st grade. Mrs. Reiley kept that lighthouse drawing up for nearly a decade in her classroom until my Catholic school closed. My best work is behind me.

In the novitiate, though, I went on a five-day silent retreat and made a piece there, a first in years. I did a copy of Van Gogh's *Pietà* in oil pastels. However, I changed Van Gogh's pleasant, sunny background into a grim and foreboding one.



1 Van Gogh, Vincent. Pietà (After Delacroix). 1889. Oil on canvas. 28.7 x 23.8 in. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

It was okay, but in hindsight, I should have copied Van Gogh more precisely as he had it right.

Then I did the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola in the novitiate – a thirty-day silent retreat. Its purpose is to lead a retreatant "to overcome oneself, and to order one's life,

without reaching a decision through some disordered affection."[1] That's all to say, it is to profoundly deepen one's personal relationship with and commitment to God in freedom. On this retreat, one is typically forbidden to read much besides the Bible. No newspapers, novels, or anything of that nature. But I found a copy of *Sister Wendy's 1000 Masterpieces*,[2] and because it was an art book, I thought I was being clever and could use that to pass some of the time. However, her entries began to move me spiritually, and I started to use her book to accompany me during my prayer periods. When I would pray with the scenes of Jesus's Baptism, his walking on the water, or the raising of Lazarus, I would prop the book open to those scenes as imagined by the big shots of art history. Throughout those thirty days, I was changed through prayer and Ignatian imaginative contemplation, and art helped facilitate that process. There was something there for me between art and prayer. Art was this transformative thing that helped me have a more profound experience than ever during this time of intense prayer.

Later, I moved from the novitiate in Syracuse, New York, and began First Studies[3] in St. Louis. During our studies, we also work in the apostolate.[4] I worked at our Nativity school – Loyola Academy – tutoring and reading with the middle school boys during my first semester. In the Spring, the school asked me if I could accompany one of the boys, let's call him William. He had learning disabilities and was in peril of not graduating, so he needed some volunteers to help him stay focused in class. I agreed, and then they asked me to sit with him during his art class. "Art class?!" I thought, "How will art class help this young man graduate? It's just art, after all." They had some other volunteers to cover the other subjects with him, so I ended up with William in his art classes twice a week. The first few months were brutal. He didn't engage with people

[1] (Loyola, 1992)
[2] (Beckett, 1999)
[3] A period of Jesuit formation where men in formation study philosophy generally among other subjects.
[4] A place where one does ministry work.

and needed to pace the room a lot. He wouldn't do his work, and I felt utterly useless in helping him. I'm sure we both loathed that first period, and we would just wait for the bell to ring with dreaded anticipation every Tuesday and Thursday.

Then, one day, I had a spark where I thought I would do something different. I was fed up with just sitting there in uncomfortable silence. I decided that I was going to teach him to draw. The class was working on a collage project he didn't seem engaged with, so I figured anything was better than where we were now. So we sat down together as usual, and he wasn't interested in working on the collage and would just sit there. I then began drawing and asked if he wanted to draw, and he cautiously said yes. He was trying to illustrate a character from a popular video game but was getting frustrated. I showed him how to draw out the basic shapes and use a kneaded eraser, which I brought in from home. He became focused and *spoke* with me, asking me how to make this shape or draw this part. And then suddenly, the bell rang, to both of our surprise. We were both so engaged in this process that we forgot to watch the clock like usual. He stayed behind for a minute to finish his drawing and left. I was profoundly moved by this experience because something there – in the course of drawing – something changed him. For a glimpse, I saw his deeper, more authentic self, who was not scared of the world or worried about anything. There was something in the act of creating something that made him almost a different person – a transfigured person. Again, art seemed to have the power to transform this young man into someone new, especially in the creation of art. It revealed his real self. What happened? Did art have such a power?

At the same time, I was taking my first sculpture class at SLU. We had to take some cultural courses here, and I tried them. I enjoyed the class and then, in the following Spring, took the proceeding course as well. I was pondering what to do for one of my projects. I wanted to

write something about The Annunciation, based on the biblical account, of course, but also on a poem of the same title by Denise Levertov.[5] I discovered her poem in the Novitiate, and it really spoke to my experience of discerning a vocation – to saying yes to becoming a Jesuit. She asks, "Aren't there annunciations / of one sort or another / in most lives?" I wanted to capture artistically that moment "when roads of light and storm / open from darkness in a man or woman." I wanted to illuminate the courage it took for Mary to say yes, in total freedom, to the unknown future that would come with bearing God's Son. I struggled to sketch an image because I was deadset on making the piece *accurate*. I wanted to make it figurative in the sense that Mary and the angel would *look* like how Fra Angelico depicted Mary and Gabriel. Yet, nothing was clicking.

[5] (Levertov, 1997, pp. 59-61)

2 Fra Angelico. The Annunciation. Ca. 1426. Tempera on panel, 63.9 x 75.4 in. El Prado, Madrid.

One morning during prayer, I imagined the Annunciation happening at one of our dining room tables in my Jesuit community. Every night after dinner, it is our custom for someone at the table to bring the plates away and for someone else to offer and serve coffee, tea, and dessert. Last year, one Jesuit in particular always prepared this tray to bring coffee and tea to his table. Usually, guys would bring out mugs and plop down the dessert plates. The tray was different, though. This Jesuit brought out this prepared tray with great elan, which was quite humorous for the whole community. This simple event infused the house with joy and laughter. And so, here is Mary, at our table, who is called by God to bring Christ into the world.

3 *Leeper, Nicholas. The Annunciation. 2023. Plaster, 13 x 19.75 x 6.5 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.*

She is called in a way that guys at dinner are called. There's an implicit ask at the end of every meal that everyone "hears" and eventually someone responds to. When everyone is done, we all know *someone* has to go and wash the dishes and get the drinks. Sometimes, I wait for others to get up and beat me to it so I can linger and be served. Other times, I rush to take plates to take a break from the dinner conversation.[6] And here is the Annunciation, at our table, in our community. It is this tray. It's the one Mary brings to our table. Something familiar, yet something new and filled with joy. She responds to this ask from God uniquely and creatively, not only by bringing the expected products to our table but also by bringing *joy* and giving the

[6] Or a painful lack thereof.

gift of laughter to our table and to every table in the dining room. And so, this is not an image of the Annunciation, where Mary's yes is not one not a yes out of sullen duty like we see in those Renaissance depictions, nor does she cower and wait for someone else to say yes instead. She says, "Yes, and." She answers with more. She brings Christ to the table – that is, the world – with laughter and lightheartedness.

In this work, I wanted to show the Annunciation differently. And I recalled how Daniel Spoerri, in the spirit of Nouveau Realisme, places found still-life objects in new perspectives hanging from walls.

4 Spoerri, Daniel. Kichka's Breakfast I. 1960. Wood chair hung on wall with board across seat, coffeepot, tumbler, china, eggcups, eggshells, cigarette butts, spoons, tin cans, and other materials. 14.375 x 27.375 x 25.75 in. MoMA, NYC.

He gives us, as Yves Klein and the New Realists wrote, "new ways of perceiving the real."[7] Returning to *The Annunciation*, I've taken this event and the coffee tray and given the viewer – and myself – a new way to see it, not just physically but to see the real in a spiritual perspective. Notice the text on the cups: "Blessings Abound" and "I <3 Los Angeles." One cup is for Mary, while the other is for her angelic guest. But the third has no information on it. It is blank. It's for you. Imagine being part of that conversation once the coffee is served at your table. Gabriel

[7] (Foster, Krauss, Bois, & Buchloh, 2004, p. 434)

delivers this news to Mary, but you, the viewer, are also sitting with them at the table, hearing all this. What do they speak about? How does Mary react? What are they wearing? What are they saying? The point is to enter the scene of the Annunciation, much like *The Spiritual Exercises* invites the retreatant to do. A core element of Ignatian spirituality is imaginative contemplation – to put oneself in the biblical scene and allow God to speak to you through the imagination as that scene plays out.

Finally, I placed a tiny little dove on the end of one of the spoons – the one that is pointing toward the Madonna's mug. Inside the container is sugar. I imagine that if Christ could be represented by one other thing, it could be sugar that one puts in their coffee. And isn't that what happens with Mary with Gabriel's news? Her life becomes much sweeter once she learns that Jesus is a part of it. Without Christ, our coffee or tea is bitter and bland. However, our lives are enriched, sweetened, and more pleasant with Christ.

I return to *The Annunciation* often, and more meaning keeps emerging from it. At first, I just responded to a simple idea – the Annunciation happening in our everyday lives – at the dinner table. But then, the piece began to speak on its own. And say more things about that moment between Mary and the angel. It said more about Christ. I am sure that there is something that you, too, have picked up on that I haven't noticed, but that could be equally valid. That could speak truth into our faith – or perhaps even our humanity. After completing this piece, I felt that I received an Annunciation of another kind. There was a certain call to create these artworks to help make the invisible God visible. There was an invitation to integrate art more fully into life because there is something there that is transformative.

The Early Jesuits and Arts

Reflecting on this call, I also realized that the early Jesuits, the pioneers of the Society of Jesus in the middle of the 16th century, also saw something transformative in the arts. The Jesuits established their early schools to provide character formation through the humanities and promote character formation, or *pietas*.[8] And these Jesuits saw the schools as a means to help souls.[9] And it did so, in large part, through the arts. Students developed *pietas* by reading the classics – *secular literature*, not theological arguments or biblical narratives alone. They read Cicero and St. Paul – Virgil and the Gospels.

The Jesuits emphasized that students both appreciate art *and* participate in it creatively. The Jesuit school used the Parisian method, which, among other things, insisted on an education of action. Students were encouraged not just to read literature but to also compose their own poetry. Students were to read plays *and* act in them. Jesuit schools became renowned because of the drama productions they would put on. The arts were not only popular but spiritually effective. One Jesuit noted that "the spiritual impact [of the plays] could be the equivalent of a good sermon."[10] These Jesuits saw a deep connection between the arts and spirituality, the aesthetic and the faith. Somehow, they saw that the arts moved people closer to God.

It's also worth mentioning that the Jesuits did not just teach the arts but also actively participated in them. Jesuits, such as the Tristano brothers, Daniel Seghers, and Andrea Pozzo, were active in the visual arts, and other notable Jesuits wrote plays, composed music, and designed buildings. Perhaps these Jesuits realized that the arts were tools for their mission, yes,

---

[8] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 9)
[9] (The Society of Jesus, 1996, pp. 3-4). *The Formula of the Institute* – a sort of mission statement of the Jesuits – claims that all of our ministries are aimed "for the progress of souls" by various means, including education.
[10] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 11)

but also for their own self-transcendence or personal fulfillment. Maybe they saw the arts as part of their own route to God within the Society of Jesus – a pathway to God.[11]

Images, in particular, which will be my focus in this paper mainly in the medium of sculpture and painting, also had an evident power that these early Jesuits recognized. Francis Xavier wrote about the importance of images when doing missionary work among the Japanese.[12] Jerome Nadal also published his *Evangelicae Historia Imagines* and *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia* to complement prayer.[13] These works, particularly the latter, were widely disseminated particularly in the Jesuit schools to give images of the Gospel stories so that people could more readily imagine those scenes and place themselves within them imaginatively to make spiritual progress.

The Society was imbued with a cultural mission that integrated its spiritual one. Art and religion are one and the same mission.[14] However, after the Suppression and Restoration of the Society[15], this cultural and spiritual program was lost in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Fortunately, this dyad mission was recovered in our schools after the Second Vatican Council. However, the artworld has changed drastically, and it is unclear – at present – if art can aid a contemporary spiritual mission as the early Jesuits believed it did for their time.

Hegel and the End of Art

Going to contemporary art museums, it's clear that religion has lost its place in the artworld. There are less explicitly religious works generally. And the medium and way art is done

[11] (The Society of Jesus, 1996, p. 4) "This Institute [The Society of Jesus] which is, so to speak, a pathway to God."
[12] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 24)
[13] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 25)
[14] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 26)
[15] The Suppression of the Society of Jesus began in 1773 with Pope Clement XIV ordered that the Order cease its operations and that Jesuits renounce their vows. The Society was restored by Pope Pius VII in 1814.

is no longer confined to paintings and sculptures. It seems somewhat chaotic from the outside looking in. Not only is there no more religious art, but it seems there's less and less *art* generally. Is it possible to unite spirit and culture as these early Jesuits did in this cultural climate where religious art is marginalized?

Religious art, or art in general, apparently has not been *working* for a while, according to G.F.W. Hegel, a German Idealist, who wrote extensively on art and claimed famously that art has ended. Arthur Danto, a contemporary philosopher of art, clarifies that the end of art does not mean art will not be created anymore but rather that it has nothing left to say philosophically.[16] For Hegel, we come to know about the world not just through rational sciences and empirical observation but through what he terms Absolute Spirit, which consists of art, religion, and philosophy.[17] These three elements are how we discover Truth instead of merely beautifying, moralizing, or articulating what we already know. Art gives us knowledge via sensory intuition, religion through pictorial imagination (or *Vorstellung*), and philosophy through conceptual thought. These three exist in a hierarchy where art serves religion, and religion serves philosophy. However, Hegel concedes that art can no longer contribute anything further to religion because art no longer produces devotion, contemplation, or any other religious benefit in its audiences. It is no longer necessary to form belief, Hegel's primary understanding of the essence of religion, because of the advent of rational, discursive philosophy and theology in the Enlightenment. Hegel says, "No matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer."[18] Art then no longer *works*. It seems that religious art – which all art is for Hegel in the sense that it serves religion –

[16] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997)
[17] (Hegel G. W., Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, 2007, pp. 292-316)
[18] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 103)

no longer causes prayers to be said, minds to contemplate, or hearts to be converted. Pictures of the saints and Christ crucified fall flat for contemporary audiences. And so, in the age where religion, in the West at least, is on the ostensible decline[19], it seems perhaps even more true that accurate depictions of religious figures will not "work" any more than they have in Hegel's day. It seems easy to conclude then that art – religious or otherwise – does not seem to make people more spiritual, ethical, contemplative, or anything.

The issue for Hegel, however, is that he assumes that the highest art must portray *Geist* or Spirit, and it does this most perfectly by *portraying humanity*. For him, to portray humanity is to represent the divine, seemingly based on the idea that humans are created in God's image.[20] But he takes this quite literally. The highest art must have figurative, representational depictions of human beings to communicate the highest Truth about God.[21] Romantic artists of the 19th century were very good at depicting religious figures with a high degree of accuracy. Yet despite these skilled depictions, people no longer are moved to belief, according to Hegel. I posit that is because his theory of art has a fundamental error in that portraying Truth about God does not rely on the representational portrayal of human subjects; *merely* depicting human beings does not communicate Truth about the divine.

Like others of his time, Hegel operates on an art theory in the Vasarian mode of representation, where art aims to make *accurate depictions* more than anything else. Giorgio Vasari authored one of the most influential theories of art that has had a very long run in Western

---

[19] At least according to secularization theory, where religion continues its decline and the world becomes "disenchanted" the more rational a society becomes (Weber, 1958). Additionally, polls show that religious affiliation – particularly Christianity – continues to shrink at least in the United States. (Pew Research Center, 2019).
[20] See Genesis 1:27 (*New American Bible Revised Edition* [NABRE]). The idea that humanity is created in the image of God is foundational for the belief in the equal human dignity for all human life.
[21] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 607)

art history. His manifesto argues for representation by imitation. For Vasari, Michaelangelo was akin to a god who came to earth and gave the world, starting with Florence, his incredible talent and accomplished the purpose of art, which is "imitating the perfection of Nature by the excellence of Art."[22] It is an art that acts as a "mirror towards nature."[23] The artist's goal is realism or mimesis – to represent the natural world in art because nature is made by God. Therefore, the thought goes, if one looks at nature and copies it perfectly in an idealized fashion[24] – especially the human form – then God's Truth is perfectly communicated to the audience. And Vasari saw the apotheosis in art through the person of "the Tuscan genius." After *The Last Judgment*, there is no more art to do besides fine-tuning and repeating.

[22] Quoted in (Danto, The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World, 2000, pp. 416-7).
[23] Plato and Shakespeare both held this view of art (Carroll, 1999, pp. 20-1).
[24] Some, like Caravaggio, sought to interpret this mimetic agenda through true realism instead of idealized ones, putting him at odds with the artists of the Italian Renaissance. However, Caravaggio still sought to portray humanity just in another mode.

5 Michelangelo. The Last Judgment. 1535–1541. Fresco. 539.3 in × 472.4 in. Sistine Chapel, Vatican.

And so, for Hegel, Vasari, and all the artists between the two, art had to reflect nature – meaning that religious art had to depict Jesus, Mary, and saints as human figures.

In this view, representing Mary and Christ is more important than what they *mean*. As Danto claims regarding Vasari, art moved from meaning to being or from semantics to syntax.[25] However, as Danto concurs, art cannot be without meaning. Merely depicting religious figures doesn't necessarily mean that those pictures *mean* anything. And so, for art to continue to teach us about the world and ourselves, it must *abandon* the Vasarian manifesto for an art of religious meaning. Religious art does not necessarily carry spiritual significance through realistic representation. I hypothesize that art is not at an end. It can still aid religion, as the early Jesuits thought. However, it requires rethinking *how* to do that in the 21st century.

Perhaps a new way of representing the religious in art can help achieve that spiritual and cultural mission that the early Jesuits adapted for themselves. I posit that such a way, especially now, must move away from mere traditional representation to something different. It's important to note that the Jesuits were also very able and comfortable seeing God in the pagan works of Virgil and Cicero. They could recognize God in works that were not religious in their *content* – their depictions – but these works still had a spiritual depth. These early Jesuits were comfortable "finding God in all things" – a common Jesuit adage for the ability to see God working in everything in creation for our good.[26] Therefore, if the early Jesuits saw that God could speak through non-Christian aesthetic objects, then it seems that perhaps there can be a new and possibly more productive way to advance this spiritual and cultural mission through the arts aside from a program of religious pictorial realism that Hegel, along with Vasari, believed was the highest form of art to convey religious Truth.

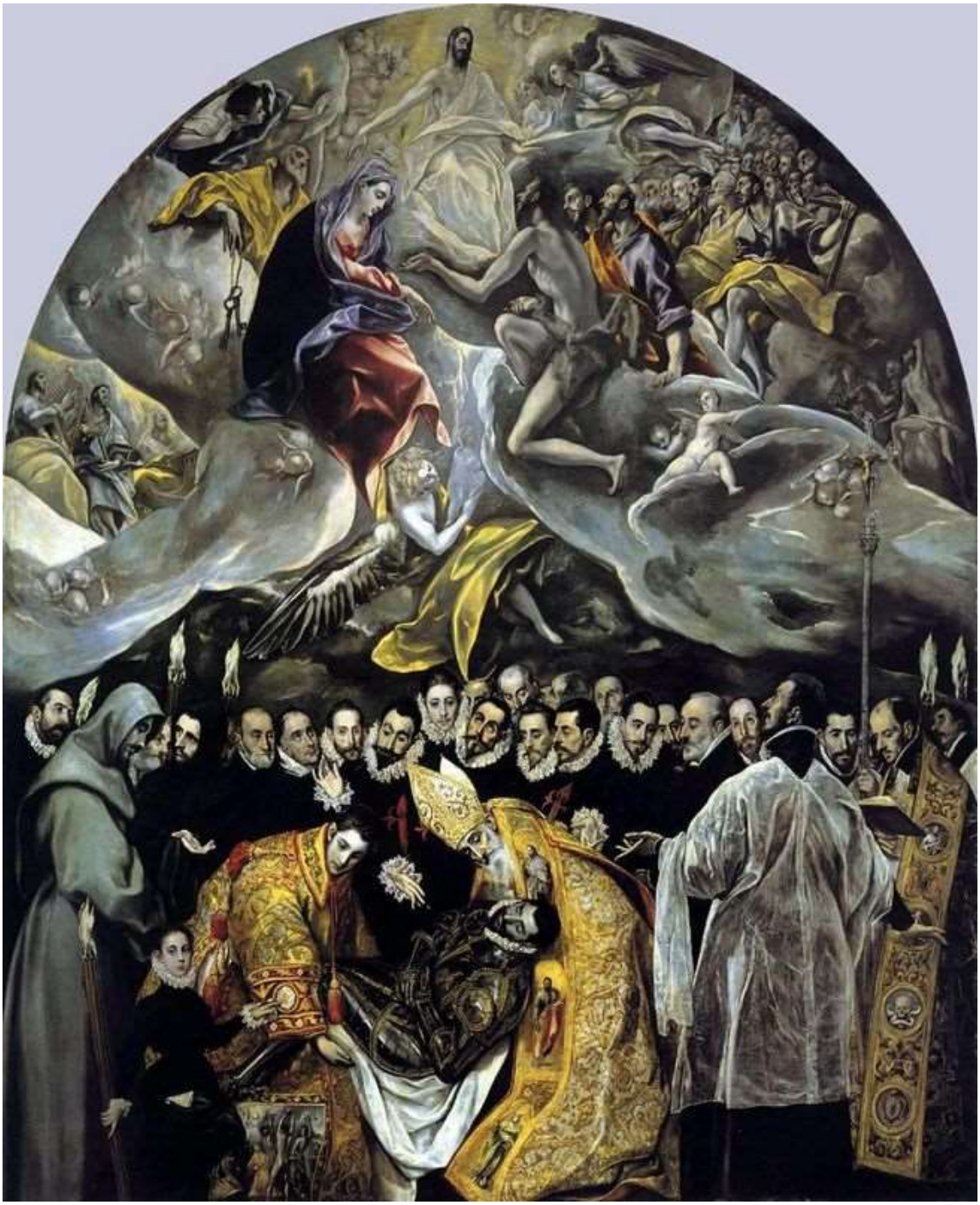
---

[25] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 108)
[26] (Loyola, 1992, p. #236)

What is Christ?

Although Vasari's program dominated art history, it did not go unchallenged. El Greco,[27] a Greek Mannerist painter from the late 15th and early 16th centuries, sought to answer "Who is Christ?" by first considering the question "What is Christ?" in his artwork.[28] His religious paintings, such as *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, capture the Platonic Form of the divine in visual space as *something* that illuminates *someone*.

[27] Dominikos Theotokopoulos – El Greco was his Spanish nickname.
[28] (Davies D. , 2003)



6 El Greco. The Burial of the Count of Orgaz. 1586. Oil on canvas. 190 x 140 in. Iglesia de Santo Tomé, Toledo.

He was more concerned with light and color than draftsmanship, which put him at odds with Vasari's agenda of imitating nature.[29] For El Greco, Christ's essence was more properly captured through a thing rather than a mimetic depiction. Christ looks unnatural here, but El Greco makes him the source of light for this painting. For him, Christ's Form is radiance itself. Christ is light: a *thing*.

As time passed, El Greco was largely forgotten and fell outside the pale of art history[30] as Vasari's agenda calcified as *the* aesthetic program until the invention of the photographic camera. After the photograph – nature's pencil[31] – Vasari's program was fulfilled, where all of nature could be depicted perfectly with a machine. Art needed a new purpose, and new aesthetic manifestos came to take Vasari's place, starting with the Impressionists, who emphasized visual effect over mimetic representation. Édouard Manet, an Impressionist pioneer, rediscovered El Greco as an exemplar of the new movement because El Greco focused more on visual effects than mimesis.

Manet was inclined to show the what of persons, albeit in a different mode. Peter Schjeldahl notes that still-life technically makes up about a fifth of Manet's work. But, he comments that still-life was not a side project for Manet. It was fundamental. He asks, "What are his celebrated figure paintings but [still-lifes] in which people are objects of particular variety?"[32] His human figures in paintings such as *The Dead Christ with Angels* are less portraiture and more still-life.

---

[29] Funnily enough, El Greco was professionally ousted from Rome for saying that Michelangelo, Vasari's hero, was a good man but that he did not know how to paint. Although to be fair to the "Tuscan genius," painting was more of a hobby for him whereas sculpture was his proper vocation. Additionallz, El Greco was inimicaly opposed to Vasari's program in general (Davies D. , 2003).
[30] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997)
[31] (Talbot, 1844)
[32] (Schjeldahl, The Urbane Innocent, 2000)

7 Manet, Édouard. The Dead Christ with Angels. 1864. Oil on canvas. 70.525 x 59 in. The Met, NYC.

For Manet, everyone and everything is objectified – not as objects to be used inhumanely – but rather as objects that reflect light and color. For Manet, people are properties. They are chromatic

impressions more than individuals. Christ, for him, is revealed more through an optical experience than conventional representation. Christ is color: a *thing*.

Both artists attempted to illuminate who Christ is by showing Him as things: light and color. What other phenomena can reveal to us who Christ is? Could other *things* also speak to who Christ is? Instead of people being objectified, could not objects be personified? Christ is transfigured, but can't objects be too to reveal God's Truth? Can we understand who Christ is through objects? Can we come to know more about God through things? So perhaps, through still-life, we can learn more about God.

Still-life, historically, was the lowest rung of painting. They are projects that artists do in school to practice and master form to move from fruit to figures. Still-life was seen as practice for the grander depictions of religious, national, or mythical paintings. This mode of painting has a long history, but it came into vogue in the modern era during the Dutch Golden Age. After the Netherlands became Protestant, patronage and religious ideation shifted art away from religious representation and more toward landscape, portraits, and still-life. The Dutch creatively found ways to make their "banquet pieces" have spiritual meaning. They created "religious art" in a new mode to comply with Jean Calvin's stance on producing graven images.[33]

Still-life began to take on moralistic messages in the *vanitas*. This still-life motif was a subtle reminder of the Stoic expression *memento mori.*[34] For example, Heda's painting shows the typical gilded cups, the tray of oysters, the snaky orange peel, and the silver dishware with such a restrained reminder.

[33] Calvin forbade the depiction of God, but permitted arts that represented things that could be seen, such as landscapes, portraits of living people, and everyday objects. (1845, I, 2, 12).
[34] "Remember that you have to die."

8 Heda, Willem Claesz. Still-Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware. 1635. Oil on wood, 19.525 x 31.75 in. The Met, NYC.

All the items here indicate a wealthy lifestyle made possible by colonial expansion in this period.[35] Yet, in depicting wealth, Heda reminds the affluent patron that they, too, will die. The broken glass, the abandoned breakfast, the inconspicuous knife, and the rolled-up almanac page remind the viewer of their temporality. It's a reminder that despite one's wealth, everything will fade away. Heda and other Dutch still-life artists were still able to use art to preach, in a sense, and do so in an understated way that blended with their societal norms at the time. They were creative in incorporating the spiritual, where they could have just painted fruit as seen and nothing more. They made something ordinary mean something more.

[35] Lemons don't grow so well in the Low Countries.

With this history in mind, I titled my accompanying exhibit of artworks *What is Christ?*[36] In this show of eight artworks, I provide additional answers to El Greco's question, hopefully deepening our *interior* knowledge[37] of *who Christ is*. According to Hegel, if our human portrayal of religious figures no longer works, then perhaps spiritual still-life might be a way to provide a fresh perspective. This show and paper attempt to invoke all three moments of Absolute Spirit at once – it is artistic, theological, and philosophical. Through this, I hypothesize that art, religion, and philosophy *together* can still give us meaning in our lives and that there is no end to art but rather a new beginning – without the baggage of Vasari's artistic agenda. Art, welded with religion and philosophy, can continue to lead to Truth in the 21st century. These three together give meaning to life.

Going Forward

Frank Burch Brown and David Brown, both theological aestheticians, point out that most accounts of theological aesthetics start from the point of theory and then move to aesthetic examples to illustrate those points.[38] These theories work deductively, where artworks are made to fit into a program or system of thought. However, both authors claim that the field needs to work inductively, first from experience and then moving to theory from that point of departure. Their point can rightly be made about philosophical aesthetics as well. And so this paper will explore these things inductively, starting with art. As this is a philosophical thesis, I will focus here primarily on philosophy and leave the theologizing for elsewhere.

---

[36] Which has been graciously hosted at the Saint Louis University Museum of Art from May 3 to May 26, 2024.
[37] St. Ignatius uses the term interior knowledge to refer to a personal knowledge of Christ (*conocer* in Spanish) to distinguish it from knowledge about something or someone (*saber*). The point of the 2nd week is to grow in interior knowledge of Christ to know him as a friend not to merely learn about him (Loyola, 1992, #104).
[38] Explicitly noted in (Brown, 2014).

All of my examples, of course, will be from this exhibition and are primarily visual arts: painting and sculpture. I hope the things I discuss can apply to other art forms, such as music and architecture. However, I will not discuss those different means of creative expression with *too* much emphasis in this paper.

Additionally, on the subject of religion, I will approach the subject mainly from the perspective of Catholicism. Since this is my faith tradition, I do not feel it necessary to universalize my claims to make them applicable to other religious faiths. If they are helpful insights that can be applied to different faith traditions, I leave that to other scholars to investigate, and I hope that this project can inspire work in those areas.

Finally, I will address each piece in the show and try to draw some fruit from it that is philosophically relevant to developing a theory of an Ignatian aesthetic that can reunite the cultural and spiritual missions of the early Society again. As I currently teach art to middle schoolers and will be teaching high schoolers in Regency,[39] I will have a concluding section on creativity and aesthetic education and how this survey might "help souls" in the classroom.

[39] A three year period of Jesuit formation where Jesuits in Formation work in ministry full time.

Brillo Tabernacle

9 Leeper, Nicholas. Brillo Tabernacle. 2024. Acrylic on Plywood and Maple; Acrylic on Brillo Pad, 18 x 27 x 17 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

Here is an open Brillo Box. Inside is an elaborate medieval design for a tabernacle. The flaps depict carved scenes from the life of Jesus: His baptism, walking on water, his encounter with the rich young man, his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, his praying at the Garden of

Gethsemane, and his scourging at the pillar. The interior walls depict Jesus's burial and Resurrection. There is the monstrance, an ornate and costly vessel used for Adoration, where Catholics worship the Blessed Sacrament in prayer in churches, that suspends from the wall of the box to give the viewer "new ways of perceiving the real" in the manner of Daniel Spoerri and the nouveau-realists. Inside the monstrance is an ultramarine blue Brillo pad, a piece of steel wool used for cleaning pots and pans. Behind the monstrance is a relief scene of Christ's Descent from the Cross, with Mary holding Jesus's hands. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus take him down from the cross. St. John, the beloved disciple, looks on, observing the scene. Angels float above, one with a sun and the other with a moon, and in between them, and directly behind the blue host, is the sign that Pontius Pilate placed above the cross of Jesus, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." This vibrant Brillo box is a tabernacle – a place that contains the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[40] But what in the world is a Brillo Box?

Arthur Danto claims that Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* ushered in the end of art in 1964.[41] If *Brillo Box* can be art, then everything can also be art. The reason is that what Warhol made is *indiscernible* from what was sold at the grocery store in the sixties. A Brillo box was just a box of Brillo pads that ordinary people bought in stores to clean their dishes. It is just an everyday, ordinary object.[42] *Brillo Box* looks exactly like one would buy in the grocery store, and therefore, how could Warhol's box be art and the one in the store fail to be if they look the same? Although Warhol built his box out of plywood, unlike the grocery store one, there will be some minute

[40] Not actually but metaphorically in this artwork. No Brillo pads have been consecrated liturgically in the making of this artwork.
[41] (Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, 1983)
[42] Although Warhol appropriated the box, the commercial product was actually designed by an Abstract Expressionist artist, James Harvey, which raises an interesting question about the commercial box's status as an art object being that it was made by an actual artist.

differences perceivable to the eye upon very close inspection.[43] These small perceptual changes do not make the essence of *Brillo Box* art, where the one in the store fails on this account. There must be something more significant, then. Instead, Danto argues that *Brillo Box* has an *embodied meaning*. For Danto, art is embodied meaning. Art must be about something.[44] Warhol's work is *about* something where the box in the store *does* something. The latter holds soap pads, and its design is meant to sell boxes, not be contemplated. The former is *about* commercial art, the beauty in the everyday, and the philosophical definition of art itself.

[43] Goodman (1968) argues that forgeries of artworks are never truly identical because minute differences can be identified upon very close inspection.
[44] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 195)

10 Warhol, Andy. Brillo Box (Soap Pads). 1964. Polyvinyl acetate and silkscreen ink on wood, 17.125 x 17 x 14 in. MoMA, NYC

Because art, according to Danto, is about embodied meaning, *Brillo Box* has become the symbol of contemporary art, that is, art after the end of art.[45] Anything now in this era can indeed rise to art status.

Art a Joke?

Challenging Danto, Roger Scruton asks, "If anything can count as art, what is the point or the merit in achieving that label?"[46] He believes that the consequence of Danto's theory of art is

[45] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997)
[46] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 98)

that it allows people in modern society to ignore culture and consider soap operas and operas equally valuable. *Brillo Box* and a Renaissance painting are of the same value because both have art status, and this is problematic for Scruton and perhaps for most ordinary people who see contemporary art as strange and esoteric but strangely on the same plane as classic masterpieces that hang in the Uffizi Gallery or the Louvre. Scruton sees Warhol's project as a massive joke that is not funny and sees current attempts to challenge the definition of art as equally absurd and a waste of time and resources. These are the result of degradation in Scruton's worldview. According to this critique, it is not helpful to classify something like *Brillo Box* as art.

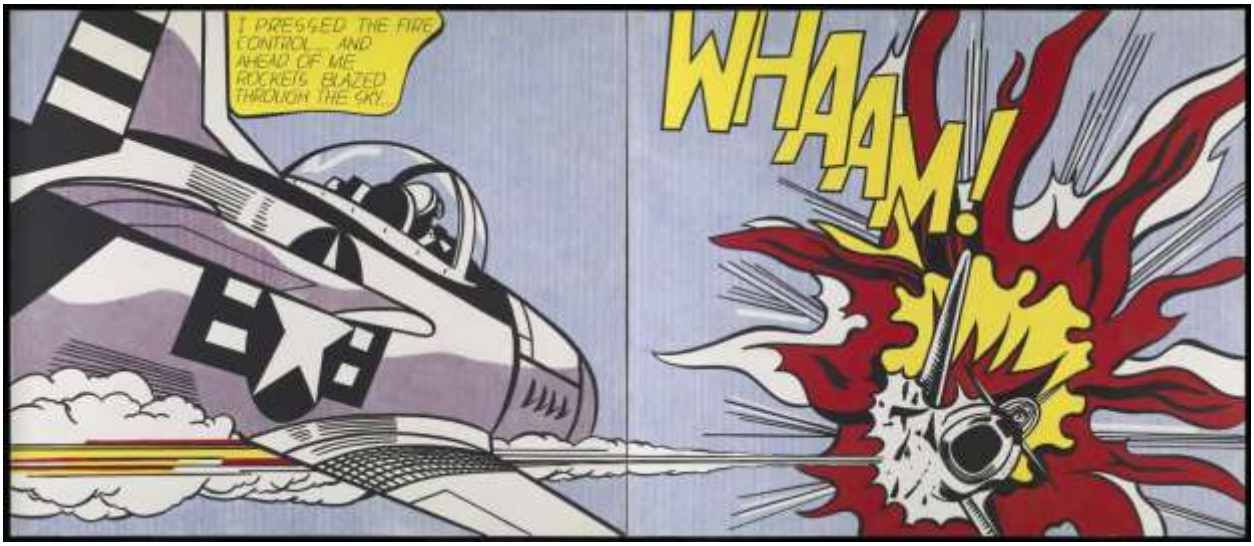
Scruton's critique rests on several assumptions about art that are more commendatory than classificatory. He defines art by what he thinks it *should be* rather than what it *is.* Like many in the 20th century, he has taken the liberty to define art according to what he *would like* art to do. R.C. Collingwood, author of *Principles of Art*, is a notorious philosophical predecessor for claiming such commendatory conditions for art's status as art, where there is Art differentiated from craft, amusement, magic, and representation, which he distinguishes from a genuine, capital-A, "Art."[47] He is not alone, however. As mentioned earlier, Vasari is the progenitor of the mimetic theory of art – where art needs to mirror reality in an ideal fashion, preferably. Vasari's art theory is the genesis of such "manifestos" in art history, which defined art in terms of its representational ability to capture reality –like a camera on one's phone with filters to make everything look perfect.[48] Since the invention of the camera itself in the late 19th century, there have been many other influential manifestos, such as Expressivism, Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism, and Realism and Surrealism, which have proposed to consider what is true art

[47] (Collingwood, 1938)
[48] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, pp. 28-37)

where everything else fails to be so. To just take one alternate example, Leo Tolstoy proposes that "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."[49] Any painting or sculpture or piece of music then that does not "hand on to others feeling he has lived through" and bring about an experience of those feelings in the audience then fails to be Art and is merely something else. These manifestos fail to say much about what art *is* and instead insist on what art *should be*. Unfortunately, Scruton joins a long line of angry critics with their fists in the air and their heads in the sand. His manifesto – and manifestos generally – fail to see the merit of the art object in front of them due to manifesto myopia.

Regarding Scruton's concern about operas and soap operas sharing equal value, he can rest assured that just because both are art forms does not mean that they guarantee *equal* value. Anything that is art has embodied meaning, but that does not mean that its meaning has equal weight. Art has different *ends,* which it pursues by divergent *means*. For example, a comic book's purpose is to entertain, but Roy Lichtenstein's *Whaam!* is not meant for entertainment.

[49] (Tolstoy, 2007, p. 123)



11 Lichtenstein, Roy. Whaam! 1963. Acrylic paint and oil paint on canvas. 68.762 × 160.826 × 2.3622 in. Tate Modern, London.

Instead, Lichtenstein's work is *about* something: militarism, violence, the black-and-white perspective of a child regarding war, and, of course, commercial art and comic books themselves. The comic book *could* have an embodied meaning, but it lacks it on its own and needs an artist to make it communicate that. Part of this process could occur simply by placing the comic book in a museum, where an artist or a curator simply declares this art via George Dickie's Institutional Definition of Art.[50] According to this definition, some person acting on behalf of the Artworld declares an artifact to be Art and succeeds when the artifact is accepted. One can cynically say that Lichtenstein and Warhol are admitted access and sneak past the gatekeepers of the Artworld to make something that is not art, Art. Perhaps that is what Scruton is upset about: things such as grocery store containers and comic book pages have risen to the status of art, thereby deflating art's significance to nothing.

[50] (Dickie, 1974)

The Institutional Definition, however, fails to account for the meaning that a work can have, and that is precisely what Danto claims is the weakness of that definition. It also fails due to the advent of conceptual art, where artworks no longer have to be artifacts and do not need to be created by the artist. Consider Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, a pile of candy that museumgoers can take and eat.[51]

12 Gonzalez-Torres, Felix. "Untitled" (Portrait of Ross in L.A.). 1991. Candies in variously colored wrappers, endless supply. Dimensions vary with installation; ideal weight 175 lbs. Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.

When the candies are all gone, does the work continue to exist even though it does not have a medium? Does it exist while the museum waits for another batch to replace the missing ones? Sculptures like *Brillo Box, Brillo Tabernacle*, or a more conventional one like Bernini's *Ecstasy*

[51] I did grab a piece, but I was very afraid to actually eat it. Where's the nutritional information? Is this just solidified Chlorox? So I just threw my little piece of art in the trash at the museum, which leads to an interesting question about where art could be in the museum besides on the walls.

of Saint Teresa, for that matter, are all constituted out of material, but is the statue identical with the material?

13 Bernini, Gian Lorenzo. Ecstasy of Saint Teresa, 1647-52. Marble. 138 x 110 x 81 in. Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome.

Sculpture, at least, is not constituted by its physical material.[52] The statue and the material are distinct and separate entities. So, *Untitled (A Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* is merely *constituted by* individually wrapped candies, which are not *identical to* the work. The artwork will remain in existence when all the sweets run out. Sculpture is like music; it has two levels of ontology or two modes of being.[53] In the first mode, the artist expresses how the work should be. The second mode happens on the occasion of its incarnation. Those instructions must be carried out to display the art object in question through a particular means. For example, a composer writes the composition, and an orchestra follows the instructions. But the work still exists if someone wrote a composition and no one ever played it. It is embodied as sheet music, although it never might be embodied in sound. Similarly, visual artwork can still exist, which ontologically defeats the Institutional Definition of Art, which requires an artifact or a museum curator to deign it Art.

Things cannot just be art because an Artworld ambassador submits an artifact for candidacy. The piece, the creation, must be about something, even if it only exists at the level of idea. However, to Danto's point, art must *embody* meaning because ideas themselves are not art. They can become art when made manifest, as when a music composer sets down a score on a sheet of paper – or even a napkin in a coffeehouse. In this instance, everything can be art because everything can embody a meaning. Again, this is not to say that everything *is* art, but only that it has the potential to be art. And so, a more apt question might not be "What is art?" but "When is art?"

[52] (Irvin, Artworks, Objects and Structures, 2012)
[53] (Irvin, Installation Art and Performance: A Shared Ontology, 2013)

When is Art?

Nelson Goodman asks, "When is art?" in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), claiming that because all artifacts are sensory, they must be aesthetic objects. For him, everything can then function as art, and the concept of art as an ontological status is equivocal in his nominalist perspective. There is no unique visible property that makes something art. Humans only engage objects as "art." Art is a verb instead of a noun. Goodman claims that when art happens, things gain "symptoms of the aesthetic." These symptomatic objects become "replete" and begin to carry meaning and significance and emerge as worthy of attention. This sounds right when we consider a crowd of museumgoers who stop and look at some debris on the floor of a modern art museum with interest and engaged attention. People certainly pay more attention to objects they believe to be art, so art is a matter of engagement rather than status. And his theory seems to be backed by some studies in neuroaesthetics. Rolf Zwaan, a Dutch cognitive psychologist, did a study where he reproduced a news article for two test groups.[54] The first group was told it was an excerpt from a piece of literature. The second was told that it was a news article. He found that the first group paid much more attention to the form than the latter group. They memorized more vocabulary, remembered the story more accurately, and spent more time with the piece than the control group. Although it is not literature, the newspaper article became replete – it became literary – when people engaged with it as such. Ellen Winner, an aesthetician,[55] concludes, "It makes no sense to ask if a text is literature. We can only ask whether it is functioning as literature. And the same goes for any kind of art."[56] Anything can be art, and all art has meaning to varying degrees.

---

[54] (Winner, 2018, p. 18)
[55] A term for philosophers who study art and aesthetics, not to be confused with those who paint nails in salons – although no doubt that one could be both simultaneously.
[56] (Winner, 2018, p. 19)

Art's value is determined by the meaning that the art embodies. Scruton claims that art offers "food for thought and spiritual uplift."[57] For him, the intellectual and spiritual have significance in meaning, and I would certainly agree with that. However, such a meaning can be found in *Brillo Tabernacle*, and *one* of those meanings is that *Brillo Box* also contains content for "spiritual uplift."

If God can be found in all things, then even in "a world in which human aspirations no longer find their artistic expression, in which we no longer make for ourselves images of the transcendent, and in which mounds of rubbish cover the site of our ideals"[58] significant meaning can still be found that brings the soul closer to God. Unfortunately, Scruton seems beholden to an aesthetic theory that merely prizes specific categories of artworks for their own sake. He indicates that such a genre accomplishes his spiritual ends *because* it is that genre. At the same time, he dismisses non-traditional modes of depiction as "mounds of rubbish." In his film, *Why Beauty Matters* (2009), he discusses the differences between Delacroix's *Le Lit Défait* and Tracey Emin's *My Bed*.

[57] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 98)
[58] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 101)

14 Delacroix, Eugène, Le lit défait. Watercolor. 7.25 x 11.75 in. Le Louvre, Paris

15 Emin, Tracey, My Bed. Box frame, mattress, linens, pillows, and various objects. Overall display dimensions variable. Tate, London

Both depict the same content: an unmade bed. However, Scruton takes issue with Emin because it is just a bed, whereas Delacroix *painted* it. Scruton uses the language of beauty and transformation to exalt Delacroix but denounces Emin's work because there is no skill or depiction – it is just a real bed, not art, according to Scruton. Scruton might agree with art critic Adrian Searle, who excoriated Emin, saying, "Tracey, you just go on and on, in an endlessly solipsistic, self-regarding homage to yourself…There's nothing to see in your work but you, your mood swings, your sentimentality and your nostalgia. It's all so mawkish, so cloying."[59] However, *My Bed* could also be about more profound concepts than Seale and Scruton would be willing to admit, such as "vulnerability, heartbreak, depression, femineity, sexuality."[60] I find it a remarkable philosophical take on Plato's concepts of the Form. Socrates uses the example of a bed to illustrate how Forms exist as an idea of a bed, the actual bed, and a depiction of a bed.[61] In *My Bed,* the idea, craft, and depiction as an artwork are all united. Its Platonic threefold existence in this instance as conceptual artwork is united into one Form of being that is physical, mimetic, and ideal. Scruton fails to understand *My Bed* because it is conceptual art, and he writes off this mode of depiction as unspiritual. If Delacroix painted a painting of *My Bed*, it seems that Scruton would have praised it because it was a painting. It is not that his *lit* is any less of a mess than Emin's is. However, Delacroix – or any painter for that matter – could never embody the message My Bed captures regarding Plato's Forms in a painting because it needs conceptual art to express it precisely in this way where all three Forms are united in one piece. One cannot portray a bed and also have a real bed in a painting, which is *just* a representation. If he stopped to consider the embodied meaning of this work, he might be able to grasp that it *does* have "food

[59] (Searle, 1999)
[60] (Vaccarino Bremner, 2021, p. 543)
[61] (Plato, The Republic, 1992, 596a-d)

for thought and spiritual uplift." Instead, he seems to discard *My Bed*, along with other pieces of modern art, because they don't fit his particular palette for a classical Western aesthetic.

To be fair to Delacroix, I do not deny that his painting lacks an embodied meaning. In fact, it could have quite a profound one, and my point is not to deny its meaning but just to stress that *both* artworks embody meaning. Unfortunately, Scruton mistakes the aesthetic form for artistic value and conflates the two. Artwork is only valuable as a painting, sculpture, or classical Western music for Scruton. He dismisses all that does not fit within Baumgarten's program of the fine arts, such as paintings, sculptures, music, poetry, and architecture, to say the least. But art, at its core, is embodied meaning.

Formalism and Freedom

Brillo Tabernacle shows that *Brillo Box* does have such an embodied meaning. It speaks to the transcendental truth that Scruton desires. In part, Andy Warhol's agenda with Brillo Box was to free the artworld from the aesthetic Formalism that dominated the fifties under the aegis of Clement Greenberg and the Abstract Expressionists. Formalism, a theory of art articulated by Clive Bell, claims that art is all about Significant Form, a unique aesthetic quality manifest in composition, line, shape, color, value, and other qualities that make art distinct from ordinary, everyday objects.[62] According to Formalism, art is valuable not because of what it represents or expresses but because of its design. For example, the formalist would see Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* as valuable for its symmetry and design *alone*.

[62] (Bell, 1914)

16 Da Vinci, Leonardo, The Last Supper. Dry wall-painting. 181 x 346.5 in. Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

The formalist would not regard the religious content, ideas, or emotional expression as adding to the artwork's value.[63] Clement Greenberg and the Abstract Expressionists sought to capture pure form without *any* mimetic or expressive content. They even removed signatures and frames from their art pieces because they believed they would distract from the aesthetic experience. And so, *Brillo Box* is a direct challenge to Formalism, as Warhol's box looks exactly like the one in the store – yet one is art, and the other is not. The variance cannot be attributed to form or aesthetic distinctions. Danto believes that Warhol ushered in the end of art marked by the production of contemporary art, where "artists liberated from the burden of history, were free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all. That is the mark of contemporary art."[64] Now, everything is possible, and as Danto says, "Anything can be

[63] Although Da Vinci was not a formalist, he did say, "Let no one read me who is not a mathematician" (Quoted in Aristides, 2006, Art as Visual Music). His saying certainly could be taken up as a formalist axiom on the importance of composition.

[64] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 15)

art…It inaugurates the greatest era of freedom art has ever known."[65] Because of Warhol's *Brillo Box*, contemporary art is marked by an almost absolute freedom. Warhol set the artworld free from the reign of manifestos, so the *Brillo Box* symbolizes that freedom for our time.

Brillo Tabernacle also makes *Brillo Box* a symbol of freedom in the Christian sense, where people could create and respond to God with their own creativity – freely – as it might have been in the Garden before the Fall. Like in most medieval religious works, the floral designs in *Brillo Tabernacle* evoke images of the Garden of Eden. Most medieval naves of churches, for example, have floral patterns to indicate that the church building was a sort of Garden of Eden. And so in this tabernacle, inside the Brillo box, it is like this Garden – where God and humankind are in harmony and totally free. And so the freedom found in the artworld mirrors the freedom that we long for in our lives – one that is total and absolute like it was in the Garden. Even though *Brillo Box* might have this meaning given by *Brillo Tabernacle*, does that make it beautiful?

One might say that my *Brillo Tabernacle* is beautiful because of all that gold paint, or because I took the time to carve mimetic figures of Jesus, or because they want to be nice to me, but Warhol's *Brillo Box* is not beautiful in the same way.[66] One might object that Warhol's project is just an ordinary box, not art. However, as I have shown, art must embody meaning. To say it is not art is wrong because it *embodies meaning* – and quite a deep one. So then the objection might qualify that *Brillo Box* is lousy art because it is not beautiful. At least intuitively, it is not as beautiful as *The Supper at Emmaus.*

---

[65] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 114)
[66] Or one might see both as ugly.

17 Caravaggio. The Supper at Emmaus. 1601. Oil and tempera on canvas. 55.5 x 77.25 in. The National Gallery, London.

If Warhol and Caravaggio both have made beautiful artworks, then the word is meaningless because there is such a disparity between those two artists in their artworks. Beauty has become a pretty useless word nowadays because of its haphazard use in conventional speech. But it seems that most people would agree that Caravaggio makes beautiful work while Warhol does not.[67]

From this analysis, art is embodied meaning. Therefore, art seems to accomplish the cultural and spiritual mission of the Society in part by providing meaning to the audience and the artist, presumably, as mentioned earlier. Of course, the early Jesuits could not have known about *Brillo Box* or *Brillo Tabernacle*. Still, their observation seems fitting that there is a connection between artwork and spirituality, although they did not understand it in the way one could before

[67] It is worth pointing out that in Caravaggio's day, some decried him as the downfall of painting because he refused to idealize his subjects. He painted shabby Madonnas and scruffy Apostles thereby rejecting the idealized component of Vasari's program.

the advent of modern and contemporary art. Despite these drastic changes in the artworld, there still seems to be an avenue for art to speak to purpose and meaning in life. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that such art is beautiful. Many in the early and medieval Church, such as Pseudo-Dionysius, focused on *beauty* – not art – as the pathway to God.[68] However, does beauty still matter today when it seems that it has lost its place in the contemporary artworld? Is beauty necessary alongside art to lead one to God?

[68] *The Divine Names* (Pseudo-Dionysius, 2004) discusses beauty in depth and is not interested in questions about the status of art as contemporary aestheticians do.

The Abuse of Beauty

18 Leeper, Nicholas. The Abuse of Beauty. 2023. Oil on recycled canvas, 36 x 48 in. St. Louis, MO.

A vase with some green leaves, a lit candle, a kintsugi[69] lamp without its lampshade, and a recycled soda bottle acting as a vase to hold a couple of tall, pink flowers all stand on a table. In the background are many canvases leaning against the wall. The largest one is a depiction of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. However, most of this painting is covered by other canvases. We can only see Venus and part of Flora to the right, along with the drapery she is tossing over the goddess. The other canvases are turned away from the viewer, save for one framed, abstract piece facing the viewer. An electric cord goes from the lamp, off the table, and

[69] Kintsugi is a Japanese artistic process of repairing broken objects with a golden metallic glue thereby making the object more aesthetically interesting than it was before it was broken.

snakes to the outlet on the back wall where it is plugged in. To the right is a table with a lampshade, presumably belonging to the naked, illuminated lamp in the foreground.

In this piece, I sought to explore the interplay of beauty, pain, and restoration in conversation with Botticelli's painting, *The Birth of Venus*.

19 Botticelli, Sandro. The Birth of Venus. 1485-6. Tempera on canvas, 67.9 in × 109.6 in. Uffizi, Florence.

Botticelli has Flora in action with a robe positioned to cover Venus's naked body. As the myth goes, Venus is not permitted to walk the earth because she is too beautiful for humanity to bear. So Flora is covering her so she can land ashore and disembark from her seashell. Venus is both love and beauty and we humans typically cannot handle too much of that reality at its core. And so we find beauty covered in our world, hidden. Only those who seek can see it. The lampshade sits off in the background, ready to cover up the bright, naked light that is too stark for our eyes. Additionally, the canvases leaning against the Botticelli also cover the full beauty of this

painting. We cannot see the whole picture. Nor do we know what is on the other side of those canvases. Beauty is something that we can only take in moderation.

I call this painting *The Abuse of Beauty* for several reasons. One is to give homage to Arthur Danto's book of the same name. Two, the name refers to concepts of pain and restoration, especially in the person of Chloris, who becomes Flora. Chloris is violated by Zephyr, god of the wind. She eventually comes to forgive him and, in that process, divinizes into the goddess Flora. But, finally, there is a perceived "abuse" of beauty that happens once Venus lands on our shores, and this is the one I want to focus on here. Venus lands on the shore covered in Flora's garment, but in the 20th century, she was "assassinated."[70] With the rise of modern art, beauty in a conventional sense was wholesale abandoned. Some might loathe modern art for this reason. We can see the downfall of the fine arts due to our contemporary culture, where the artworld is instead fascinated with the disgusting, the banal, the snobby, or the political. Most people seem to then write off the artworld because they have abandoned beauty for something else entirely that does not connect with ordinary life.

There is now a divorce, it seems, between beauty and art. Scruton attributes this abandonment to a degradation of the sacred in contemporary society.[71] Danto sees this as a response to the two World Wars. Between these two conflicts, the Dada artists sought to desert beauty because beautiful art caused such wars, and modern society was so immoral in causing those wars that it no longer *deserved* beautiful art. And so, according to this history, the Venus who landed on Earth seems no longer welcome in the contemporary artworld.

---

[70] In (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003), where Tristan Tzara's Dadaist manifesto claims to desire to "assassinate" beauty.
[71] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, pp. 173-83)

On a conventional understanding of beauty, this history would seem correct. Beauty – in a classical sense – no longer seems to have a place in modern art museums and galleries. The classical conception of beauty is one concerned with "perfect proportion."[72] Harmony, symmetry, unity, and other formal properties make something, such as an artwork, a person, or nature, appear whole. Classical beauty is about compositional and aesthetic elements; thus, it is a close cousin to Formalism, as mentioned in the previous chapter, where attention is paid to aesthetic qualities alone. A paradigm example of this type of beauty is evident in the Greek *canons,* particularly the use of the golden ratio, a proportion that is present in much throughout the natural world. It mimics nature. The ancient Greeks considered this the most beautiful because it is ubiquitous in nature, such as the proportion of the palm of a hand to one's fingers or the

[72] (Wölfflin, 1950, pp. 9-10)

mathematical makeup of spirals that exist in conches. The Parthenon, as a famous example, fits within a golden rectangle, a rectangle based on this proportion of 1.618:1.

20 The Parthenon, Athens, Greece

On this account, the Parthenon is beautiful because it mimics nature mathematically. Much art, especially in the Italian Renaissance, executed these proportions and rejected medieval anti-aestheticism[73] for an art that returned to a classical beauty, where the focus shifted from content to form. And so, for most of Western art history, beauty in the classical sense and art were married together. Art came to be defined by classical beauty. But it is this marriage that the Dadaists and others after that in modern art sought to break up.

[73] For more on this point, see (Eco, 1986).

Beauty Concealed

And so, art such as *Bicycle Wheel* became the norm rather than the exception in the artworld. Marcel Duchamp, one of contemporary art's founding fathers and artist of the "readymades,"[74] insisted on "making" sculptures from ordinary objects to challenge society's classical conception of beauty.

[74] To be precise, *Bicycle Wheel* is an "assisted readymade."

21 Duchamp, Marcel. Bicycle Wheel. 1951 (third version, after lost original of 1913). Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 51 x 25 x 16.5 in. MoMA, NYC.

Duchamp insisted that art no longer had to fit within Baumgarten's fine arts program. Sculpture can be an ordinary object. It doesn't need to be cast from marble to be art. Additionally, he proposed that art no longer had to be beautiful in the classical sense either. He "created" many readymades, taking ordinary objects and raising them to the status of art without them being

obviously classically beautiful.[75] He wanted to stress the *ideas* inherent in artworks rather than their *aesthetic*. Ultimately, like Warhol, half a century later, Duchamp and the Dadaists wanted to debilitate aestheticism by divorcing art from classical beauty.[76]

Despite Duchamp's attempts, the formalists, those who still believed in a form of classical beauty in the 20th century, had a new agenda. Roger Fry, a contemporary of Clive Bell and a fellow formalist, believed that new art would be seen as ugly until one could see it as beautiful.[77] To *see* new art as beautiful, one needs an aesthetic education to see the beauty in color, line, and proportion *underneath* the surface. Consider Manet's *Olympia*, which was initially hated by the public and seen as ugly.

[75] Although, to his dismay, many emergent formalist audiences began admiring his readymades through an aesthetic lens admiring them for their harmony and symmetry.
[76] A synonym for Formalism.
[77] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003, pp. xv, 44)

22 Manet, Edouard. Olympia. 1863. Oil on canvas, 51.4 x 74.8 in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

When *Olympia* first debuted in Paris, the salon needed to hire security guards for the first time to protect it as furious visitors were trying to poke holes in the canvas with their umbrellas.[78] They were upset because Manet didn't idealize Olympia like other nude paintings of the time. He made her brusque, and the salon patrons initially didn't understand his aesthetic. These audiences just needed to look harder and have a better aesthetic sense to see *Olympia* as beautiful aesthetically. Based on Roger Fry's theory, these audiences would have to give *Olympia* time to see its beauty past its immediate ugliness – to allow beauty to appear through the surface. That beauty is hidden away. To do that well, these audiences needed to learn how to see unity, balance, and composition more adeptly to "look under the hood" to see its true aesthetic beauty.[79]

[78] (Farago, 2023)
[79] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003)

In earlier art, the artist was intentional about making their paintings' harmony evident. However, as new artistic movements developed in the late 19th century onward, these movements demanded more from their audiences. John Cage, an avant-garde artist of the 20th century, captures this shift by stating, "The highest responsibility of the artist is to hide beauty."[80] Artists then put audiences to work so that they can have the joy of discovering classical beauty. The formalist urged the audience to spend time with these works so that they could be rewarded with the discovery of aesthetic beauty through their intentional looking. And, of course, this agenda expanded to less conventionally representational works, such as abstract art and even the work of the Dadaists like Duchamp. The height of this theory was reached by the Formalists, such as Clement Greenberg and the Abstract Expressionists, who wanted to capture aesthetic beauty in its pureness. To make painting pure, they had to divorce themselves from Vasari's representational agenda and permit no more figurative content. They believed audiences were *too* distracted by content and ideas, such as people, objects, or places, to see beauty in this classical sense. They believed that pure beauty existed *apart* from mimetic content. The action works of Jackson Pollock – Greenberg's Michelangelo – were masterpieces of *pure* beauty that allowed the opportunity to look for this classical beauty without distraction.

[80] (Cage, 2011, p. 131) quoting W. H. Blythe's *Haiku*.

23 Pollock, Jackson. Autumn Rhythm (Number 30). 1950. Enamel on Canvas. 105 x 207 in. The Met, NYC.

For Formalism, beauty went nowhere. Instead, like with the analogy of the clothed Venus, she wanders the earth clothed, unable to be seen except by the perceptually astute. To see classical beauty in contemporary art requires training one's eyes to see it even in *prima facie* ugly things. Beauty is no longer given to us directly as it was in the Italian Renaissance. We no longer see the light without its shade on. If we want to see beauty, it requires effort on our part – to really look and see. It requires us to turn the canvases around.

Beauty and Wisdom

But what is the point if something is classically beautiful? How could harmony, symmetry, and sound design – or what Clive Bell calls "Significant Form"[81] – help one spiritually? Several classic Christian authors, such as Aquinas, [82] stress the importance of classical beauty. Still, it doesn't seem evident that design connects one with the divine. At least

[81] (Bell, 1914)
[82] (Aquinas, 1981, I, 39, 8)

for my purposes, it seems dubious that classical beauty has any transcendent value of its own if it is solely aesthetic.

Even for secular art, this theory also seems to be missing something. As Danto states, "What made paintings 'work' seemed poorly captured by the way beauty had been classically formulated with reference to balance and proportion and order."[83] Art as embodied meaning can only be aided by significant form, but does not require significant form to communicate such meaning. Aesthetic qualities such as symmetry or asymmetry, harmony or chaos, classical beauty or ugliness are tools to convey meaning. Despite how it looked, as proven by the *Brillo Box*, art would still be art. Embodied meaning is not contingent on significant form.

Perhaps beauty and art are joined together on another conception of beauty. Beauty *looks* different than design alone. Plato discusses the differences between beauty as separate from art on other grounds in *The Symposium*. To start, it's important to note, as Iris Murdoch does, that Plato *intentionally* separates art from beauty, seeing the former as debased and the latter as of the highest value.[84] He saw these two almost as polar opposites, where poetry was the work of hypocrites and deceivers, and beauty was as close to the Truth as possible. In *The Symposium*, Socrates recalls the sage wisdom of Diotima, a wise woman from Mantinea. For her, beauty is connected with giving birth either naturally through childbearing or in wisdom, which happens through the presentation of "beautiful accounts," such as a person's virtuous life or poetry and craft.[85] Beauty is like birth – it is a process. One starts this process by loving an individual, but then, upon reflection, one begins to climb a sort of intellectual ladder toward the Form of Beauty itself. If one loves an individual, they might realize successively that they love all individuals, all

[83] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003, p. 7)
[84] (Murdoch, The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists, 1997, p. 401)
[85] (Plato, Symposium, 2007, 210a8)

of humanity, all of the laws of nature, the sciences, and finally, Beauty itself. She claims that life is only worth living when one attains this vision of the Form of Beauty itself. In the case of art, one would love a particular painting and then would be led to love all paintings, all art, all nature, and finally Beauty itself.

In a Christianized reading, the ultimate Form of Beauty would be God and the beatific vision that some Church Fathers, such as Pseudo Dionysius,[86] discuss later. The idea behind Diotima's theory is that beauty leads one toward *wisdom*. There's a connection between truth and beauty. As John Keats wrote in a poem, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."[87] Danto echoes this curious connection between truth and beauty, saying that beauty is "truth with a dress on."[88] Danto claims this is *internal* beauty, whereas the classical or formalist conception is *external* beauty. Perhaps creating and appreciating beauty seems to be more linked to expanding the boundaries of knowledge. At its core, beauty is more about pursuing Truth than pleasure in form.[89]

Beauty and Aesthetic Ideas

Internal beauty has a long history, starting with Plato and Diotima.[90] However, Immanuel Kant offers one of the more thorough accounts of what Danto would call internal beauty.[91] However, many formalists have also interpreted Kant to support their counter-theory.

---

[86] For more, see (Kirwan, 1999, p. 29)
[87] (Keats, 1819)
[88] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003)
[89] I have not said much about the hedonistic account of beauty here, but I assume that like most formalists, aesthetic pleasure is linked to classical beauty, whereas one derives pleasure from discovering something as externally beautiful. I would also extend that pleasure could equally derive from finding wisdom through beauty. Regardless, the source of this pleasure is in question, not pleasure itself. I speak more about aesthetic hedonism in the penultimate chapter on *Frankie's World (Revelation 3:20)*.
[90] Other philosophers have emphasized this point to a certain extent, including Aristotle, Plotinus, Aquinas, Shaftesbury, and Hume.
[91] Although Danto, at least in *The Abuse of Beauty* (2003) fails to acknowledge this, which is quite disappointing.

Unfortunately, as Jennifer McMahon, a contemporary aesthetic philosopher, points out, many until recently have looked over Kant's thick Formalism for a thin Formalism or the aestheticism of Bell, Fry, and Greenberg.[92] Thick Formalism, according to McMahon, is primarily concerned with Kant's theory of "aesthetic ideas," where beauty is predominantly cognitive rather than only sensuous.

Kant's theory of "aesthetic ideas" is fundamental to his conception of beauty, where he sees beauty as the exhibition or expression of aesthetic ideas.[93] An aesthetic idea is a "representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking, though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it."[94] An aesthetic idea illustrates Kant's "rational ideas," which he discusses in his first *Critique*.[95]

A rational idea[96] is a placeholder for something that we do not sense or can only sense in part. For example, infinity is a rational idea in which there is no sensible evidence of infinity in a phenomenological sense. You cannot taste, touch, or see infinity. You can see trillions of grains of sand on the seashore, but that itself is not infinity. So, the mind creates the rational idea of "infinity" to fill the gap of an awe-inspiring quantity, like the number of grains of sand on the shore. We *know* infinity exists, but we can't empirically verify it. And that's where rational ideas operate. In this example, an image of a beach would be the aesthetic idea – presenting the concept of infinity. However, the *image* of grains of sand on the beach is *insufficient* in capturing the entire notion of infinity. Other aesthetic ideas could also present infinity, but never fully, such

[92] (McMahon, Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized, 2007; McMahon, The Classical Trinity and Kant's Aesthetic Formalism, 2010)
[93] (Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 2000, §49)
[94] (Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 2000, §49)
[95] (Kant I. , 1998, A 584/B 612)
[96] Sometimes referred to as an "idea of reason."

as the number of cells in an organism, possible configurations in a chess game, or Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrored Room - Filled with the Brilliance of Life.*

24 Kusama, Yayoi. Infinity Mirrored Room - Filled with the Brilliance of Life. 2011/2017. Mirrored glass, wood, aluminum, plastic, ceramic, and LEDs. 116.3 x 245.6 x 245.6 in. Tate Modern, London.

Other ideas of reason can be religious, such as heaven, hell, eternity, creation, death, love, and God.[97] Our concepts of these things come about primarily through art. For example, we furnish our ideas of heaven and hell through Dante's *Divine Comedy* or of love and loss through *La La Land*. Generally, an aesthetic idea is a new way to imagine these concepts in phenomenological terms, giving new insight into a concept that would otherwise be inaccessible without such a material representation.

[97] (Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 2000, §49)

Aesthetic ideas can teach us more about the world by enriching these abstract notions. These can contribute to our empirical knowledge about the world, our emotions, moral concepts, and what it means to be human.[98] Furthermore, aesthetic ideas *revise* these concepts.[99] These concepts are not static, as Plato suggested regarding the Forms. Instead, the concepts are constantly evolving and changing, and this happens through art where "beauty is born of the Spirit *and born again*."[100] When we experience beauty, wisdom is born. Through art, beauty, and the generation of aesthetic ideas, we learn something new and climb Diotima's ladder toward wisdom. These aesthetic ideas are always inadequate; they are never the fullness of Truth.

But, perhaps more significantly, aesthetic ideas give us a mode for thinking about abstract concepts.[101] Fine art that evokes aesthetic ideas helps us think differently about the world and can encourage human advancement, including spiritual growth. Religious beliefs can be clarified through aesthetic ideas; wisdom can help us lead better lives. Without the beauty that we get through the fine arts, according to Kant, we would be wanting for wisdom. This wisdom impregnates our world with a more prosperous and profound meaning, which can bring us closer to God.

For Kant, beauty is the *experience* of looking at an art object through the free play of the imagination[102] and creating an aesthetic idea based on the art object's aesthetic attributes, those formal and representational features that contribute to spawning aesthetic ideas. A formalist or realist might call those aesthetic features or depictions *beautiful* for their own sake. However, in Kant's view, they are beautiful only as a utility that fosters aesthetic ideas. Beauty is, therefore, a

---

[98] (Matherne, 2013; Chignell, 2007; Reiter & Geiger, 2018)
[99] (Vaccarino Bremner, 2021)
[100] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 2)
[101] (Pillow, 2006)
[102] (Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 2000, §9)

verb – as opposed to a noun or an adjective. Beauty is a manner of contemplation. And not one of form but of idea. More importantly, this sense of reflection doesn't appear too different from religious meditation. It is through artistic beauty that spiritual wisdom is born.

Beauty Revisited

Venus, the goddess of beauty, is not just a beautiful woman but a beautiful *idea*. She represents Diotima's Form of Beauty. She is not beautiful only for her appearance but for what she means and represents. There's a long tradition of the nude in art history that has been criticized – and rightly so – for objectifying women.[103] Even the word "beauty" almost exclusively refers to judging female attractiveness historically.[104] In *The Abuse of Beauty*, Venus, this paradigm of female beauty in art history, is on a canvas in the background. To the right, though, is a naked lamp, with its lampshade in the background on a table. The lamp has been broken and repaired through the art of Kintsugi, and its light is the brightest thing in the painting. I introduce another possible paradigm to parallel Venus as the goddess of beauty: the lightbulb, the universal sign for *idea*.

But what about aesthetic, external beauty? Does that still matter? External beauty is a mode of presentation that does not guarantee an experience of the beautiful – this movement up Diotima's ladder or the generation of Kant's aesthetic ideas. However, classical conceptions of beauty such as harmony, symmetry, and proportion are beautiful, not as autonomous features – not for their own sake. Instead, these features are beautiful for what they mean. In the medieval world especially, harmony and symmetry were valued because these expressed the orderliness of the world that God had designed. Considering the chaos, filth, and ugliness that pervaded much

[103] See (Wolf, 2002) for more details on the feminist critique of beauty.
[104] (Sartwell, 2004)

of ancient life, these harmonious churches and hymns were orderly to express the idea that God brings order to the world. Symmetry has a significance beyond itself. However, that does not mean balance is valuable in and of itself. Certainly, some study the intersection between evolution and art and note that most humans find such harmonies naturally pleasing. Pleasing might indicate why unity is attractive, but that is not what makes it *tout court* beautiful in Kant's sense.

Aesthetic contemplation must lead to wisdom for it to have spiritual importance. Beauty makes the embodied meaning of art significant. Although Plato sought to unstitch beauty and art, they work well when sewn together. However, it is not the same unity that Vasari and the latter formalists sought to make between beauty and art. The more proper connection is between art as embodied meaning and internal beauty. In both senses, however, beauty is not as obvious as blue.[105] Seeing beauty is not analogous to recognizing a color in one's field of vision. Beauty – internally and externally – must be searched for because it hides within art. It requires attentive looking. Beauty invites us to contemplate. Thus, there has been no actual abuse of beauty because Beauty continues to walk among us with Flora's cloak. Beauty is covered by a lampshade.

However, is contemplation the only way we can engage spiritually with art? Gordon Graham, an aesthetic philosopher, asserts that the preponderance of the contemplative stance toward art "implies that something like the monastic life is the paradigm of religion."[106] There is undoubtedly much more to religion than reflection. One obvious contender is the role of emotion

[105] Contra (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003, p. 89)
[106] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 162)

in the arts. Wouldn’t emotion, rather than contemplation, be a more suitable bridge between the arts and the soul?

The Descent from the Cross

25 Leeper, Nicholas. The Descent from the Cross. 2023. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

My mom died from breast cancer about eight years ago, right after I graduated from Rutgers. My brother, Greg, and my now sister-in-law, Cecilia, and I were in her hospital room when she passed away. It was devastating, as her decline was quite sudden. Greg and I were both by my mom's side, each holding one of her hands when she took her last breath. I believe she died in peace knowing that her two boys, now grown, were by her side and doing well.

She particularly loved Yellowtail Chardonnay wine. In this painting, a few drips escape this empty wine bottle and spill onto the white and red cloth. Surrounding the bottle are three glasses. Two are full to the brim and pouring over, whereas the shorter glass only contains a small sip of wine. A wine stopper and a cork are in the foreground, while a bottle opener floats surrealistically in the dark sky, with the white cloth draped over one of its arms.

My mom's death reminds me very much of Jesus's, and that religious scene for me has a much deeper meaning now than it did before she passed because I painted this. Through painting, the connection between Christ's death and my mother's became clearer. Death is like an empty wine bottle poured out to the last drop. But in that emptying, others are filled – overflowing with life. Death occurs when we empty ourselves entirely for others. Even in our darkest hour, when a loved one dies, there is hope on the horizon, and that person's life lives within us who were loved so that we too can go out and pour our lives out for others.

I get quite emotional every time I reëngage with this piece. As I was praying about it, sketching it, painting it, and now writing about it, the emotional force of this piece continues to emerge. And perhaps for you, too, you can see this piece as speaking to your own experience of losing a loved one and what that might mean. It may also inform your understanding of Christ's death and carry heavier emotional weight.

Many people see emotion as the heart of art. Unlike in the sciences, emotion seems to be art's most vital asset, which makes art valuable. Additionally, emotion also has a leading role in religion, where some have deeply moving, emotionally laden mystical experiences. Emotion seems like a natural link between those early Jesuits' cultural and spiritual mission. And so, perhaps emotion, instead of contemplation, lies at the heart of art's power to move souls closer to God.

Although this piece is emotionally potent for me, and perhaps even for you, we can easily imagine that not everyone encountering it would be emotionally moved. There is a great deal of art in museums that also carry such emotional weight, like the work of Vincent Van Gogh, but most visitors only spend a few seconds with it and move on, unmoved. Certainly, one does not have to apply any *religious* content to these emotional responses. Religion would seem somewhat optional in the conversation between art, emotion, and religion. So, it doesn't seem evident that emotional – let alone religious – responses are guaranteed when people engage with art.

Expressivism

Most people would agree that art is about expressing emotion. However, *expressing* is not quite an obvious term. The term comes from the Latin, indicating the juices that ooze outward when pressing grapes.[107] So, the thought goes, an artist makes a work, feeling gushes out from the medium, and the audience collects those juices and savors them. They can then feel what the artist felt. To repeat Tolstoy's manifesto, "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through

[107] (Carroll, 1999, p. 61)

and that others are infected by these feelings and also experience them."[108] According to Expressivism, based on Tolstoy's comment above, art is where an artist shares an emotion with the audience, whereby the audience feels and experiences that emotion.

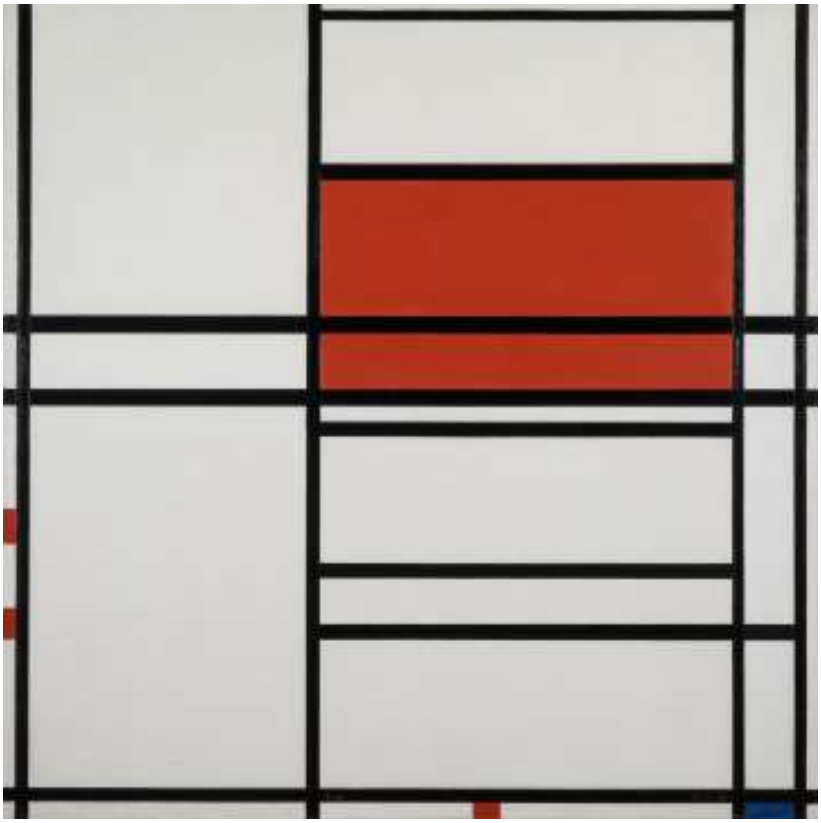
In the case of *The Descent from the Cross*, I've had a feeling of grief, I've shared it with you via this image, and then you would also feel and experience that same feeling. Expressionist artists, such as Van Gogh, Kandinsky, Klee, and Gauguin, also tried to do this very same thing: give the audience an experience of an emotion they have felt. So, it seems that sentiment is at art's center. Some go so far as to discard art's contemplative capacity in favor of pure expression.

Benedetto Croce, a prominent Italian philosopher, writes that art is about intuition. And the thing that makes intuition understandable is "intense feeling." Furthermore, he claims, "Not idea but intense feeling is what confers upon art the ethereal lightness of the symbol."[109] Croce seems to discard Kant's theory of the beautiful here, where art is no longer about aesthetic ideas but instead about this communication of intense feeling. He denies that art "has the character of conceptual knowledge"[110] and is not about any sort of contemplation; rather, art is primarily about emotional responses. In *Descent*, the actual image, according to Croce, would be the feeling that the metaphor inherently provides. The representation of a wine bottle, or a metaphor of the wine bottle for Christ, my mother, or a loved one you have lost, is not primary. The representational content is a means toward an emotive end. Feeling is the purpose of art.

Although this might resonate, there are some issues that the theory of Expressivism fails to address well. First, some artists deny that emotion is part of their artistic process. Consider the

[108] (Tolstoy, 2007, p. 123)
[109] (Croce, Guide to Aesthetics, 1965, 25)
[110] (Croce, Guide to Aesthetics, 1965, 14)

Neo-Plastic work of Piet Mondrian, where he sought to transcend emotion and feeling precisely for a universal and spiritual purity.



26 Mondrian, Piet. Composition of Red and White: Nom 1/Composition No. 4 with red and blue. 1938-42. Oil on canvas. 43 x 43 in. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO.

Mondrian, a theosophist, believed that art's essence was more important than its content. He thought abstract art leads the viewer to spiritual enlightenment by expressing ideals – not emotions. One might counter that because Mondrian doesn't convey emotion in his paintings, it is not really Art. That would, however, be a *commendatory* remark – which tells us what art *should* be instead of telling us what art actually *is*.

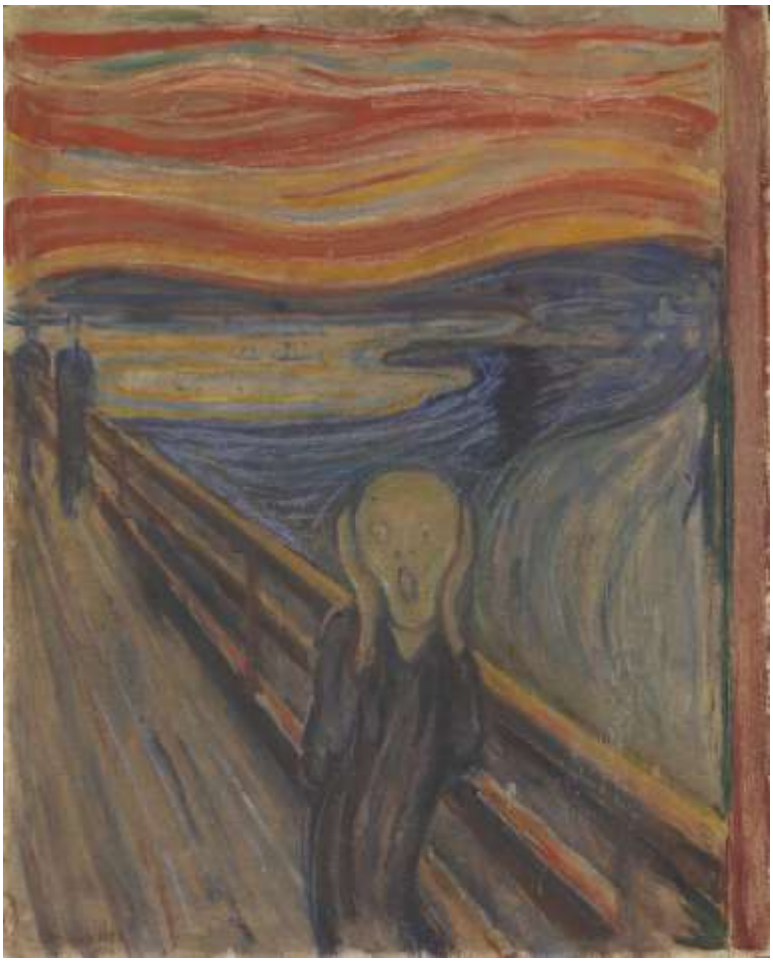
There is a more considerable concern about how an artwork can communicate that emotion. For example, saying that *The Descent from the Cross* is a sad painting does not seem entirely correct. To say that it was caused by my sadness is more correct, but what about these

pigments actually make the picture "sad?" After all, it is just paint splotches on a canvas. How could these inanimate, unconscious pigments carry conscious feelings? How could sadness then be embodied in such a painting? There are several theories, such as Nelson Goodman's exemplification theory,[111] whereas sadness is metaphorical. So, the picture depicts an empty wine bottle, and that image is a metaphor for unhappiness, just as the color blue is an analogy for the same sentiment. We perceive it as sad due to extra-aesthetic information gathered from the story of my mother. But even without that, the title alone suggests a sorrowful image from Christ's Passion. And even without any words, we may have been conditioned to see that dark sky as something not particularly cheery. This last example is what one would call a "natural sign"[112] – something that universally communicates a particular sentiment. Rain, for example, is a natural sign of sadness, and a sunny day is one of happiness. Art can communicate metaphorically as a symbol, but that does not guarantee its audience will feel that same emotion.

A bigger problem with Expressivism is that art does not guarantee the "infection" of those feelings so that others experience them. I am affected by the emotional gravity of *The Descent*; others have seen it and have not outwardly felt anything. Even when I share the story behind it, it does not guarantee that everyone starts crying and grieving. Although someone can *understand* this grief, there is no guarantee that they will *feel* it. Suppose art is valuable for this transmission of feeling per Tolstoy's claim. In that case, the fine arts appear relatively weak, contrasted with more *effective* media. Effective artworks, or what R.C. Collingwood, a British philosopher, would call "craft" or "magic,"[113] are different from art in that they affect the audience and generally do pretty well. A funny movie makes someone laugh. It is not about

[111] (Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols, 1968, pp. 53, 86)
[112] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017)
[113] (Collingwood, 1938).

funniness. It *is* funny. In a religious context, praise and worship music makes one feel "religious feelings,"[114] and erotic art arouses its audience. If Expressivism is true, then *The Scream* would more or equally effectively produce a feeling of horror in the audience as the latest horror film could.



27 Edvard Munch, Edvard. The Scream. 1893. Tempera and grease pencil on cardboard. 28.9 x 35.8 in. Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, Oslo.

An art that *does* something emotional would align with Aristotle's theory on comedy and tragedy in *The Poetics*.[115] For Aristotle, these two genres were considered successful if they produced the proper effect on their audience. They would be *cathartic*: a purging or cleaning of

[114] More on this in a bit.
[115] (Aristotle, Aristotle: Poetics, 1996)

an audience's raw, primeval emotions.[116] A tragedy should produce an appropriate emotional effect on its audience. Tragedies should evoke pity and fear. Contra Plato, mimesis, and fiction are suitable for Aristotle – so long as they are used to produce desired emotive outcomes. If Aristotle is correct, the fine arts are a relatively poor cathartic agent to make an audience feel something. From this point of view, it would be better if museums were filled with more shocking and emotionally laden artworks, like those of Damien Hirst, who mastered the craft of disgust.

28 Hirst, Damien. A Thousand Years. 1990. Steel, glass, flies, maggots, mdf, Insect-O-Cutor, cow's head, sugar, water. 81.7 x 157.5 x 84.6 in. Private Collection.

My painting does not guarantee an emotional transference, but Hirst's does because of the actual graphic content within the conceptual artwork. In *A Thousand Years*, Hirst has a severed cow's

[116] Although Aristotle's account of catharsis is rather underdeveloped in his own writings, other interlocutors have made it a trademark of his aesthetic theory that is still quite influential.

head that maggots and flies eat on display. To anyone, this would cause a visceral, biological reaction of disgust. It successfully transmits a felt response in its audience, unlike most paintings.

Tolstoy and Croce's theories might be more suitable for a view of Collingwood's conception of craft rather than art. The idea that art makes an audience feel something doesn't seem universal to art. Still, it belongs to particular subclasses of it. Some religious arts are crafts. Collingwood saw religious art as falling under this category because it *did* something for the audience. According to Collingwood, singing hymns, adoring statues and icons, and reading religious poetry could all have a devotional effect. These "crafts" have their place in the spiritual life and are not to be dismissed. However, there might be more that links the emotional with the spiritual and cultural mission of the Society beyond that concerns *art* – not craft.[117]

Collingwood

Collingwood perhaps gives us a better understanding of how emotion works with the fine arts, as opposed to crafts. He believes the connection between emotion and art is *not* about the audience or the artist experiencing and transferring a feeling. Instead, expression is about cognitively *clarifying* an emotion. An artist starts their process with a "psychical disturbance."[118] It is some raw, unidentified emotional state that loosely may fit in a generic emotional concept but is insufficient. The artist then tries to give it form and clarity by creating an artwork, and over time, that emotion becomes clarified. The audience also participates in this type of process on their own. According to Collingwood, the audience recreates the artwork in their mind via their imagination. Through this recreation, they clarify their own psychical disturbances just like the

[117] Craft could be art, just as everything *can* be art. However, craft is distinct in that *prima facie* it lacks embodied *meaning*. Instead, craft is an embodied *function* or something that brings about an effect. For example, political propaganda is not meant for contemplation. It doesn't mean anything. Instead, its function is to make someone vote, support, or *do* something. However, this does not preclude the fact that a craft can *become* art.
[118] (Collingwood, 1938, p. 304)

initial artist does. The point of Collingwood's argument is that emotion in art is not meant to be felt contra Tolstoy. It is intended to be *understood*.

Art can't capture the artist's *felt emotions,* like how a child catches a firefly in a bottle. Instead, art illuminates an emotion intelligibly. Emotion needs such elucidation because emotion, like other ideas of reason,[119] is abstract. Yes, we can feel emotions, but the linguistic concepts we apply to them are limited. For example, there are different types of grief, such as when a mother dies, one loses a dog, or moves to a new city. They all involve grief, but they are colored in different shades. But ordinary language reduces the nuance of these shades to a generic representation.[120] Collingwood holds that this is where art can expand our language around emotion to give us images that clarify these feelings more precisely. Namely, art is about producing aesthetic ideas about emotions.[121] For example, the work of Mark Rothko is highly emotional. Still, it does not transmit emotional feelings like a craftwork might. He made *Untitled (Black and Gray)* the year before he killed himself.

[119] (Kant I. , 1998 A 584/B 612), discussed earlier.
[120] Of course, literature and poetry are linguistic arts that can give better form to these sentiments than our everyday concept of grief and I do not mean to cast these off as totally inept at "shading" the emotions.
[121] (Matherne, 2013)

29 Rothko, Mark. Untitled (Black and Gray). 1969-70. Acrylic on Canvas. 80.125 x 69.125 in. Guggenheim, NYC.

The colors here exemplify[122] the deepening sadness that stayed with him up until the point of his death. However, they don't make everyone who looks at this piece in the Guggenheim want to commit suicide. Instead, they produce an aesthetic idea to understand Rothko's specific form of despair, which might help us know despair more universally, and this causes the audience not to *feel* hopeless but to *empathize*.

For Collingwood, empathy is art's foundation. Empathy is acknowledging emotions without necessarily feeling them. It gives us a better knowledge of these feelings so that we can better accompany others who have those feelings in our lives and have a better sense of what those "psychical disturbances" are when they arise within us. Therefore, emotion in Collingwood's sense is *cognitive*. The role of emotion in art – as opposed to craft – is more closely connected to Kant's theory of beauty than it is to Expressivism. Kant claims that pure beauty lacks "charm or emotion."[123] Craft – in Collingwood's sense – can't be beautiful unless it becomes art. Beauty does not necessarily affect the audience; it is necessarily contemplative. Art presents the *idea* of a particular emotion rather than making the audience feel it.

Religious Feeling and Emotion

The question remains of how spirituality might play into all of this. In the throes of the Enlightenment, the defenders of religion scrambled to find how seemingly irrational or less rational religion could survive the onslaught of the empirical. When rationality seemed to make religion obsolete regarding its claim to truth, some pointed to religion's other benefits, such as its ability for social cohesion, its ethical merits, or its scientifically defensible theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher claims that none of these get to religion's heart, which he believed to be *religious*

[122] (Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols, 1968)
[123] (Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 2000, §13)

feeling.[124] On the surface, art seemed to find a natural ally in religion from an Expressivist point of view. Graham likewise suggests that there might be *religious* emotions, which he condenses to wonder, anxiety, and sinfulness.[125] He claims that what makes an emotion particularly religious is recognizing that emotion is connected with something *other than feeling*.[126] That is, emotions are often caused by and directed at something. And so, in this case, "grief is a depressed feeling that is *caused by* and *directed at* loss."[127] "When emotions have *proper* objects," Graham states, "the feelings that are part of them become *intelligible*."[128] That is, the objects of our emotions could be religious ones that relate to the narratives, beliefs, or mystical experiences that one has.

Returning to Schleiermacher, he claims that religious feeling is not an overt feeling but rather an intuition into the divine. It is a "sensibility and taste for the infinite."[129] Later, he adds that it is an absolute dependence on the Divine.[130] It is more about the cause and direction surrounding a feeling than the sentiment itself. The feeling makes the relevant objects more salient in a person's experience. His account of religious feeling is more about awareness – it is more cognitive than emotive.

A religious emotion is where one becomes *aware* of the cause or the direction of those feelings rather than just experiencing them themselves. Emotions have emotive *and* intellectual components.[131] It is this intelligible content that produces feelings, whether we are conscious of it or not. Consider a man who walks through the forest, sees a poisonous snake, and runs away.

---

[124] (Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 1996). Rudolf Otto (1958) also expresses a similar sentiment. William James (1958) also insists that religion is more fundamentally about experience and feeling.
[125] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017). These are also rather limited.
[126] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 79)
[127] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 79)
[128] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 80) Emphasis mine.
[129] (Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 1996, p. 36)
[130] (Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, 2016, p. 12)
[131] (Alston, 1991, pp. 49-50)

The following day, he sees a coiled rope on the same path, realizes he mistook the rope for a snake, and becomes at ease.[132] Here, the intellect informs the emotional output. The man's sensory knowledge then informs his intellect about the dangers of snakes. Then, he develops a feeling based on that knowledge. What then makes an emotion particularly spiritual is what causes that emotion or where that emotion is directed. For example, in *The Descent*, my feeling is caused by my mother's loss but can be redirected to the religious narrative of Christ's passion and death. The feeling itself is not exclusive to religious persons. Instead, the direction of those feelings is religious.[133] What makes this a religious feeling is the clarification of those feelings via imaginative engagement with a religious concept.

In art, aesthetic ideas present content that causes *possible* emotional responses, but the main emphasis, as per Collingwood, is on clarity. Awareness of aesthetic ideas is necessary for art to have a spiritual connection. Religious feeling, this awareness of the divine, then is something that can pervade every art, including abstract and secular art. Consider the work of Wassily Kandinsky, the father of abstract art, who sought to give the audience spiritual resonances through his work.

[132] (Asaṅga, 2019)
[133] The cause could also be religious where one is caused an emotion in a religious setting, such as a revival meeting, or a particularly moving liturgy.

30 Kandinsky, Wassily. Improvisation 31 (Sea Battle). 1913. Oil on canvas. 55.375 x 47.125 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Kandinsky painted music and felt that through this process, there was a spiritual reality for the audience to grasp. The "spiritual vibration" was paramount for the artist, and the physical colors and lines were meant to produce such an impression.[134] However, this feeling is caused by what one might think the colors, lines, and shapes mean, and this is exemplified subconsciously. He was connecting more to "spiritual" feelings rather than religious ones. Still, in either case, the feeling is not necessarily spiritual or religious. He wanted to direct the audience toward the divine in an abstract[135] – yet intelligible – sense.

Ultimately, Expressivism is not necessarily true. It is hard to guarantee the transmission of emotion through the fine arts. Instead, we can better understand the connection between emotions and the arts through Collingwood's concept of clarification, where we better

[134] (Kandinsky, 1977, p. 24)
[135] Ha!

understand emotions rather than feel them. However, Collingwood's conception of art is unfortunately limited to emotional intelligence. It fails to account for other modes of knowing outside of self-consciousness. Emotion can be an aesthetic idea and, therefore, falls under Kant's aegis of beauty, which is about the *idea* of an emotion rather than the felt experience that is important in the arts.

Additionally, religious feelings are located at the intersection between culture and religion. Religious feelings are less about a felt quality and more about recognizing the religious or spiritual cause and direction of those emotions. Religious feeling is ultimately about one's awareness of the world from a religious perspective, which makes sense of these feelings within that context. This awareness comes about in art through Kant's conception of beauty – the generation of aesthetic ideas. Suppose we understand those ideas in light of a religious system. In that case, we can attain a more clarified meaning from the artwork, thereby enriching our experience both spiritually and artistically.

And so, emotion in art still seems to have a contemplative character. But shouldn't more attention be given to craft – the art of effect? Aren't those more effective than contemplative arts for everyday people *practicing* spirituality? What about artworks used in religious ceremonies or at home that are not contemplative at all? They may seem more essential to a spiritual practice than this contemplative art found in museums. Isn't there space for an art of action that could be religious without necessarily being contemplative?

The Transfiguration of the Commonplace

31 Leeper, Nicholas. The Transfiguration of the Commonplace. 2023. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

As shown, Danto argues in his book, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, that anything can be art because anything can have embodied meaning. As Danto's title suggests, the

ordinary object is transfigured and becomes art, something exalted. The Transfiguration is a scene from the Synoptic Gospels[136] that reveals Jesus's true nature. God reveals Him as God to his three closest apostles: Peter, James, and John. On the mountain, Jesus prays, and his appearance changes. His face becomes radiant, and his clothes become "dazzling white."[137] Moses and Elijah, two First Testament figures, appear with Jesus and begin to speak with him. The apostles fall prostrate and are terrified at the sight. Then a cloud appears, and from the cloud, a voice says, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him."[138] The vision is then over, and the group descends down the mountain. The next scene is also essential for understanding this painting. A man with a possessed boy comes to Jesus, asking him to cast the demon out of the child. The father claims, "I begged your disciples to cast it out but they could not."[139] Jesus, exasperated, heals the boy, and the demon flees from him.

Here, a purple hairdryer, a comb, and a face towel lay in the foreground at the base of the elevated surface. Above is a soap bar, a deodorant stick, and a bottle of shampoo that all lie down before the floating toothbrush, toothpaste tube, and the exalted roll of toilet paper. The toilet paper, dazzling white, is transfigured. It's the image for us to contemplate in at least two directions: What does it mean for toilet paper to be transfigured and to be art? And what does it mean that this roll is like Christ? Here, I want to examine the role of art – or a beautiful vision – in our personal transformation. Is it only through contemplating beauty that we change? Are aesthetic ideas all there is to art that can move us?

---

[136] The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke
[137] (Luke 9:29, NABRE)
[138] (Luke 9:35, NABRE)
[139] (Luke 9:40, NABRE)

Raphael and Hegel

To explore this question, let's start with what inspired my painting: Raphael's *The Transfiguration*.

32 Raphael. The Transfiguration. 1520. Panel. 159.4 x 109.4 in. Pinacoteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome.

In his painting, the top is illuminated with that bright, radiant light of Christ and the prophets. In contrast, the lower half is dominated by shadows and contrast. Raphael combines the two stories, where on the bottom is the scene of the paralyzed, possessed boy that Jesus will come down and heal. The apostle in the pink robe on the bottom left points to Christ, indicating that the suffering people below and all of humanity must *look* to Christ for salvation. Furthermore, Christ is levitating – a fact not evident from reading any of these Gospels – and Raphael's decision to have him float in the top center emphasizes the glorious nature of this iconic biblical episode.

Hegel discusses this painting in some detail as a good allegory for his theory of art, akin to the one I have presented in reading Kant's theory of the beautiful. For Hegel, too, art was all about attaining Truth.[140] However, it was not just representational truth, nor was it a sort of emotional truth discussed in the previous chapters. For Hegel, it was about accessing the *Geist*[141] of the age and surpassing individualism to access higher, universal realms of Truth constantly in development. The everyday world is no longer necessary, especially in art, and we can transcend that to access Truth, which is akin to Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas. Hegel claims that beauty must leave the world behind and concern itself with the ideal. He says, "The sphere of the beautiful is withdrawn from the relativity of finite affairs and raised into the absolute realm of the Idea and its truth."[142] And Raphael's painting helps give "sensuous form" to Hegel's thought more aptly.

[140] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 71) "Art…is essentially a question, an address to the responsive breast, a call to the mind and spirit."
[141] Translated sometimes as "spirit" or "mind."
[142] (Hegel G. W., 1975)

In the painting, Christ floats above the other disciples even though no scriptural evidence supports this. The ideal – Christ – is above and separate from "finite affairs." For Hegel and most Christians, the painting is undoubtedly a magnificent religious painting. For Hegel, Truth does not mean *accuracy*. Visual truth – or accuracy – is unnecessary contra Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites. The Pre-Raphaelites see Raphael's mystical and unrealistic paintings as corrupt because they lack accuracy – they promoted a "false Imagination."[143] In contrast, Hegel sees Raphael's imaginative painting as leading *toward* Truth manifest in Idea.

Truth is about those ideas, whereas accuracy concerns form, such as the visual accuracy of the persons represented or photographic realism. Raphael's painting is realistic in depicting human beings, but there is no *visual* truth here. The two scenes smashed together in one is also more allegorical than realistic. Visual accuracy does not matter for Hegel because what matters is the Truth – or what the painting is *about*. Through the Transfiguration, Christ is above and separate from the other humans in the picture because He is God. And so, the painting captures the aesthetic idea of the divine by portraying Christ above the rest and as that which to look toward for healing. Hegel's understanding of Christ can be analogical to his understanding of art and Truth. Truth rises above the empirical. Truth transcends whatever is painted, and it is set apart as an image to *behold* because it is that idea-as-image that is the most valuable thing in a painting for Hegel. For Hegel, like for Kant, Truth and Beauty are one. And the only thing that art calls the audience to do is to look and contemplate such ideas.

Nietzsche

Until this point in this paper, contemplation seems to be the dominant mode of spiritually engaging with the arts. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche challenges this assumption,

[143] (Ruskin, 1889)

rejecting that our engagement with the arts is merely a state of mind. He uses the allegory of the Greek deities Apollo and Dionysius to illustrate this debate. Apollo represents an art of image, whereas Dionysius represents one of action. Nietzsche sees that Greek tragedy was born from ritual action represented by the Dionysian and eventually devolved into the art of image represented in Greek theatre. Art has a religious root that is ultimately discarded in favor of autonomous art – art for art's sake – losing its spiritual connection. In Apollonian art, audiences passively observe like one does at a modern theater. Dionysian art is much more participative, like the singing of songs and acting. Most high art, then, according to Nietzsche, is of the Apollonian type, where the Dionysian has been degraded and lost in the world of art in Nietzsche's time.

For Nietzsche, Raphael's painting presents the aesthetic idea of the dominance of the Apollonian via religion. He sees the bottom half of Raphael's painting as representing the truth of suffering in the world where there is no hope within that bottom half of the frame. However, what saves this world is the Apollonian world of beauty.[144] It is having the image of something to rescue us from the darkness of the bitter truth of suffering. But what the Apostle in pink on the bottom of the painting points to is Christ – that image in the sky. It is this new substratum above the chaos of a world of suffering that we look to *an image* of salvation from the truth via Hegel's Truth. For Nietzsche, this is a mere dream – invisible to the naked eye, or "mere illusion of an illusion."[145] The Kantian and Hegelian models see Truth as something to revel in, like how Christians look to the Truth in Jesus Christ in the Transfiguration. Nietzsche sees this *image* of Christ as a sort of Apollo, dreamlike and one of fantasy, but it makes life bearable.[146] The horrors

[144] (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 33)
[145] (1956, p. 33)
[146] (1974, p. 163)

of the world point to our salvation so that one can "produce the redemptive vision and to sit quietly in his rocking rowboat in mid-sea, absorbed in contemplation."[147] However, the Dionysian and the Apollonian depend on one another to work – neither can be abandoned.[148] Yet here, Nietzsche concludes that the suffering we endure is made bearable through beauty, as understood by Kant, due to this divorce. In Nietzsche's development, the Apollonian aesthetic cannot redeem us. It only makes the journey through life less burdensome. But this is not enough; it is a distraction from living life to the fullest.

According to Nietzsche, the problem comes in the modern age when the Apollonian takes over, and the Dionysian aspect of culture and the arts disappears. The artworld of his day, and even ours, still would have this imbalance. Concert halls, museums, and movie theaters have replaced dance halls, folk festivals, and religious participation as the art that matters. The Apollonian reigns when audiences sit and clap. They passively receive images and sounds as a mode of distraction from the suffering of life. The rise of aestheticism and Formalism advances this Apollonian dominance where, as Francis Bacon says, "painting has become – all art has become – a game by which man distracts himself."[149] There's a delight in form alone without any transcendental value.

Art, in this vein, only represents rather than re-presents.[150] Apollonian art represents the divine in symbol and art to the viewer. In contrast, the Dionysian re-presents the divine through action. For Nietzsche, the roots of Greek tragedy were Dionysian religious festivals where, through the actions of the participants, the god would actually reappear amongst them in their

[147] (1956, pp. 33-34)
[148] (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 33)
[149] (Rookmaker, 1994, p. 174)
[150] (Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, 1983, p. 20)

ritual. As the Greek tragedy becomes more tame,[151] the god is only represented in the drama, where everyone takes the actor as a symbol for the god rather than for the god himself. A Christian analogy would be with the Eucharist, where Catholics believe Jesus actually becomes the bread and wine through liturgical action. In contrast, in other Christian services, communion is only a symbol – a representation. Scruton claims that art "becomes the *real presence* of our spiritual ideals."[152] His eucharistic language indicates that art has some sort of transubstantial nature with the divine, where this canvas or stage can host the divine presence in some capacity. An artwork is not the same as a eucharistic host. I'm not claiming that it is the real presence of Christ in the same way. But it seems that art acts analogously to the Eucharist and can also be a host for some divine encounter. But this encounter with a real presence in some way requires an engagement akin to liturgical action.

One way to revive the Dionysian in art is through action, where one physically participates in the creative process rather than merely watching or listening. Nietzsche stresses the importance of song and dance and one's active participation in such. However, in the evolution of the program of the arts, those means of expression are bracketed to the professionals, and most people can merely attend. People cease dancing and instead watch ballets. People cease singing and playing instruments and instead listen to music. However, Nietzsche sees spiritual value in performing low arts, such as folk music and dance, because they are active and accessible. There is value to the low arts because it gives us another point of access to human flourishing that an exclusive passive engagement with the arts cannot do.

---

[151] And rightly so because the Dionysian festivals were quite wild.

[152] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 192), Emphasis mine. It is also worth noting that the real presence is phrase that Catholics use to describe the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ.

Active, creative engagement enhances our knowledge of something. It's much easier to understand paintings when one is a painter, as it is easier to understand plants if one is a gardener. Wang-Yangming, from the Confucian tradition, says that we can come to know the universe through anything, even something as simple as a bamboo stick. However, knowing the bamboo requires more than looking at it to understand it and, therefore, know the universe. But we must interact with it in every way: eat it, dig it, plant it, and so on.[153] So, too, in our art, we can deepen our knowledge and gain more palpable aesthetic ideas in the Platonic and Kantian sense, perhaps by painting, singing, and dancing rather than *just* by looking. Additional meaning is given to an aesthetic activity through action aside from contemplation.

Considering this view, one might move to abandon the high arts as a result. Indeed, some see the high arts as elitist and have no use for them. However, Nietzsche doesn't suggest a total abandonment of the Apollonian in favor of a Dionysian artistic revival. Nor does he suggest raising the Dionysian art to the level of the Apollonian. If we consider the Dionysian to be like the low arts and the Apollonian as the high, bringing the low arts to the museum will not change our engagement to one of action. For example, many African masks that were brought to Western museums in the early 20th century,[154] which inspired Picasso, Matisse, and Modigliani, are examples of the Apolloification of Dionysian art.

[153] (Sartwell, 2004, Ch. 6)
[154] Unfortunately, not always in the most ethical means considering the history of colonialism.

33 Yaure artist. Face mask. First half 20th century. Pigment on wood. 11.8 x 7.5 x 3.7 in. SLAM, St. Louis, MO.

These masks were used in funeral ceremonies and other occasions where people *used* them for ritual or entertainment. However, in the museum, it loses such a function and becomes an exalted object to be contemplated. Its importance, in the eyes of the museum, is for its formal qualities

and meaning rather than its use. It loses something when removed from action, and its meaning becomes lost on its audience divorced from that.

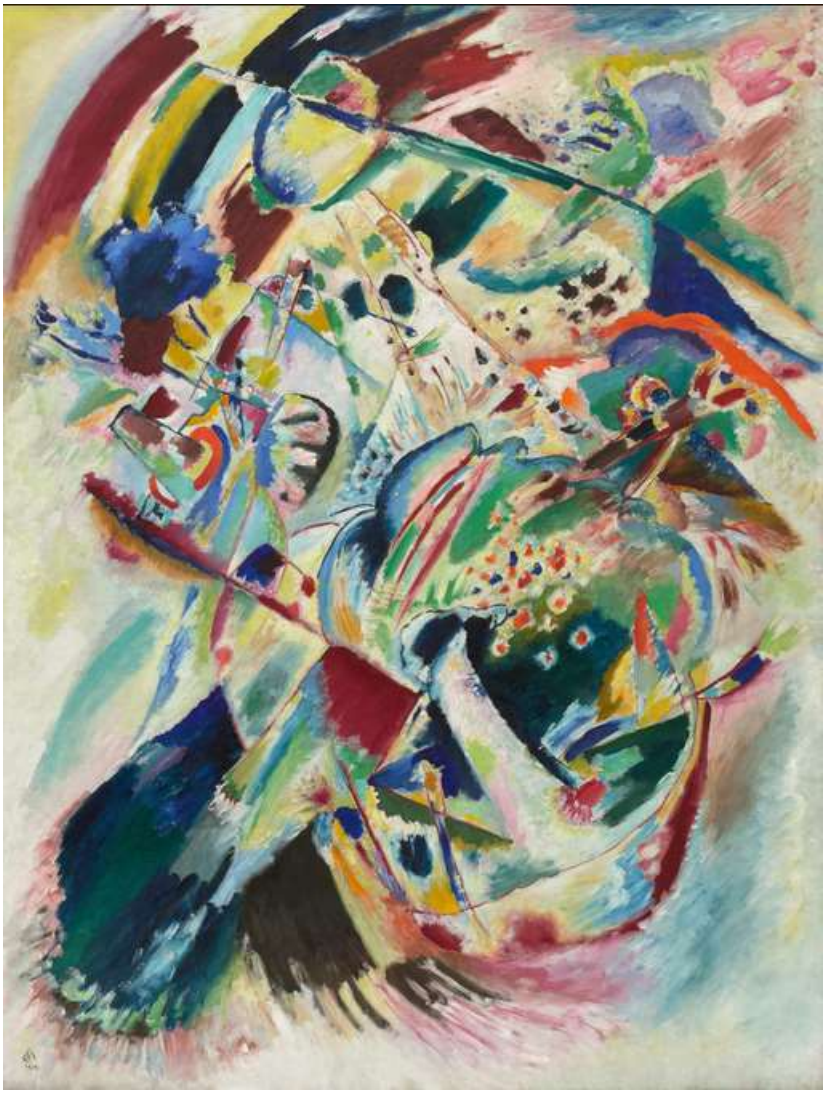
For the arts to mean something to us spiritually, a synthesis is required between the Dionysian and the Apollonian – the contemplative and the active. Beauty, then, has *both* an Apollonian and a Dionysian component. It is meditative in meaning, but its meaning is also partially revealed through its action. A good example would be church music in particular. Most church hymns are designed to be sung, but they also can be contemplated apart from the signing. The religious musical works, such as those of Bach and Mozart, were moved to concert halls and out of the place of the liturgy, thereby removing them from action and moving them to the realm of pure contemplation. However, for the music to be prayerful, it must be sung *and* contemplated – and that combination creates a more meaningful spiritual encounter. That is, we can grasp the meaning of a song by singing it, not just by listening to it. We can uncover the Truth of a drama by performing it. Graham sums it up by saying, "Apollonian art provides experiences. Dionysian art informs activity."[155] We can certainly have both with art, and we do not need to choose between them. Both are spiritually valuable. However, the point is to resist the tendency to elevate everything to the level of contemplation or reduce everything to a craft. Instead, the point is to *engage* with art as embodied meaning.

Nietzsche's theory of art can lead us to a more spiritual engagement with art through thought *and* participation, and this can happen through the visual arts for audiences and artists alike. Unlike the formalists and classical theorists mentioned earlier, Kant stresses beauty as an *experience* rather than an aesthetic *property*. Beauty is not an inactive quality but instead a mode

[155] (Graham, Art and Religion, p. 517)

of engagement. According to Kant, beauty requires the "free play of the imagination and the understanding"[156] to generate aesthetic ideas. Imagination is the key to combining the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Nietzsche stresses this link to his reader, saying, "If one were to convert Beethoven's 'Paean to Joy' into a painting, and refuse to curb the imagination when that multitude prostrates itself reverently in the dust, one might form some apprehension of Dionysiac ritual."[157] Kandinsky, the founder of abstract art and author of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, seemed to make this his artistic agenda when he painted music.

[156] (Kant, 2000, §9)
[157] (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 23)



34 Kandinsky, Wassily. Panel for Edwin R. Campbell No. 4. 1914. Oil on canvas, 64.25 x 48.25 in. MoMA, NYC

One of the most secular art movements – abstract art – has quite a spiritual depth and history. Ernst Gombrich notes that Kandinsky, along with Klee and Mondrian, "were mystics who wanted to break through the veil of appearances to a higher truth."[158] In his project, Kandinsky was after the spiritual – not art for art's sake. These spiritual artists believed that the power of the imagination held such a spiritual power that mimetic art no longer seemed to afford. Art had to become abstract because people stopped imagining with Apollonian, representational art.

[158] (Gombrich E. , 1995, p. 604)

Beauty, the active use of the *imagination* to generate aesthetic ideas, is not about representing a concept to the mind. Looking at a painting or an icon and gaining an aesthetic idea isn't the same as looking at a flower in nature and knowing something about it. These ideas are imaginative. Yet, this imaginative capacity with artworks has generally been lost – to Nietzsche's complaint about the Apollonian. Art, in the Apollonian mode, is more didactic rather than synthetic. In Christian art, this seems obvious, as cathedral stained glass windows were visual catechisms for the illiterate. Perhaps this is Hegel's realization, too, when he says, "No matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably and perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we bow the knee no longer."[159] If we merely *look at* religious art, such as this Madonna below, as a picture of Mary, then we miss the point.

[159] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 103)

35 Aretino, Spinello. Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels. 1390. Tempera and gold leaf on panel. 53 x 25 in. SLAM, St. Louis, MO.

It is not meant to be a picture of Mary like a photograph. Its meaning is revealed through its use, but it is also extracted through the imagination. This artwork was initially an altarpiece, which the priest would face while saying Mass. The image would help the priest's imagination when

saying the prayers – to use this scene as a springboard to imagine himself and the congregation speaking to the Madonna and Child seated as such. "Painting alone will never let us see the sacred,"[160] claims Graham. That is because painting requires imagination to become a window into the holy. On its own, it is just a *symbol of* the sacred and nothing more. Through the imagination, we *see* the sacred. God re-presents in the imagination.

Another, perhaps more apt example, is the crucifix. For the crucifix to *work*, it requires a religious imagination, which informs its function. "When something stops being a re-presentation of the crucifixion, but merely stands as what we might term a crucifixion-representation – a mere picture," Danto begins, "the congregation that addresses it has become an audience rather than coparticipants in a piece of mystical history, and the walls of the church are half-transformed into the walls of a gallery."[161] Crucifixes, like other religious art, have a purpose. The crucifix is meant to be like the bronze serpent Moses held up in the desert,[162] so too, looking at Christ on the Cross is supposed to do something, not just represent something. The viewer is supposed to look at it not only for contemplation but for salvation. Although both require looking, one is passive and the other active. One is symbolic, while the other is salvific. Without participatory action with the aesthetic, there is no divine encounter, only a symbol that reminds us of the sacred. From here, we might say that art is a type of sacramental, like the crucifix. And it seems that accessing that divine, spiritual element in art requires participatory activity. A sort of active looking through the imagination, which re-presents rather than represents.

---

[160] (Graham, 2010, p. 186)
[161] (Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace, 1983, p. 20)
[162] (Numbers 21:8-9, NABRE) In this scene, the people of Israel are bitten by venomous snakes and begin to die. God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent and hold it up. Anyone who would look at the snake would then live if they got bitten.

This concept, where God works *in* the imagination, is not so foreign in Jesuit circles. St. Ignatius believed in the power of *imaginative contemplation,* where one would pray with Scripture and place oneself in the scene or imagine God looking at you or conversing with you in extra-scriptural settings.[163] This is why Nadal published images for students in the early days of the Society – for the pictures to prompt imagination in prayer.[164] Ignatius's point is that we are not merely developing our beliefs through this approach but having an experience of Christ through our imagination. It's an epistemology of encounter. We learn about Christ through knowing Christ, and that latter knowing comes through prayerful imagination aided by art. Hegel's formulation of religion in Absolute Spirit is mainly limited to religious *belief*. Belief is only one aspect of religion. Yet, Nietzsche invites us – surprisingly – to consider the other elements that religion might have for us – namely what Schleiermacher would call "religious feeling."[165] Through contemplation, not just in the intellectual sense but also in an imaginative, active sense, one is led closer to God *relationally*. The imagination is the balance that unites image and action – the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Art and Religion

But why does God need to be involved in this at all? Couldn't art actually replace religion instead? Nietzsche also asks such questions and sees that the dyad of the Apollonian and the Dionysian is good, but it doesn't need to be colored in religious garb. For Nietzsche, art and religion are interchangeable modes of Absolute Spirit. To move toward self-knowledge and enter into the communal *Geist*, one starts with art, which leads to religious belief, and then moves toward conceptual knowledge in philosophy, according to Hegel. Nietzsche sees religion and art

[163] (Loyola, 1992) Exercises from the 1st and 2nd week in particular show examples of scriptural and extra-scriptural meditations.
[164] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 25)
[165] (Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 1996)

as interchangeable. However, they are on the same plane and thus are transposable. Nietzsche claims, "Art raises its head where religions decline…feeling, forced out of the religious sphere by enlightenment, throws itself into art."[166] This feeling that Nietzsche refers to is likely this Dionysian sense of primordial, religious feeling – this desire for the sublime and the divine. And art can replace religion in this process. Returning to the Transfiguration, Art can replace Christ as the transfigured one that saves, in Nietzsche's mind. [167] The toilet paper as a religious icon could merely be an aesthetic one, and there would be no difference for Nietzsche – they both perform the same function – to save.

Much can be said about this argument, but generally, art is a means of expression that lacks an ethos and cannot replace religion, contrary to Nietzsche's thought. "Art is of all things the worst suited to the purpose" – that is, at replacing religion, according to historian Jacques Barzun. "Art cannot do the simplest things that religion, philosophy and the state can do by their nature," he continues. "Art cannot be 'a way of life,'…it lacks a theology or even a popular mythology of its own; it has no bible, no ritual, and no sanctions for behaviour. We are called to enjoy, but we are not enjoined."[168] Furthermore, Graham avers, "In short, the abandonment of religion, it seems, must mean the permanent disenchantment of the world, and any ambition on the part of art to remedy this is doomed to failure."[169] Graham asserts that art needs religion, and religion needs art for one to attain some closeness to God. It is not a matter of one over the other. The Dionysian and the Apollonian are united as are religion and art.

---

[166] (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 150)
[167] And perhaps even insinuated by Danto (1983)
[168] (Barzun, 1974, p. 90)
[169] (Graham, 2010, p. 186)

My painting provides another angle in interpreting The Transfiguration in light of this argument. On the bottom half of my painting are objects that alter looks – a hair dryer, a face towel, and a comb. All are used to enhance *appearance*. Yet, they point up toward the objects in the upper half of the painting that *clean*. There are objects of *action* that give of themselves in the doing: soap, shampoo, a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant – and toilet paper. It is an analogy to Nietzsche's understanding of Raphael, where there is a reversal of sorts. The objects of "mere illusion of an illusion"[170] are on the bottom half of the painting, pointing up toward objects that do something. One is transfigured, but the two prophets worked before Christ, and the Apostles will continue Christ's work after His Ascension. Art – an appearance must transcend itself and become an object of action, an art that clarifies our lives. It is something to behold yet also something that acts. Aesthetics are justified when it is an art of action. Art's spiritual capacity does not lie in its representational or formal content alone. We must *use* art to transform us. We *use* art through our active imagination, and it is that active use of the imagination that gives art a transfigured quality, setting it apart from the ordinary. Yet, in a world where everything *can* be art, everything can be transfigured, just like the roll. We can "find God in all things" by being "contemplatives in action" – to use two Jesuit phrases[171] – through our imaginative capacity to extract meaning from the everyday.

Yet a transfiguration into art is not for its own sake. Finding something meaningful means it can transform – to clean and heal like Christ. Art does something besides just improve appearance, like those objects on the lower half. Jürgen Moltmann comments, "Transfiguration cannot be demonstrated on a mountain away from the world. Even the transfiguration of Jesus

[170] (Nietzsche, 1956, p. 33)
[171] I realize that the active part here is meant to indicate action in the world such as through good works, but here I am adapting that phrase to emphasize the active nature of imaginative contemplation.

took place on the road to Jerusalem." A transfiguration – an art that brings us closer to God "must be demonstrated in a suffering and struggling transformation which involves changing oneself and existing conditions so that [people], together with other [people], may be conformed to [their] future."[172] Beauty is revealed in the one to be crucified, which leads to hope and a transformation of the self and the world. But it is through the imagination that this transformation can take place. Art and objects in the everyday – the roll of toilet paper – *reveal* Christ to us if only we have the imagination to see it.

[172] (Moltmann, 1973, p. 63)

The Madonna of the Future

36 Leeper, Nicholas. Madonna of the Future. 2024. Acrylic on wood. 22.5 x 13.75 x 2 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

I wrote[173] an icon. During Lent, while fasting from meat and doing my usual prayer, I embarked on a journey to make an icon using a process similar to that of the iconographers. An iconic light switch with a dimmer and two screws are nested within the elaborate Renaissance frame. I invite the viewer to imaginatively contemplate a *sacra conversazione*[174] with the Madonna and Child like one would have done in the depiction below.

[173] Icons are written, not drawn or painted. They are written because they are believed to contain teaching. But perhaps on the view expressed thus far all beautiful art should be written.
[174] A holy conversation

37 di Cosimo, Piero. Madonna and Child Enthroned with Sts. Peter, John the Baptist, Dominic, and Nicholas of Bari. 1481-5. Tempera and oil on panel. 105.25 x 63.375 in. SLAM, St. Louis, MO.

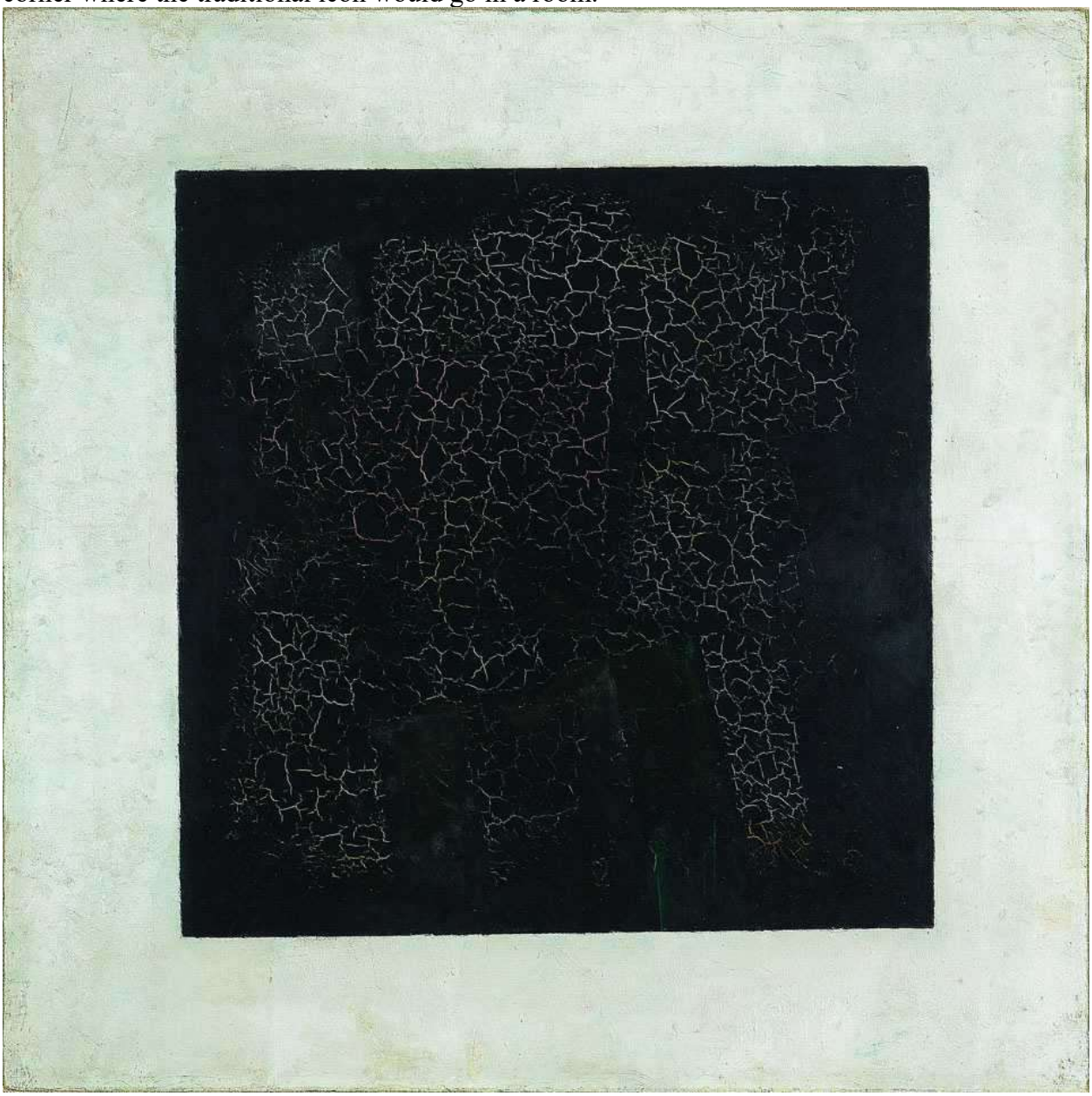
The icon, in general, has a long history. The Italian artists reimagined a new mode of presenting the Madonna in the Renaissance. Instead of placing her and Christ in an abstract divine realm like the one below, they brought the mother and child down to earth.

38 Berlinghiero. Madonna and Child. 1230s. Tempera on wood, gold ground. 30 x 19.5 in. The MET, NYC.

They began to place these heavenly persons in earthly settings so that viewers could *imagine* them among us and speak to them in prayerful imagination. And so here is another shot at recreating the Madonna for our time: a Madonna of the Future.[175] But why in the world is she a light switch, and what does a light switch have to do with Mary and Jesus?

[175] A title taken from Danto's collection of essays (2000) of the same name, which was also appropriated from Henry James's short story of the same name.

Kazmir Malevich, a Russian artist, created his *Black Square,* which he placed in the corner where the traditional icon would go in a room.



39 Malevich, Kazmir. Black Square. 1913. Oil on linen. 31.3 x 31.3 in. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Malevich challenged his contemporaries to see the icon differently – to see it imaginatively again. And he did so by making the icon a black square with no mimetic content. He declared, "A square is not a picture, just as a switch or a plug is not electricity. Anyone who…saw the icon

as…a picture was mistaken. For he mistook the switch, the plug, for a picture of electricity."[176] The icon is a means of producing electricity, not as electricity itself. The icon is like the light switch that turns the lights on, but it itself is not electric. The icon is a means to *conduct* a divine encounter, but it is not that encounter itself. And one can flip the switch and turn it on by employing *imaginative contemplation.*

Imaginative contemplation[177], mentioned in the last chapter, is a form of prayer that St. Ignatius helped popularize. [178] St. Ignatius placed an extraordinary emphasis on the imagination in his *Spiritual Exercises*. The idea is to mentally place oneself in scenes from the Gospels or to imagine themselves before the persons of Christ, God, or the saints in heaven. Through this imaginative activity, one can encounter God, which can be a mystical experience. The artists of the Renaissance believed in the importance of the imagination, as did the medievals. Painting the Madonna in an earthly scene was intentional to facilitate easier imaginative encounters. To see Mary and Jesus in a place that looks like the one we inhabit in lieu of an abstract, golden atmosphere. This historical shift in depiction indicates that the imagination is more important than the picture itself. Art is the switch, not the light. The imagination is the electricity that connects us with the divine.

Imagination

Icons can still foster imagination, of course, but there's a problem. In the artworld, where we engage with art in an Apollonian mode, we can quickly fail to engage actively with the icon imaginatively. This is what Malevich addressed in his time and what still needs to be addressed today. We can easily bypass much art in an age oversaturated with images. But *how* do we

[176] Quoted in (Nehamas, 2007, p. 23)
[177] Sometimes this is also referred to as Ignatian contemplation.
[178] (O'Malley & Bailey, 2005, p. 26)

engage with art via our imaginations in a way that combines the Apollonian with the Dionysian? After all, much art just shows us what the artist wanted us to see, right? How could the imagination work with static art objects, such as icons?

To engage with art imaginatively is akin to playing a game. Kendall Walton, author of *Mimesis as Make-Believe,*[179] compares our imaginative aesthetic activity with pretend games that kids play. Where children might use a stick as a sword or a stump as a throne, so too, artworks and the depictions therein are like props in a game. The work of Paul Klee creates a similar sort of childlike experience with the imagination. Klee's *Around the Fish* was one of the works that the Nazis denounced as "degenerate art." As a result, Klee was forced into exile, and his works were seized by the National Socialists.

[179] (Walton, Mimesis as Make-Believe, 1990)

40 Klee, Paul. Around the Fish. 1926. Oil and tempera on canvas mounted on cardboard. 18.375 x 25.125 in. MoMA, NYC.

The Nazis didn't like this painting because they found it childish and confusing. Yet, this childlike quality inspired the surrealists, some of the most imaginative artists in art history. In this painting, Klee wants the audience to imagine, for imagination's sake – to make up a game within the frame and play it. Croce believed the same thing happens in art, where the "nonlogical" picture contains its own world that makes sense on its own without reference to any external information.[180]

The imagination then works like these children's games, or I think another apt analogy might be improv, where there is a maxim of "yes, and." Someone offers something – such as

[180] (Croce, 1965, 14)

what the fish might mean, and then the response is "yes, and." If the fish represents a Lenten meal (a yes), then the cross above the fish makes sense of that and connects the two things together (the and). Then, maybe the cylinders are like the pillars on which Christ was flogged. And the flowers are reminiscent of the garden of Gethsemane. And the "ands" can go on and on. But having this sort of attitude allows the imagination to work, just like how children don't debate the incredulity of a stump being a throne or a stick being a sword. They say "yes, and" and create something with their imaginations. To kill the imagination is to say "no (period)," and then art is reduced to Apollonian once again, where meaning is reduced and buried.

The imagination is *necessary* to go deeper into a picture and mine it for aesthetic ideas – to have a Kantian experience of beauty. The relationship between a depiction and the imagination is quite firm, considering the ontology of artworks as well. Walton claims that seeing something in a picture[181] is a matter of imagining that thing. Collingwood makes a similar point in that all art is not an artifact but a *creation* in the mind of the artist *and* the audience.[182] The audience actively re-creates the artwork in their mind, and that is where it exists, apart from what is known as its vehicle, the material work. A vehicle is to the artwork as a body is to a person.[183] The audience is a co-laborer with the artist in imaginatively making the artwork – not the physical object – in the mind, but this requires imaginative action. As Collingwood says, "Art is not contemplation,[184] it is action," and that the audience's role is "not a merely receptive one, but

[181] Most of the study on imagination relates to fiction, literature, and theatre as artforms that might have a stronger connotation with the imagination, but the imagination also has a strong correlation in the visual arts.
[182] (Collingwood, 1938, p. 128)
[183] (Danto, 1993, pp. 199-200)
[184] By contemplation, Collingwood means a passive, Apollonian contemplation, that only perhaps gawks at brushstrokes instead of getting to the core of a painting. That is, I do not take Collingwood's comment to be in contrast with Kant's theory of beauty discussed earlier. Instead, he is only emphasizing Kant's point that beauty requires the "free play of the imagination" (Kant, 2000, p. §9).

collaborative."[185] For the artwork to even exist, it requires imagination in some capacity. Yet, we still need a vehicle because our imaginations are too weak to do all the work independently. One could get from Saint Louis to New York on foot, but that would not be ideal. Instead, the trip would be much better with a *vehicle*. So, the work of art actually exists in the mind. However, the artwork provides an invitation that directs the imagination.

Making this collaboration requires audience participation in playing the imaginative game Walton describes. In this *Madonna and Child* by Dürer, one can use one's imagination to get more information from the painting, form the picture, and learn more about the person of both Mary and Jesus.

[185] (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 332, 324)

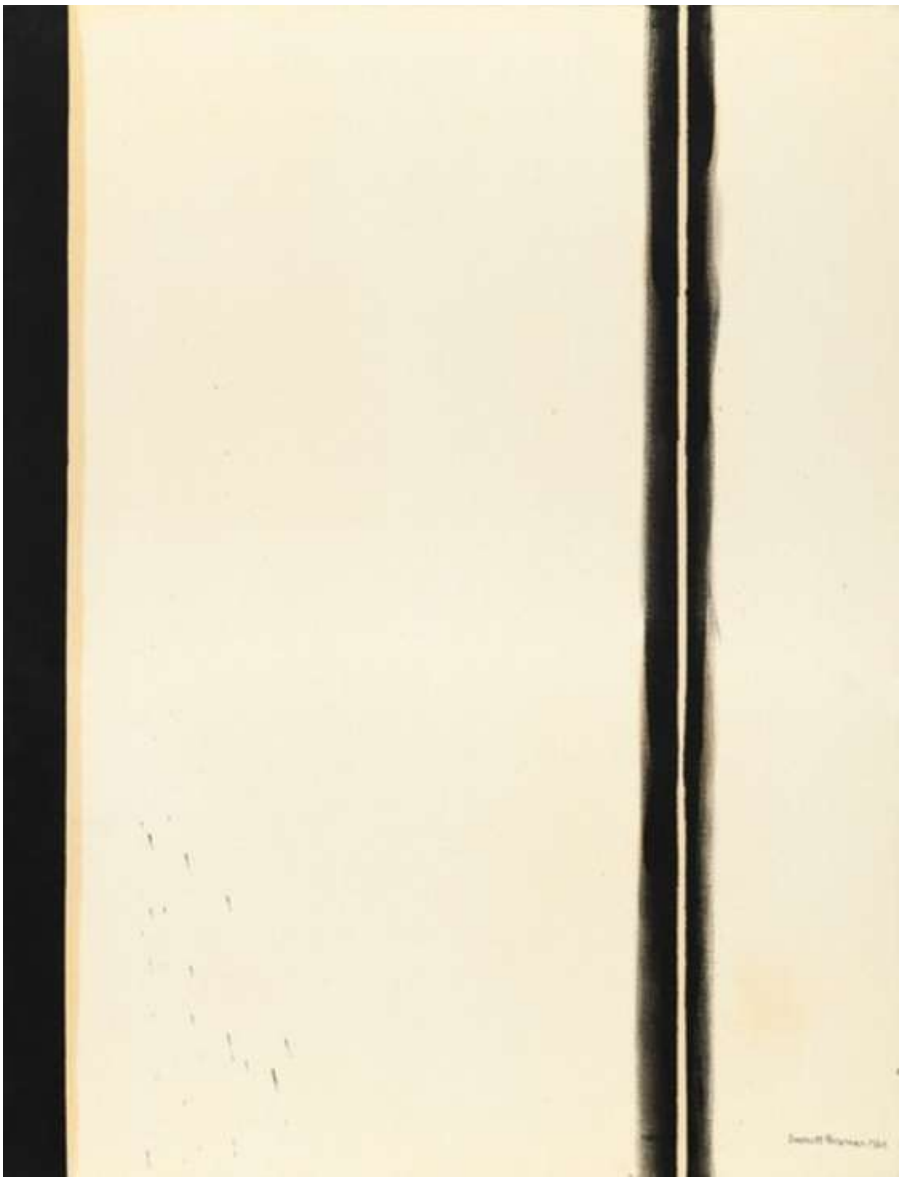
41 Dürer, Albrecht. Madonna and Child. c. 1496/99. Oil on panel. 26.075 x 21.875 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

On the surface, one could simply see the mother and child in this room and in some fantastical locale. However, by questioning the artwork, our imagination can begin to provide answers that aren't obvious. How did Mary and Jesus get all the way to medieval Germany? Why is she there? What is Mary feeling and thinking? What is the baby Jesus looking at? Why is he holding an apple? Does it have something to do with Adam and Eve perhaps? What might it mean then for Jesus to be holding this apple? And why is Jesus naked and not covered up?[186] Answers to all of the questions come through the use of the imagination, and they begin to construct the work in our minds and make it richer. The vehicle is a springboard for the audience to enter into imaginative activity. Artists do not tell us everything they want us to imagine; instead, they rely on the audience to dance with them. The artist makes a step, and the audience can respond by being in step with them, stepping on their toes, or stepping out. People usually have more joy when they dance instead of being wallflowers. This is why most people prefer books to movie remakes. Movies, a highly Apollonian art form, show us a lot and leave less to the imagination than a book would. Most movies sit us on the edge of the dance floor, where we watch the cast, director, sound engineers, costume designers, and screenwriters dance together.[187] With literature, our imagination is more at liberty to fill in the gaps. The reader dances with the author. Dancing is just using our imagination, creating something more engaging, meaningful, and frankly fun.

Another way to engage the imagination in the visual arts is through titles. Historically, titles weren't necessary because all art was representational. Audiences could "read" a painting

[186] Leo Steinberg wrote a fascinating book on the subject (The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion, 1996).
[187] Some moviemakers are quite adept at making imaginative films.

through universal symbols, such as the apple,[188] as an allusion to the incident with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But now, titles can help the audience engage in such imaginative activity. For example, Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross* has a religious title with no mimetic religious content.



42 Newman, Barnett. Fourth Station. 1960. Oil on canvas. 78 x 60.25 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

[188] Although in Scripture, it is just an unspecified fruit and not particularly an apple, which points to how art informs our beliefs (and sometimes falsely as in this case).

The audience then has to play a game of charades[189] to see *how* this piece is the fourth station, where Jesus meets Mary on the Via Dolorosa. There's a lot of room for the imagination to explore on this account. However, being particularly abstract, this might be hard to do for some compared to Klee's work. Maybe this clarifies how that fourth station *felt* for Jesus or his mother? According to Newman, his series depicts Jesus's question, "Lema Sabachthani?"[190] which has no answer.[191] How is Newman's painting an answer to that question? What else might it be saying? It's hard to determine, and that's precisely the point. Art that has what Vaccarino Bremner calls *indeterminate* aesthetic ideas[192] is that which can be the most imaginative. An audience member can engage with art actively through the imagination to discover the work's meaning, even if it is not determined by the artist. Titles are an excellent means of facilitating this active capacity. In my work, *The Madonna of the Future*, the title invites one to think about the relationship between what they see and know, helping to conduct the imagination. Yet, simultaneously, the artist doesn't want to tell the whole story of an artwork and rob the audience of their imaginative experience. Therefore, the artist must find a balance to provide the audience with an experience where the idea is neither too conclusive nor too aloof.

Such an imaginative experience is valuable because, in Jesuit fashion, it is a key to mystical experience. Using our imagination, we connect with God, or what Hegel would call *Geist* – Spirit. It's also worth noting that Hegel believes religion's essence concerning Absolute Spirit is *Vorstellung*, or pictorial *imagination*.[193] And so through an engagement with the arts – or

[189] (Carroll, 1999, pp. 52-3)
[190] "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 NABRE)
[191] (National Gallery of Art, 2012)
[192] (Vaccarino Bremner, 2021)
[193] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 101ff.)

sensory intuition for Hegel –we come to religion, which uses the imagination to connect with the divine.

Yet, we might be a little hesitant to admit this. Isn't using our imagination just us talking to ourselves? How could that be God? In *Joan of Arc* by George Bernard Shaw, the eponymous protagonist tells her prosecutors, "I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God." Her adversary responds, "They come from your imagination." "Of course," Joan quips, "That is how messages of God come to us."[194]St. Ignatius of Loyola would agree. If God is in all things, God works through everything, including one's imagination. But this does not mean that our imagination can come up with whatever it wants, and we call that God. Our imagination is a key to finding the voice of God, but it is not absolute. It requires a discernment of spirits. That is, one would have to test whether or not some imaginative images are from the good spirit or the evil spirit, according to Ignatius. We could test this by determining whether someone experiences consolation or desolation. These are particular terms in Ignatian Spirituality, where consolation generally is a movement toward greater faith, hope, and love, whereas desolation is the opposite. There is a connection with "religious feelings" here, but the core of these two concepts, at least in my read, are those volitional movements toward or away from the theological virtues. However, these are also tested through external factors. St. Teresa of Avila claims we can tell if an experience comes from the good or evil spirit[195] depending on the fruits of those experiences,[196] along with its vividness, conformity to Christian Tradition, and resonance with the Church.[197] We need to use our imagination in the arts to "see God in all things," but this does

[194] (Shaw, 2002, Scene I)
[195] In Jesuit lingo.
[196] William James (1958) also claims that the fruits of a religious experience give it credibility as well.
[197] (Teresa, 2019, Ch. XXXVII)

not give unbridled license to the imagination as an authority in and of itself. But it is *through* the imagination that God speaks to us in our time and place anew.

But why would religion be necessary? Couldn't one just be spiritual like the Theosophists? Religion gives art its ethos. It is like a language one has when dealing with the arts. Religion gives us the tools to engage in the arts and use our imagination for spiritual ends. As Schleiermacher says, "Religious feelings should accompany every human deed like a holy music; we should do everything with religion, nothing because of religion."[198] That is, religious art doesn't necessarily need religious content at all, but having a *religious* imagination helps us better understand art in a spiritually significant way. We look at art *with* religion. We imagine with religion. Religion is like a watch in Segal's Law: when someone has one watch, they know what time it is. If they have two watches, they can't be sure.[199] Religion helps us tell what time it is and gives order to our lives. Religion provides us with a means to order our lives and our world, whereas having no or many religious or philosophical frameworks only brings confusion. This doesn't mean one can't learn from other traditions, but it is always about putting it into perspective from the one watch. And so, religion helps form the imagination by giving it a structure. All art can be spiritual, but religion helps make that spiritual content mean something, like how a watch makes meaning of time.

So, religious art is less about containing religious symbols and more about learning to see with religion. Instead, looking at art with religion can help us draw a more articulate or apparent meaning from a work of art. Obviously, with conventional religious art, not having the lens of religion will reduce the artwork to its form, divorced from any meaningful content. However,

---

[198] (Schleiermacher, On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers, 1996, p. 30)
[199] (Bloch, 2003, p. 36)

engaging with any work, abstract or representational, a religious imagination helps us to *develop* our conception of God rather than create it from scratch. However, some art leaves less room for the imagination than others and doesn't always provide a rich imaginative experience.

As stated earlier, the problem in Apollonian art is that we engage with arts like empirical realities. Aristotle claims that seeing such a likeness is why we look at art. We find pleasure in recognizing someone we know in a portrait.[200] However, this type of engagement is not necessarily imaginative but perceptual. Once one registers a Madonna and Child icon as Jesus and Mary, the engagement is over because recognition has been achieved. Apollonian art's contemplative activity stops at the level of form and depiction. It does not go deeper into the realm of meaning. This aesthetic engagement does not have a spiritual significance in a mystical, Dionysian sense. Instead, Apollonian art can remain at the level of "kitsch."

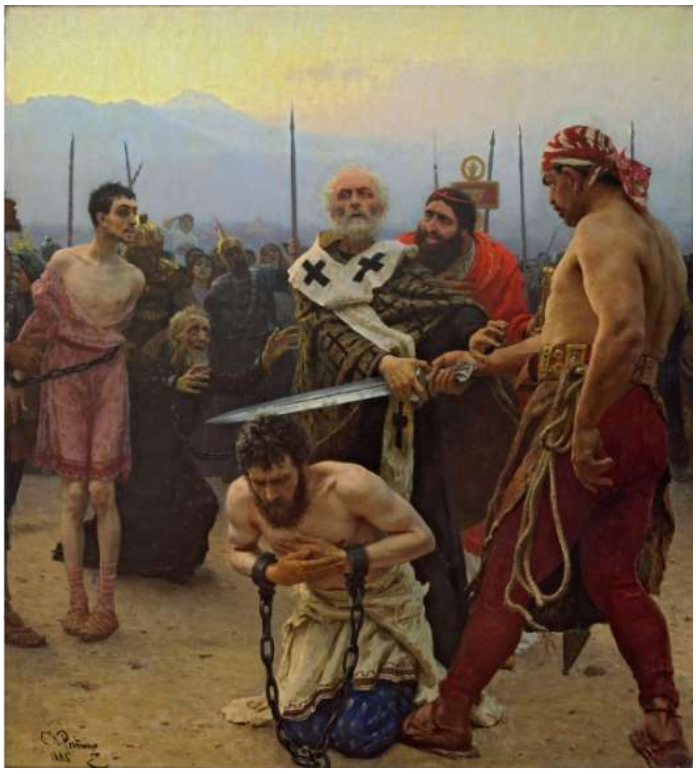
Kitsch

As mentioned previously, the National Socialists of Germany banned Paul Klee's art as degenerate because of its esoteric nature. Instead, the fascists prefer the art of kitsch.[201] Scruton thinks kitsch is equivalent to low art, what Nietzsche would call purely Dionysian, which is not contemplative. According to both Danto and Scruton, kitsch lacks meaning and doesn't give meaning to life.[202] And indeed, there is kitsch all around us, primarily due to mechanical and digital reproduction.[203] Joan Chittister claims, "We bask in kitsch…we reproduce the Pieta in plastic."[204] Kitsch is an art that merely represents something for representation's sake. It is like an art for art's sake, but on a mimetic level. It is about the representation that does not conduct

[200] (Aristotle, 1996, 1448b15–17)
[201] (Greenberg, 1989)
[202] (Graham, The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion, 2010, pp. 346-9)
[203] (Benjamin, 1996), Although I expand his thesis implicitly with the addition of digital reproduction.
[204] (Chittister, 2001)

the imagination. They are accurate, perhaps, but do not lead to Truth.[205] That is, they fail to engage the imagination to induce aesthetic ideas, thereby not providing an experience of beauty.

Art is different than kitsch in that it invites the audience to actively imagine. Kitsch is more proper in the realm of Apollo, where mere appearance does not invite dialogue with the viewer. Nehamas examines this piece from Repin, which he claims is kitsch.



43 Repin I. E., St. Nicholas of Myra Saves Three Innocents from Death. 1888. Oil on canvas. 84.7 x 77.2 in. The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

Nehamas claims that Repin "predigests" the material for the audience and gives the audience a "shortcut" to what the art is about.[206] In short, it is more challenging for Kant's "free play of the imagination" to operate here when depicting an event as if it were in a history book. This is not

[205] Akin to what Charles Chaffin says about photography: "There are two roads distinct in photography, the utilitarian and the aesthetic: the goal of one being a record of facts, and of the other an expression of beauty." Quoted in (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003).
[206] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 31)

to say that imagination is impossible for the viewer, but there is little room for it. Kitsch *refers* to something, but art is *about* something. It is illustration, not illumination. An illustration shows a factual depiction, but illumination tells us the Truth about something. Illustrations are in encyclopedias, while art is more adequately concerned with illumination via the experience of beauty. Graham notes that art is a "means of spiritual orientation,"[207] but kitsch fails to do the orienting because of the lack of imagination that it can foster.

Kitsch is a statement, not an invitation to imagine. It is also like propaganda or commercials, where a single message is behind a piece of work. Alain Locke, a pragmatic philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, claims that Black artists, in particular, must break free of making propaganda – art with a social agenda – and instead make art.[208]And commercials are designed to *do* something: to sell you a product. While propaganda and kitsch are similar, both fail to engage the imagination. Instead, perhaps both engage in fantasy. Fantasy, according to Scruton, is "an imaginary object that leaves nothing to the imagination."[209] Kitsch, propaganda, ads, and other sorts of created things can fall under the broad umbrella of kitsch in this mode if we define kitsch as that which fails to induct the audience's imagination.

But, it seems kitsch is a relatively new phenomenon in Christianity and religion in general. Kitsch is often associated with being cheap and mass-produced. With the dawn of mass production, kitsch makes its way into the realm of religion in the ways of plastic rosaries and ephemeral prayer cards, and this isn't a good thing for religion generally. Scruton goes so far as to say that the kitschification of religion is a "disease of faith."[210] Kitsch provides symbols of

[207] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 70)
[208] (Locke, 2012)
[209] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 105)
[210] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 191)

faith, yes, but because it lacks this capacity for imaginative engagement, it is perhaps a type of art that is done *because of* rather than *with* religion. That is, one makes kitsch because one is religious or is asked to make it for a religious organization. Meanwhile, art that is *with* religion can be any art, which perhaps paradoxically *could* include kitsch and propaganda. However, kitsch cannot induce imagination. Furthermore, this kitschification progresses beyond the age of mechanical reproduction.[211] In the age of digital reproduction and even artificial *production* with the advent of artificially intelligent artists such as DALL-E[212], the "aura"[213] of art is rapidly diminishing.

However, this might be a somewhat elitist view of kitsch that is uncharitable. What's so wrong with having a mass-produced icon of Mary or some bric-a-brac Bibles? Or, perhaps the term itself is tossed around as a filler for "bad art." A more problematic question is this, if everything can be art, why would that exclude kitsch, propaganda, and commercials? Couldn't old Soviet murals and religious store tchotchkes count as art, too, in this view? Of course, they *can* be art, but this does not guarantee they *are*. As discussed earlier, art is a verb – the question is better put as "when is art"[214] rather than "what." Conversely, kitsch, propaganda, and ads are also verbs. "When is kitsch?" seems more fitting. They are *modes* of engaging with objects rather than classifications of those objects themselves. For example, one could go to the Uffizi and Florence and imaginatively contemplate Parmigiano's *Madonna of the Long Neck*.

---

[211] (Benjamin, 1996) I will refrain from getting into Benjamin's theory here, but perhaps we value art over kitsch because of the "irrational" concept of contagion – which is akin to how Catholics might engage with relics. We value art that has been touched by a human artist, especially a famous one. However, this requires much more work and is rather off topic for my purposes here.
[212] One of several artificially intelligent programs that generates images based on text prompts.
[213] (Benjamin, 1996)
[214] (Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking, 1978, pp. 67-9)

44 Parmigianino. Madonna with the Long Neck. 1534-40. Oil on Panel. 85.2 x 52.2 in. Uffizi, Florence.

One can buy a print, bring it home, and put it in a cheap frame. On a conventional view, the print is kitschy, whereas the Uffizi painting is unquestionably art. However, one could go to the museum and stand in front of the painting for thirty seconds, using most of that time to open one's phone to take a picture.[215] Meanwhile, back at home, a whole dinner conversation could explore the meaning of the artwork whose mass-produced vehicle hangs in the dining room. The

[215] Most museumgoers nowadays spend about 27 seconds on average in front of a painting taking arties – selfies with art (Smith, Smith, & Tinio, 2017).

same could be said for less refined *artworks*, as opposed to vehicles. One could engage with a plastic crucifix meaningfully or meaninglessly. Because everything can be art, everything has the potential to embody meaning – including what we conventionally label kitsch or propaganda. So, the objects are not the danger, but instead it is our way of dealing with art objects: do we engage with aesthetic objects as art, where we look for meaning through the imagination? Or do we cut off the imagination, only reading art as a symbol or limiting our imagination to a single message intended by the artist in the case of propaganda? These latter forms of engagement kitschify religion and lead to a disease of faith.

When we kitschify art, we fail to engage the imagination and instead default to an Apollonian mode of looking. Although we have a symbol pointing to God with kitsch, we fail to *make* such a connection. It is through the imagination that one could get in touch with the divine. One is meant to pray through biblical images and imaginatively contemplate being in the scene and what the people might be saying. One can imagine with those arts that invite imagination, such as in the work of Klee and Newman, and I hope my work can also invite that same process.

I based the title of my sculpture on Henry James's story of *The Madonna of the Future,*[216] where Theobald aspires to paint a Madonna just as well as Raphael.

45 Raphael. Madonna della Seggiola.c. 1512. Oil on Wood. Diameter 28 in. Pitti Palace, Florence.

[216] (James H. , 1873)

After Theobald finds the perfect model, he begins meticulously studying and imagining how to make his work. The tragedy is that he takes too long. His model ages, but that's okay. The image – his masterpiece – is in his head. He just needs to transcribe it to the canvas. He then spends his days sitting in front of a blank canvas until he finally dies. Some see this as a tragedy because he never put his painting on the canvas. But it is not because he spent his life exploring what the Madonna means in his imagination. The Madonna of the Future exists in a person's heart and mind – not on a canvas. Mary and Jesus cannot remain in pigment and wood but must transpose themselves within the person to be meaningful. Through the imagination, mystics are born. And as Karl Rahner, SJ, said, "The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or [they] will not exist at all."[217] If this is the case, then the Madonna of the future is one that we converse with in prayerful imagination. And through that, religion can perhaps reënchant our world[218] and illuminate our lives once again.

A question remains, however, about the artist's intention. Although we *can* imagine an artwork to mean this or that and allow God to speak to us through it, doesn't that violate the autonomy of the work and the artist? What if what we come to imagine was not something that they meant in their work? Mark Rothko, whom I spoke about in an earlier chapter, eschewed all the mystical and quasi-religious talk people had about his paintings. So when people say they have a spiritual encounter with his works, are they not being fair to the artist? Then aren't we doing it wrong, perhaps? How do we balance imagination with interpretation?

[217] (Rahner, 1981)
[218] (Graham, The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion, 2010)

The Kiss of Judas

46 Leeper, Nicholas. The Kiss of Judas. 2024. Acrylic on Wood.. 15.5 x 6 x 6.5 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

In one moment, it is a deformed-looking Eucharistic chalice. In it floats a blue Eucharistic host, partially submerged in blue Blood. Violent waves form and crash into the perpendicular host that rises above the rim. The host stays upright as if a priest holds it there while proclaiming to the congregation at Mass, “Behold the Lamb of God; behold him who takes away the world's sins. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.” Looking beyond the chalice, there is a confrontation disguised as an embrace. Two faces in the negative space appear on the sides of the chalice, looking at one another in profile. It’s not so apparent at first glance. It takes intention to see it. It’s a sort of presence in absence. Yet, in one mode of seeing, the faces

are there, and in another instance, we return to just seeing a chalice– and an ugly, bizarre one at that.[219]

In Scripture, Judas's betrayal happens after the Last Supper, where Jesus institutes the Eucharist,[220] which is celebrated at every Mass. Through our imagination, we can begin to discern what this might mean. What might *The Kiss of Judas* mean as a Eucharistic chalice in this way? Why are the Body and Blood of Christ blue? What does forgetfulness have to do with this kiss and the institution of the Eucharist? We can come up with many questions about this piece, and by imagining answers to these sorts of questions, we can perhaps learn more about *who* Christ is by asking *what* He is. Using our imagination in such a way is what provides a beautiful experience.

However, why do we need to do all this imagining in the first place if all we need to see is what the artist intends? Doesn't the artist's intention matter? If the artist says what their work is about, isn't that all there is to it? Why do we need to do any sort of work on our part? Some think that whatever the artist intends is the only correct interpretation. So, are you bound to be wrong in doing that imaginative work on your part if you know I'm "hiding" the correct interpretation from you? How could we – or critics – interpret this piece correctly if I stay silent on these questions?

I hope it might be clear why I won't fully share my own interpretations – at least on a first encounter with the artwork. Sharing my interpretation outright could possibly discard the artwork in place for a discursive philosophy or theology. If I wrote my interpretation on a placard next to the work, people would spend more time reading that than reading the chalice. It would

[219] Classically ugly, where there is a lack of symmetry and harmony.
[220] In a conventional theological understanding at least.

reduce the artwork to the Apollonian, where it is only an image to *look at* rather than imaginatively *see* in synthesizing the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Words can kill the imagination. But words can also direct and help foment imaginative activity through criticism.

Everyone's a critic, sure, but criticism, I argue, has a vital role to play in the experience of beauty as outlined thus far in this thesis. Unfortunately, criticism has a negative connotation. Art criticism evokes images of snobby, coastal elites who lambast art with stinging negativity while wearing designer brand clothing. I want to clarify this is not the criticism I am talking about. Instead, this everyday conception of criticism would be more in line with what Nehamas calls a *review*.[221] Most popular magazines and websites have critics, but these critics are primarily trying to sell us something. So, they are perhaps more appropriately called reviewers.[222] Their review is given mainly to encourage or discourage us from attending a new art exhibit, the latest film, or buying the most recent bestseller. However, this is not what I mean by criticism.

Instead, based on Kant's purpose for his third *Critique*, criticism helps us find what makes something beautiful.[223] A critic is like a friend who connects you with an acquaintance who becomes a dear friend or even a future spouse. They want to introduce you to a movie, artwork, or book that they think would enhance the quality of your life. The critic's job is to make connections by way of introductions. But the critic doesn't do the work between you and the acquaintance to make a friendship work. All the critic does is introduce. A critic introduces by "[exposing] the vision of human life which the [artwork] contains."[224] The critic's job is to help facilitate an experience of beauty for the audience. The critics "cause, not persuade, us to

[221] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 53)
[222] Or more pejoratively, salespeople
[223] (Kant I. , 2000, §1) Emphasis mine.
[224] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 143)

perceive the object as they do through *directions for perceiving*."[225] The critic alerts us what to pay attention to through these directions for perceiving, allowing the audience to engage their imagination and generate aesthetic ideas about the work. The critic is an allegorical Virgil to our Dante, who helps us explore the embodied meaning of an artwork. The critic works generally in two parts, with an optional third component. The critic starts by *describing* the work and then offers their own interpretation. Finally, some give an evaluation of the artwork.[226]

The critic first provides an *ekphrasis*, a detailed description of the work of art. However, could a description of the work of art ever be sufficient? Starting this chapter, I described my own work but left out some elements in that description. I did not mention the details on the chalice base or the color choices of silver and gold. There are an indefinite number of ways to describe a work, and the critic's job is to *narrowly* focus on aspects of the work to support their interpretation, not to capture the entirety of the work. My failure to mention these details in describing *The Kiss of Judas* is because I do not see that element as particularly important in my philosophical interpretation of the piece that I am constructing. It is nearly impossible to give a complete description of an artwork anyway. So, the critic must choose where to direct perception rather than create a verbal substitute for the artwork. As Scruton says, "the real meaning of the painting is *bound up with, inseparable from,* the image," and it "cannot be translated completely into another idiom."[227] This echoes Danto's theory of art as *embodied* meaning, where a description can help describe the embodied part but is not itself embodied besides in words, which are always limited. Art challenges our theory of language that suggests words have the power to capture the fullness of experience. In fact, our language is relatively inefficient at doing

[225] (Isenberg, 1949, p. 336) Emphasis mine.
[226] Most critics, such as Danto (2007), do not see offering an evaluation of a work as merited in a pluralistic society and therefore do not see this as part of their assessment. I will not address evaluation here.
[227] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 110)

that. Any attempt to capture the aesthetic in full is what Cleanth Brooks calls a "heresy of paraphrase."[228] A critic's description involves choosing[229] what to focus on rather than reducing the entire artwork to an empirical, propositional statement. No description is purely objective, so it is hard to see where precisely the description stops and where interpretation begins. Descriptions are merely thinner interpretations that are more empirical but still require the critic to choose what to show to build the foundation of their interpretation. But are there right and wrong ways that critics can direct our seeing? Shouldn't they just direct us to see things that the artist intended?

Artist Centered Criticism

A widespread assumption regarding criticism is that the artist is fully autonomous in meaning-making. That is, the artist's interpretation is *the* correct one. Artworks are often considered to be the actual intentions of their creators, and discovering that intention is believed to be one of the primary goals of criticism. Thus, the name of this type of criticism is *actual intentionalism*. Some think an artist sets about making an artwork with a clear intention, but Collingwood challenges this relatively commonplace assumption. Collingwood insists that an artist sets about to create with some confusion yet is motivated by a psychical disturbance.[230] This feeling pushes the artist to create and clarify that inner feeling. Still, the artist cannot *clearly* know what they intend to do when beginning to design their artwork. They can have a sense of the shape of that psychical disturbance under the umbrella of a general concept, such as anger or sadness, but its specific shape comes about through the process of creation. For example, when I first intended the piece*, Brillo Tabernacle*, it started as a *Brillo Manger* instead. It would have

[228] (Brooks, 1947)
[229] The etymology of heresy connects it with a choice. The point is that all description is inherently "heretical" meaning that it is based in some subjectivity.
[230] (Collingwood, 1938, p. 304)

had hay, and the Brillo pad would be wrapped in swaddling clothes. But then the idea of the tabernacle emerged, giving me more clarity about what *Brillo Box* – and thus art – meant. For Croce, it is a matter of transcribing what is inside into material form for others to witness, whereas for Collingwood, the artist's intention forms alongside the artwork itself. Speaking from my own experience, the latter sounds more accurate.

Although it is good practice to assume everything the artist does in a painting is *intentional*, this does not mean that intention alone insinuates the wholeness of meaning. Instead, context also gives new angles to interpret art with perhaps alternate meanings. Speech act theory[231] gives us further insight into this by showing how utterances operate on different levels: locution, perlocution, and illocution. The locution is the word spoken, the illocution is the effect that it does, and the perlocution is the reason why it was said. So, for example, if you are standing on my foot on the subway, I can tell you factually, "You're on my foot." Although I am making a factual statement, my perlocution – the reason why I said that factual statement – is that I want you to stop standing on my foot. The utterance's illocution is not a simple indicative sentence but rather a demand or an ask, and the indeterminacy here is important. You could hear my statement as a demand to get off my foot, as a polite request, or just take it as a factual statement. My sentence is the same but can have several illocutions and several ways it can be interpreted. Similarly, in art, an artist's intention is one thing, but how it is read is another. I intend to invite you to consider Jesus's betrayal and its relationship to the Sacrament of the

[231] Austin articules speech act theory in *How to Do Things with Words* (1952). Even though this may seem particularly associated with language, rather than visual or performing arts, Austin claims that speech acts extend beyond words. That is, a speech act is any type of communication, which would include art. He says, "If there is to be communication at all, there must be a stock of symbols of some kind…and these can be called the "words," though of course they need not be anything very like what we should normally call words – they might be signal flags, etc" (1970, p. 55).

Eucharist. I interpret those two things as being about the relationship between duplicity and reconciliation, but that's not the only correct way to interpret my intention.

Even if we know the artist's intention, there is a difference between what the artist intends and their interpretation. The artist could be transparent and clearly intentional in their work, but that is distinct from their own understanding of the reason why they have that intention – their perlocution. Again, using an example from language, saying, "I am planning to go paint." is a statement of intention. If the painter says, "I think I paint just to not think about work for a while," it is an interpretation. While the painter's interpretation might be correct, it does not mean she completely understands herself and her intentions. She could be wrong about her interpretation, where she sees painting as a means to ease her burdens from the woes of late capitalism but fails to acknowledge that she's introverted and paints to avoid spending time with others. Translating this to art, an artist can interpret their own work, but it doesn't *necessarily* make it better or worse than someone else's interpretation. An artist certainly has privileged access to their intentions, but that does not mean their *interpretation* is the only correct one.

Interpretation and intention have a loose connection but are not equal. An artist's intention is just that, and it might help inform an interpretation, but it is not a guaranteed correct way to *interpret* the work. Jerrold Levinson claims, "We cannot make the meaning of the work with the artist's intention because we sometimes fail to do what we intend to do. And so we can't identify the two."[232] Instead, the goal of criticism is to *consider* the artist's intention and their interpretation when forming our own interpretations of a piece, but not to settle on either of those things as being equal to *the* correct interpretation. However, sometimes we can't know what an

[232] (Levinson, 1992)

artist intends or what they interpreted their own work to mean for a variety of reasons, and so in our search for correct interpretations, we can also turn to the artist's biography to see how their life influences their art.

If the artist's intention or their own interpretation isn't always right, then maybe the right way to read art is through looking at the artist's life, known as *biographical criticism*. In biographical criticism, we learn as much as possible about the artist and read the meaning of the work based on what was going on in the artist's life. An example of this can be found throughout the work of Artemisia.[233] She painted this rather dramatic and gory scene of Judith, a biblical heroine, decapitating the villain Holofernes.[234]

[233] Some prefer to refer to her by her full name Artemisia Gentileschi, but I wonder why we need to do that when all the Renaissance men are referred to only by their first names: Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, and so on.
[234] (Judith 13, NABRE) In this story, the Assyrian army is threatening the destruction of Israel, and so Judith goes the tent of the general Holofernes, who desires her. He gets drunk and then cuts off his head and returns safely to the Israelite camp thereby saving her people.

47 Artemisia. Judith Beheading Holofernes. 1620. Oil on canvas. 57.7 x 42.5 in. Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Her painting is brutally violent compared to those of her male contemporaries, such as Allori.[235]

[235] This painting is enhanced through biographical criticism where we learn that Allori's head of Holofernes is a self-portrait and Judith is represented as his lover, which makes for a fascinating interpretation of this story.

48 Allori, Cristofano. Judith with the Head of Holofernes. 1610-12. Oil on canvas. 54.7 x 45.7 in. Uffizi, Florence.

Artemisia was the first woman accepted into the painting academy in Florence. She was the daughter of another painter, Orazio, who worked with another man, Agostino Tassi. Tassi raped Artemisia, and her father brought him to court, but no justice was had for Artemisia. Her personal details seem to show through her painting, where Judith beheads Holofernes violently. Knowing Artemisia's biography aids us in interpreting the work as a desire to punish unjust and unvirtuous men, which is a correct interpretation. However, biographical criticism only helps us so far.

We can easily imagine that not all artists bring their life into their artwork. Of course, art from unknown artists cannot be helped by this mode of interpretation. Banksy is a counter-example in contemporary art, where his identity is unknown to the public, and he, as an artist, has no biography. And so, just going on biography, what could a correct interpretation of *Love is In the Bin* mean?

49 Banksy. Love is in the Bin. 2018. Soethby's, London.

Banksy does wild things, so knowing his contrarian persona could explain why he shredded his valuable artwork through a frame-shredder right after the work sold at auction. However, his biography is elusive, and he makes artworks not merely to express the goings-on in

his life but to do something different, such as comment on the culture writ large and, in this particular instance, on the absurdity of the contemporary art market. Biography can help us understand a work's meaning, but it is only *an* interpretation. We can quickly get stuck only looking at an artist's biography over other modes of interpretive exploration, where biographical criticism "degrades criticism to the level of personal gossip, and confuses art with exhibitionism."[236] The "proper aim" of criticism is not just to find what the artist intended nor their personal history but to "maximize enjoyable aesthetic experience" through investigating a wide range of possible, correct interpretations.[237]And so, the artist, audience, and critic can provide interpretations that weigh *multiple* variables. Because art moves into different contexts over time and across cultures, we can use our imagination to find meaning that otherwise might not have existed but still can be correct and speak to our present circumstances. These interpretations can help "expose those visions of life" that artworks contain.

Critical Pluralism

The fact that artworks "cannot be translated completely into another idiom" is because works are polysemous.[238] Works, like words, can mean multiple things at once. However, visual images, such as symbols, typically have a broader range of expression than words in a particular language. Although language, like symbols, cannot capture the fullness of ineffable reality, they can help us grasp it to some extent. The visual can extend our language. For example, our talk of God will always be limited because our *talk* is limited. Our language is sufficient for discussing observational, empirical reality but not so great at capturing more abstract concepts such as the supernatural. Simply because God is ineffable does not mean we can say *nothing* about God.

---

[236] (Collingwood, 1938, p. 316)
[237] (Davies S. , 2006)
[238] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, pp. 108-13)

Instead, we can use analogy to extend our language to get closer to the Truth. At the same time, those extensions will never be the fullness of Truth.[239] Art is a vehicle for our analogical language about God and other rational ideas mentioned earlier.[240] Our interpretations are limited, which means that, like with description, no interpretation will ever be totally summative of a work. And this variety of interpretations makes an artwork richer. When the aesthetic idea is *indeterminate* rather than factual, the artwork functions as an extension of language rather than a replacement.[241] For example, an ad for Coca-Cola in a museum is *determinate*. The aboutness of that aesthetic production is that it is designed to sell Coke and that it's about consumerism.[242] One would be hard-pressed to find any other meaning out of a Coke ad, such as some relation to "love, death, or envy."[243] However, Ai WeiWei's Coca-Cola vases do something different.

[239] See the differences between apophatic and cataphatic theological differences in religious language between Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas (Williams, 2010).
[240] (Kant I. , 1998)
[241] (Vaccarino Bremner, 2021)
[242] Kitsch and propaganda too contain determinate aesthetic ideas.
[243] Not impossible though!

50 Weiwei, Ai. Han Jar Overpainted with Coca-Cola Logo. 1995. Earthenware, Paint. 9.9 x 11 x 11 in. M+ Museum of Visual Culture, Hong Kong.

Weiwei comments on the distinct relationship between China and global Western consumerism. But what exactly might he be saying about this relationship? Based on the object alone, it is unclear whether he approves or disapproves of this historical phenomenon. Is this a celebration or a degradation of consumerism? Is it about caffeine addiction and an addiction to nostalgia? It's hard to say. By applying the imagination, Weiwei's artobject provides indeterminate aesthetic ideas because it can provide several conflicting interpretations, unlike kitsch.

This does not mean that any interpretation is a correct one. Certain interpretations are accurate, while others are not. It would be wrong to interpret *Schindler's List* as a comedy[244] or consider it a film about space travel. These would *at least* be wrong because no one else would agree with this person's judgment. Conversation in public discourse is an essential part of

[244] I will not get into the realm of categories of art (Walton, Categories of Art, 1970), but I will hypothesize here that interpretation might begin with a description of such a category, which informs the interpretation.

interpreting art. Vaccarino Bremner states, "Art that admits of connection to indeterminate ideas also persists in the thought and talk of its viewers."[245] If no one *sincerely* picks up an interpretation, it is incorrect.[246] Kant's "common sense"[247] stresses the importance of community in the experience of beauty. We gain access to aesthetic ideas – to experience the beautiful – by *talking* about art, not just through simple, introspective intuition. Our interpretation needs to be grasped by others for it to be valid, at least. And the critic begins the conversation.

The purpose of criticism is to foster appreciation through conversation and directing the imagination.[248] Interpretations invite us to see the object differently and speak to our lives and world more broadly. This does not mean the artist's intended meaning is discarded, but it is *part* of the equation rather than the final answer. In fact, we can learn a lot more about a work by searching for the artist's intended meaning. But this is also not the *only* interpretation that counts. There can be several correct interpretations because artworks generally are indeterminate, meaning there is a manifold of meaning. There is a non-combinable diversity of acceptable interpretations that could work,[249] and to limit something to one interpretation is an epistemic temptation to be avoided. However, we can't just ignore art history and come up with whatever interpretation we want, as mentioned above.[250] Instead, critical pluralism is about weighing all the factors that help us come to correct interpretations, which includes contextual reception, biographical criticism, the artist's intention, their own interpretation, and our imaginative creativity.[251] By closing the door on other factors for interpretation to enter discussion, talk about

---

[245] (Vaccarino Bremner, 2021, p. 543)
[246] Sincerely means that a group won't get together to agree on a joke such as that a tragedy is actually a comedy for the sake of proving this wrong.
[247] (Kant I. , 2000, §20-2, 39-42)
[248] (Lamarque, 2002; Davies S. , 2006)
[249] (Goldman, 1990; Thom, 2000)
[250] As Barthes does (Barthes, 1975)
[251] (Davies S. , 2006; Lamarque, 2002)

art ceases. Then, the work becomes Apollonian – an image to look at that no longer invites us into mystery. It becomes an object of cultural anthropology rather than an art object.[252] Instead, the critic invites the viewer to actively imagine – to recreate the artwork in the mind.[253] The critic is like a director of the audience's imagination. They give them the first line from which the audience member can say "yes, and" and begin to imagine themselves. And this starts the conversation.

Critical Conversation

Kant claims in his third *Critique* that judgments of beauty make a claim of "universal communicability." When one experiences beauty in an object, there is a deontological demand that everyone else also find that experience of beauty accessible through it.[254] In short, if I find something beautiful, then you should too. Based on Kant's theory, this does not mean that the object is *objectively* beautiful because beauty as a property is not Kant's understanding of beauty as discussed prior. Instead, Kant means that the critic or the audience member simply *desires* others to find an experience of beauty through that object as well. When we see something as beautiful, we want to share it with others. Thus, communities begin to form that experience beauty around particular artobjects because of a shared experience.

Some commentators have criticized Kant for making everything beautiful, although this is mistaken.[255] However, it is good that not everything *is* beautiful to everyone, and thankfully so, according to Nehamas.[256] If everything truly *was* beautiful, then there would be no diversity.

---

[252] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003)
[253] (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 128-9)
[254] (Kant I. , 2000, §6)
[255] (Guyer, 1997) Everything *can* be beautiful, but this does not mean our engagement with everything is an experience of beauty.
[256] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 83)

More significantly, art would reduce itself to the level of empiricism, where aesthetic ideas are as universally accessible as factual knowledge. Art would be reduced to science. If everything was beautiful, then beauty would cease to exist because facts by themselves do not necessarily carry meaning.[257] The idea of a universal aesthetic appreciation reified by the monolithic art museum that houses art from every corner of the world is an illusion. In our pluralistic world, these give way to special interest museums, like the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago or the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art in St. Louis. So smaller, non-universal communities form around "art of their own."[258]

Art speaks to particular audiences rather than a universal one. For example, not everyone finds the controversial work of Andres Serrano beautiful.[259] Some see *Piss Christ* as anti-religious, others non-religious, and others see it as a commentary on the sociology of religion.[260]

[257] Although facts can be made meaningful, but not on their own.
[258] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 184)
[259] In the conventional sense of the term.
[260] (Graham, Philosophy, Art, and Religion, 2017, p. 88)

51 Serrano, Andres. Immersion (Piss Christ). 1987. 59 x 39.4 in. Cibachrome print.

Without conversation, one cannot see what God might be saying through this piece. Several religious persons were pissed[261] at this piece to the extent that someone took a hammer to it, smashing the glass protecting it. It is easy to form our own singular interpretation and cling to it without being open to other ones. The protesters and several pious critics failed to notice how this piece could be religious. Serrano, himself a Christian artist, claimed, "If *Piss Christ* offends you, then I've succeeded – at least in getting you to feel what happened during the Crucifixion."[262] *Piss Christ* shows us what it meant that Jesus came to earth and died for our sins. It shows us what it was like for Him to endure that suffering. It shows the scandal of God becoming human. Someone perfect and clean entered into the world of our filth. It is a very religious piece akin to the disgust that Baroque artists attempted to recapture in their gory crucifixions in the aftermath of the Reformation. The Council of Trent claimed that abject art was needed to elicit sympathy for Christ from its viewers. In contrast, Renaissance art dismissed the vile parts of the Crucifixion to fixate the viewer's attention on Christ's divinity instead.[263] Through dialogue around art, we can help one another come to understand how something disgusting like *Piss Christ* can, in fact, provide an experience of the beautiful, despite its disgusting nature. It is a horrid thing that can be seen as internally beautiful and full of significant meaning. Conversation with others, especially those different than ourselves, can help us better see God in all things.

We can expand our experience of beauty when we enter into the artwork of others and try to experience beauty through the generation of aesthetic ideas, even though it may not be so immediate to us in our own particular perspective. This is where criticism can also be helpful.

---

[261] Ha!
[262] (Christie's, 2022)
[263] Noted in (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003)

Ultimately, through conversation, with the aid of critics, communities form around art, which continues to offer us experiences of beauty now and in the future. Through conversation around interpretations, the individual viewer can escape the "fat, relentless ego"[264] and begin to see the other through art.

Conversation is also necessary for art because it helps reify our experience. In the spiritual life, forms of conversation such as faith sharing and spiritual direction are all necessary because talking about spiritual matters helps make them more meaningful and real for us. Sharing our experiences makes the experience more concrete.[265] Conversation, too, holds a central place in our Jesuit "way of proceeding."[266] Conversations between the Church and the Society, between superiors and Jesuits, and between anyone and God are ways we grow in availability for mission within the Society. Most of Ignatius's ministry consisted of having conversations with others. A similar concept of conversation applies to engaging with artworks. Art requires conversation if it is to be spiritually significant. Critical pluralism allows such conversation to flourish around an artwork, leading to a sort of *love* for the artist, a culture, others, and, ultimately, the divine.

Against Interpretation?

Art and beauty lead us to love something, but some think interpretation gets in the way. Instead, interpretation bogs down our experience of the aesthetic with the verbal. Additionally, interpretations are used as weapons in an agenda-laden program to read everything in one's own schema. Because we can use our imagination to explore what a work *could* mean, these meanings could be liable to serve a particular audience's intentions, thereby coöpting the artwork

[264] (Murdoch, The Sovereignty of the Good, 2014, p. 51)
[265] (Ruffing, 2000, pp. 75-6)
[266] (Flowers, Forthcoming)

for some other end. Susan Sontag explores this issue in *Against Interpretation,* where she rightly condemns the ubiquity of using lenses in literary interpretation. A Marxist will view *Ulysses* from an economic point of view, a feminist will make it a work about feminism, and a Christian will make it about their own faith. In her view, all these interpretations overshadow the work and rob it of saying anything new. She sees this problem stemming from early Christian interpretative license, where Church Fathers would take total liberty in interpreting everything through a Christian lens, from the First Testament to Greek myths. She concludes that we need to discard interpretation and instead return to an "eroticism of art."[267] To love art, it must be aesthetic alone. That is, we need to move to a more formalist approach where we just let the art object speak to us without any need for interpretation. She calls for an art without beauty in the Kantian sense. As Nehamas says, "Beauty is less opposed to ugliness than to the nondescript."[268] An art without interpretation is not beautiful and, therefore, spiritually lacking.

However, this "eroticism" is quite impossible to attain because we are unable to look at an artwork without interpretation to some extent. As mentioned earlier, describing a work means thinly interpreting it. Sontag is right that we cannot succumb to the temptation to discard the artwork in favor of the idea, as Hegel suggests we do with art when it leads us to religion and philosophy.[269] The idea is incarnate in the artwork; other ideas are also "born and born again"[270] through art. Still, the audience and the artwork that births these aesthetic ideas through imagination produce an interpretation. Sontag does point out a real danger, which is that we can

[267] (Sontag, 1966, p. 13)
[268] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 42)
[269] (Hegel G. W., Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, 2007)
[270] (Hegel G. W., 1975, p. 2)

use artwork to advance our own manifestos. We could be ignorant of what an artwork might say if we discard other interpretations for our preferred ones.

Additionally, she is right to point out that we should go and see the work for ourselves without relying too heavily on interpreters to feed us what to think about the work before even engaging with it ourselves. How many protestors went to Serrano's exhibit and discussed the work before coming in with hammers? And so, she calls for an interpretative *humility,* perhaps, where we as an audience need to simply engage with the art as it is. But I would add that we must also resist the urge to block out other meanings it might communicate. We need to allow ourselves to see it. We will always apply our worldviews to it because these are the tools we have for interpretation. But like with bias, perhaps all we can do is be aware of our preferences and seek other interpretations to complement these. However, we cannot escape interpretation in art. Rejecting interpretation is impossible, and it denies the audience an experience of internal beauty, depriving us of finding meaning *for* life *from* art.

Ultimately, there are correct interpretations, but usually not just *one* correct interpretation. Many interpretations can exist alongside one another regarding the same work. They can be seen separately, yet we can appreciate the multiple ways we can see an artwork. *The Kiss of Judas* provides an apt metaphor for looking at interpretation on numerous levels. Ernst Gombrich discusses parallelism, where we can only see form or content one at a time.[271] He exemplifies this through this cartoon, where we can see either a duck *or* a rabbit at once. We switch back and forth between the two modes of seeing.

[271] (Gombrich E. H., 1969). Wollheim (1987) also has his theory of twofoldness which also works for this, but doesn't require this level of analysis here.

52 Kaninchen und Ente. Fliegende Blätter. 23 October 1892. Cartoon.

You can see either the duck or the rabbit, but not both simultaneously. In *Kiss of Judas*, you can see the chalice or the faces of Judas and Jesus in the negative space to the sides of the cup, but not both simultaneously. Similarly, with the Eucharist, one can see it as a piece of bread *or* as the Body and Blood of Christ. And then, when it comes to how Jesus's betrayal connects with the Eucharist, there can be a variety of interpretations of that, which I invite you to explore. You can only see one at a time yet acknowledge that the manifold exists despite our singular phenomenological experience.

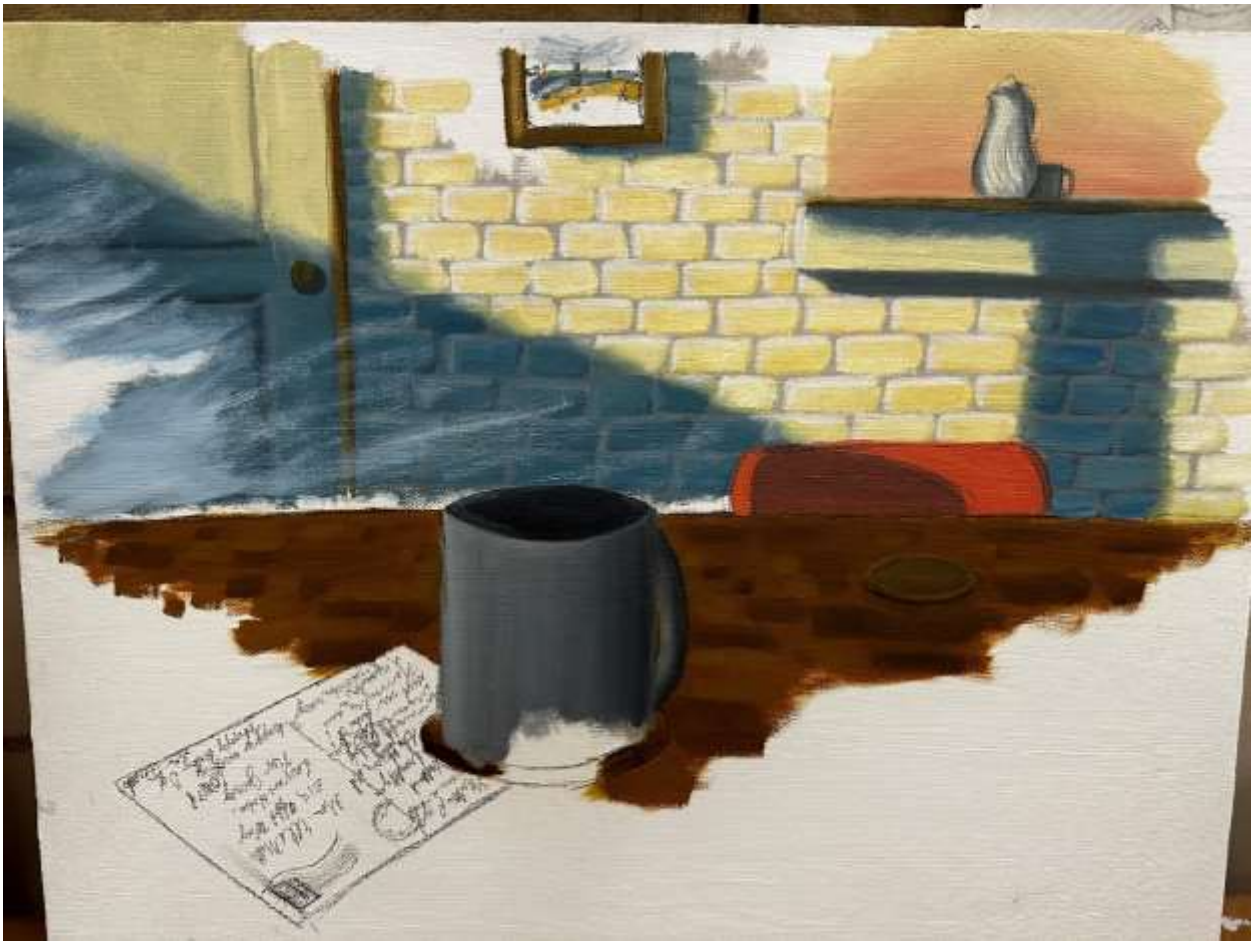
Similarly, with interpretation, we can imagine that an artist's intention is equivalent to just seeing the cup without seeing the faces. Yet, the faces are there. They are present in absence. The work can be seen in various ways, although they aren't seen at the same time. For the arts to

be meaningful spiritually, we must break free of the autonomy of the artist's intention as the only correct interpretation and instead allow others to exist alongside them. We can have a better experience of beauty when we allow others to give birth to different aesthetic ideas, and this comes about when there is conversation around art with the allowance of critical pluralism.

Kant says, "The beautiful prepares us to love something."[272] And it is through interpretation shared through conversation that an "eroticism of art" is fostered. But what does love have to do with art? Would that love ever bring us to the divine or merely keep our attention on the artwork and the artist? Don't most people merely *like* art instead? Isn't art just a pleasure of life? And isn't pleasure what beauty is really about anyways?

[272] (Kant I. , 2000, §29)

Frankie's World (Revelation 3:20)



53 Leeper, Nicholas. Frankie's World. 2023. 20 x 24 in. SLUMA, St. Louis, MO.

A coffee mug sits on a coaster with a postcard tucked underneath. An empty chair with a lonely coaster is at the other end of the table. The missing coffee cup is tucked away behind the coffee carafe, far away on the ledge in the kitchen. The painting's scene appears incomplete. It feels almost dreamlike, where the scene emerges from and into the whiteness of the bare canvas. The wall is illuminated by a morning sun that passes over a closed door and a painting in the top center.

Being a student in St. Louis has often brought to mind my Uncle Frankie. Frankie was a graduate student transplant from New Jersey, just like me. I don't personally remember him

because I never knew him. He died around the time I was born rather suddenly at a young age. The postcard on the table is one I found of his that he sent to my nana. But the real postcard he left my family was his painting, which hangs in this painting.

54 Milko, Frankie. Lawrence Harbor, NJ. 1970s(?). Watercolor on paper. Private collection.

Frankie grew up with my mom and aunt in a small house down the shore in Lawrence Harbor in the Garden State. He was a painter and made this scene of the shore around the corner from his home. For as long as I can remember, this painting has been in our house and continues to hang at my brother's. Although I've never met Frankie, I know him through this painting. In a sense, he was always around.

Anthony de Mello, SJ, talks about how God sends us many love letters.[273] These arrive as persons, events, imaginings, and so on. I imagine God's mail as postcards: a type of love letter in a sense – perhaps less sentimental, but still full of love for the receiver. And yet, it would be silly to fall in love with a piece of mail and forget the person who sent it. Art, then, is like such a love letter or postcard. It's something by which we can know and deepen our love for the sender. It reminds us of the person we don't have in the chair before us but who we long to be united with again. Art can connect us with the artist in an intimate way through its evocation of beauty within us. Yet art doesn't *just* connect us with the artist but also with God, the Divine Artist. Art leads us to love through beauty.

In the last chapter, I spoke about how conversation evokes love, and Kant believed that beauty prepares us to *love* something. Kant's thought echoes back to Diotima certainly, but also to one of the earliest poets, Sappho, who wrote, "Some say a marshaling of horsemen, others, soldiers on the march, and others still say that a fleet of ships is the most beautiful thing on the dark earth. I say it is what you love."[274] Love is a longing for the beautiful. Beauty is a desire to have that *experience* repeatedly and move us closer to God, the Form of Beauty.

Aesthetic Hedonism

Yet, in the modern period, beauty has often been discussed as *aesthetic* pleasure rather than love. One iteration of beauty is "By beautiful we generally understand whatever when seen, heard, or understood, delights, pleases, and ravishes us by causing within us agreeable sensation."[275] Bell has been a very influential voice in asserting the importance of aesthetic

[273] (de Mello, 2010, p. 7)
[274] (Sappho, Fragment 16)
[275] (Carritt, 1931, p. 60)

pleasure in art; he calls aesthetic emotion one of the most important things in the world.[276] Phrases like "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and the concept of subjective versus objective beauty derive from this sense that beauty is a pleasurable *liking* of something. Beauty has come to be reduced to a sentimentality, or what Kant would call an agreeable judgment.[277] An agreeable judgment is where one likes something based on one's tastes, like how one might like vanilla ice cream over chocolate. Vanilla doesn't mean anything. It is just nice. He contrasts an agreeable judgment with a beautiful one, which we explored more in-depth earlier. Ultimately, when it comes to agreeable judgments, Kant says no one cares about that.[278] Despite all this, some have read Kant to support a view of beauty primarily about aesthetic pleasure in what's known as a thin Formalism.[279] Although Kant certainly talks about pleasure in his theory of beauty –aesthetic pleasure is *contingent* on generating aesthetic ideas through the free play of the imagination and understanding. The core of beauty is not pleasure, but the meaning brought about through aesthetic ideas.

Beauty, far from Kant's theory, has become a meaningless word. Following a strand of empirical philosophy, the formalists sought to locate beauty in pleasure because it was observable and seemed common to most. However, it seems dubious that a Rococo painting, such as Watteau's *Embarkation for Cythera*, would objectively cause pleasure for a universal audience.

[276] (Bell, 1914, p. 37)
[277] (Kant, 2000, §3)
[278] (Kant, 2000, §7)
[279] (McMahon, The Classical Trinity and Kant's Aesthetic Formalism, 2010)

55 Watteau, Jean-Antoine. The Embarkation for Cythera. 1717. Oil on canvas. 65.6 x 90.7 in. Louvre, Paris.

Rococo art is known for its generally pleasing quality, and around the same time of its height, philosophers began to link beauty to pleasure. We can easily imagine that not everyone would experience pleasure looking at this painting at first glance or even after a long time. However, pleasure was the first move toward a more empirical sense of beauty before the 20th century.

In the contemporary artworld, there are more and more efforts to advance pleasure as the core of beauty through neuroaesthetics. Neuroaesthetics frames all of our engagement with the arts in terms of brain activity, usually divorced from context. And so, we can measure primarily what people prefer,[280] but nothing beyond that – at least yet. *America's Most Wanted* is an example of a data-driven attempt to maximize aesthetic pleasure.

[280] (Noë, 2011)

56 Komar & Melamid. America's Most Wanted. 1994. Photo by D. James Dee. Courtesy of the artists and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

The artists Komar and Melamid collected extensive data across the United States to see what Americans preferred in their art and then went ahead and made it. The idea is that data and preferences have replaced beauty in a modern sense. It is linked with what one likes rather than what is necessarily meaningful. And now, with artificially produced art, more and more art of this kind will emerge in the information age. But art of this kind is not bad, of course. It operates on a different level of beauty than the one made earlier, which is more about meaning than agreeable judgments. The problem with such a theory of beauty based on pleasure is that it is limited to preference and fails to consider what else could add to art's value.

Prior to the advent of neuroaesthetics, the logical positivists of the 20th century, non-objective terms, such as beauty and pleasure, were decried as meaningless. A.J. Ayer, one of the school's prominent voices, claims that words like "beautiful" are used "not to make statements of

fact, but simply to express certain feelings and evoke a certain response." Therefore, he continues, "There is no sense attributing objective validity to aesthetic judgments, and no possibility of arguing about questions of value in aesthetics."[281] Considering both of these more empirical developments in art, beauty is reduced to preference based on data or is utterly devoid of meaning. Yet, recalling the account I have stressed earlier, beauty includes aesthetic pleasure but is more adequately concerned with *love*.

Eros

As mentioned up to this point, beauty is a process of extracting meaning from artworks, which happens through the active use of the imagination and then is expressed in interpretations shared in conversation with others. It is this process that Kant says leads to love. And that happens through *attention*[282] given to an artwork in the imagination and conversation that helps foster such a love. Conversation and love have a close connection. Socrates claims, "The only thing I know is the art of love (ta erôtika)."[283] But a Greek pun here links the two – *eros* and *erotan* – which means to ask questions. Through conversation with an artwork in the imagination and then with others in conversation, we come to love not just the artwork itself but the artist, the world, and ultimately God, the Form of the Beautiful, as we ascend Diotima's ladder.[284] Discussion creates a hunger for wisdom, which comes about through beauty in presenting aesthetic ideas. After all, eros is the servant of Venus – the goddess of beauty. But this wisdom is not just a knowledge of the world, but also a personal knowledge – such as an interior knowledge St. Ignatius discusses in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Through art, we can gain personal knowledge of

---

[281] (Ayer, 1952, p. 113)
[282] I briefly make this allusion to Simone Weil's (1973) account of attention as a form of love, but I make this as a note for further reading, rather than giving a full analysis here. Instead, I want to focus on her Platonic sources here.
[283] (Plato, 2007, 177d8–9)
[284] (Plato, Symposium, 2007) mentioned in Ch. 2 here.

the artist and the divine, and that happens through the experience of beauty and conversation. Through art, we fall in love, which expands to a more profound love for the world, others, and God.

Eros, however, has the unfortunate equivocal connotation of being erotic in our sense of the term. It is primarily seen, as Scruton would put it, as an "opaque" love rather than a translucent one.[285] An opaque love is where we see a person as a body for our use. It is an objectification of the person for mere pleasure's sake. On the other hand, translucent love sees the beauty of a person embodied. We see the person through and with their body. The person is not objectified and not a means to some other end. "Wanting something for its beauty," Scruton claims, "is wanting *it*, not wanting to do something with it."[286] Love for art is about loving it, not doing something with it. It's not engaging with art like going to an amusement park. In a sense, art is personified. The object can now represent a person, and we love it not for its own sake but because it leads us to love a person. The example here would be my uncle's painting. It's a lovely little painting, sure, but it now represents my uncle, and loving it leads me to love him more. Eros is not about sex in the Platonic sense. Instead, it is about a particular love for something and someone that is generative universally.

We also do this with other artists, where we love specific artworks as symbols of the artist. People love *The Prodigal Son*, which Rembrandt made at the end of his life.

[285] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 48)
[286] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 19)

57 Rembrandt. Return of the Prodigal Son. 1663-5. Oil on canvas. 80.7 x 103.15 in. The Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

He made this without a commission and while near death in abject poverty as an expression of his longing to be reunited with God like the lost son. This work is a symbol of his life. And when we love the work, we come to love the person. The art object becomes personified. The Prodigal Son painting becomes an extension of him.

In the translucent type of love, we desire the individual who cannot be substituted for anyone else, yet who leads to an expansive love. We don't want any artwork but *that* one. The people we love are not substitutable, and artworks cannot be substituted for others to the same effect. And this is where hedonism – the idea that beauty is primarily aesthetic pleasure – goes awry. If pleasure were the essence of beauty, we could replace the pleasure we find in an artwork with an afternoon in the park or a trip to Vegas. The thing would be interchangeable with any other sort of quantitative experience so long as we quench our thirst for pleasure. But this does not explain why we long for *particular* people and artworks. Any other painting of the Jersey Shore would not mean as much to me as my uncle's. It is meaningful because of my uncle. But it also leads to a greater love for my home state. It wouldn't lead to love in the same way, just on pleasure alone. Yet, at the same time, this individual leads us to love others and God more universally, again echoing Diotima. Eros has a *possessive* quality, but it is not a sexual possession.

Eros is a deep love for a particular person or thing that expands our capacity to love. Eros is a *desire* to possess but in a specific way. It is not a possessing as in buying and purchasing, but instead, a vulnerability to allow that object of desire to change you. It's a possession where we allow something or someone into our lives to change our future. Possession is about something being a part of our lives. Nehamas states that "beauty is not unconnected to the love friends have

for each other."[287] We do not possess our friends like objects. Instead, we freely spend time with them, and our lives are changed by their friendship. In a sense, we own one another's *future* but not each other. The more I spend time with a friend, the more I impact my friend's future and vice versa. Friendship gives shape to ourselves, our desires, what we do, and how we spend time. Falling in love is one of the most practical things because it affects everything from why we get up in the morning to what we read.[288] That is, love impacts *how* we lead our lives. It makes a life, like how a sculptor creates a sculpture. A sculptor works *with* the material to create something. When working with wood, say the wood has knots and kinks that the sculpture needs to work with to make something. The sculptor is not fully autonomous in applying their plan onto the material. It is a conversation where the artist and the medium impact one another, and an artwork is made through the synthesis of this dance.

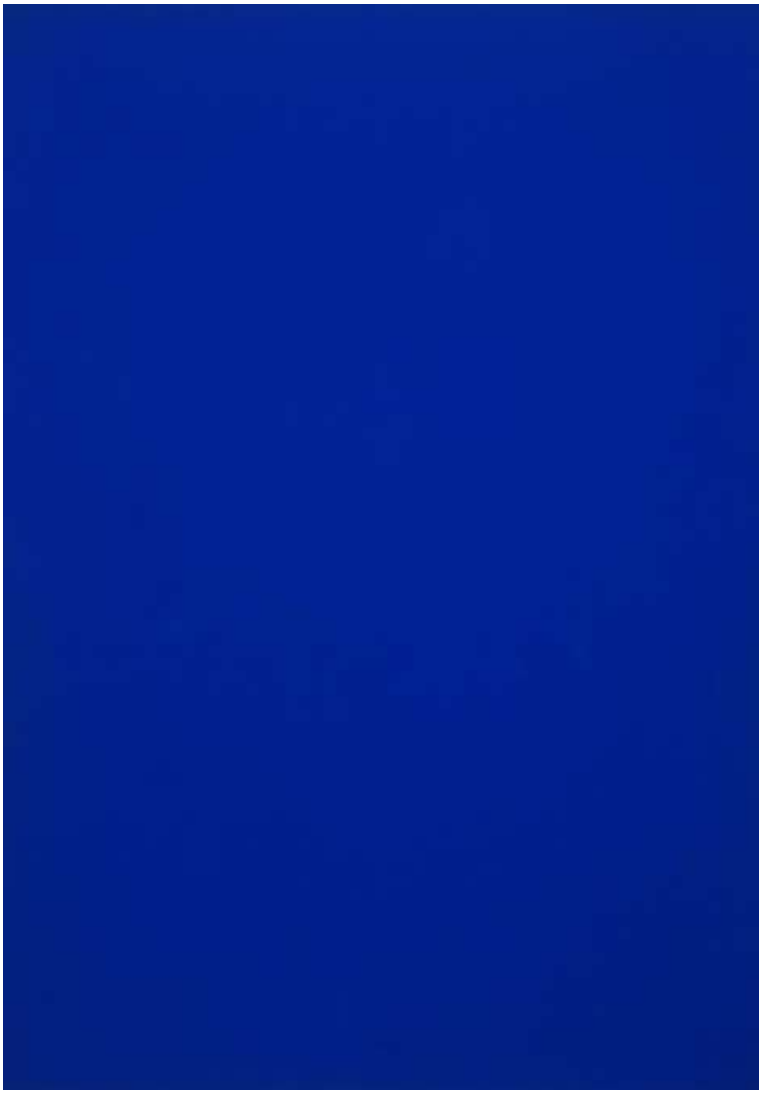
In my own artistic journey, I used to only love the artworks of Renaissance Europe, and I despised all modern art. However, by paying attention to some of the work of Yves Klein, for example, I came to actually fall in love with his work and him as an artist.

[287] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 58)
[288] (Whelan, 2009) Often misattributed to Fr. General Pedro Arrupe, SJ.

58 Klein, Yves. Ex-voto dedicated to Santa Rita of Cascia. 1961. Dry pigment, gold leaves, gold bars and manuscript in a plexiglas box. 5.5 x 8.25 x 1.25 in. ADAGP, Paris.

As a Catholic contemporary and ecstatic artist, Klein made his work to express God's beauty.[289] He asked St. Rita, a patron of impossible causes, to protect his art so that it would be for God's glory. He made this as an offering of thanksgiving for her prayers. His large monochromes were also very spiritual pieces, where his primary colors were derived from the icon's palette.

[289] The prayer in the Ex-voto reads in part "May all that emerges from me be beautiful" (Schjeldahl, True Blue, 2010).



59 Klein, Yves. Blue Monochrome. 1961. Dry pigment in polyvinyl acetate on cotton over plywood. 76.875 x 55.125 in. MoMA, NYC.

Furthermore, these colors were imbued with a profound spiritual quality, which he believed through their contemplation would lead one to God – up Diotima's ladder, in my view. And yet, he died young, too, in his early thirties. He could have given us much more for us to contemplate and see – to bring beauty to the world. And I see his life as my uncle's – cut short, yet he was still able to make some beautiful things with the time he had. Through my discovery of him, I have found more and more works by him that have grown my love for him, his work, and the art

of his period. My love for Klein, contemporary art, and God grew through *eros* – this possession –and it changed me.

Love, then, is ultimately the *desire* to possess the beautiful, which means that we are always looking for more and more experiences of beauty. We are looking for that experience in life, but this means that we lack it to some extent. The Greeks understood love to be the daughter of poverty and resource. We have experiences of beauty, but by having them, we also desire more – we lack them. Beauty and love are marked by desire.[290]

Desire

Beauty prompts the desire to possess. It gives us something in the way of wisdom, making us yearn to learn more about the beautiful thing and all that surrounds it. But desire is linked to eros, not in the sense of satisfying a sexual craving. It is a longing for the beautiful, this experience, which increases through experiencing it. It's like hunger that is satisfied when eating, but we also become hungrier at the same time. Sexual desire between persons is something that does not bring ultimate fulfillment, although it quenches a longing briefly. Sex is a gift, and it is good, but it is not the terminus of a relationship but an expression of a more perfect union that we long for in a spiritual sense. It could be pleasurable, but it becomes less good when we use others for the pleasure it provides. Desire, in its connection with the beautiful, is a perpetual state of poverty where, through our longing, we grow in love and desire for other things, such as God and others. In Plato's view, desire that finds itself in the beautiful leads to a deepening of desire. We can only continue to contemplate the beautiful but never complete it. As Da Vinci is attributed to saying about art: it is never complete but only abandoned. With our experience of beauty with art – that process is never finished, but we might only give up on it. However, we do

[290] (Nehamas, 2007, pp. 53-5)

not need to give up on it, yet this often happens in this world. Our whole lives can be contemplative in that we constantly find beauty over and over again without abandoning it, despite how painful it is to continually lack it. And for Plato, it is the constant contemplation of beauty that makes life truly worth living.[291]

Plato sees this growing, deepening desire as a positive thing because that desire leads one to the Form of the Beautiful – or God for Christian purposes. Conversely, a German idealist philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, sees desire as a negative thing instead. He understands desire as the noumenon – "Will" – that underlies all phenomena or the "world as representation."[292] All things that are empirical, such as rocks, plants, animals, and humans, have objective qualities and an underlying desire. Humans manifest the highest form of Will in our desires, but these desires are the sources of our suffering.[293] For Schopenhauer, desire is a bad thing because it causes suffering. He is a pessimist and believes there is no escape from this suffering in life. He compares our turmoil in desire to the myth of Ixion, where Ixion lusts for Zeus's wife, Hera. When Zeus discovers Ixion's desire for his wife, he punishes him by affixing him to a burning wheel that soars across the cosmos for all eternity, and he suffers indefinitely. Schopenhauer sees our state similarly, where humankind is punished by its desire and forever plagued by it because it is never satiated, like the fires of the wheel or Ixion's passion for Hera. Desire, for him, is like Tantalus's fruit – forever out of reach.[294]

---

[291] (Plato, 2007, 211d)
[292] (Schopenhauer, 1966)
[293] Plants have the desire to grow, animals to mate and survive, and gravity to pull.
[294] Tantalus was punished by the gods and made to stand in a body of water beneath a fruit tree. The water would always recede when he went to reach for fruit making the fruit forever out of reach making it impossible for him to eat.

Schopenhauer sees two ways to alleviate this endless suffering that comes from desire. The first is to be like the ascetic who denies their Will to life – their desires – through religious discipline. The second is to be like the "aesthetic genius" who transcends the Will through pure aesthetic contemplation of the beautiful. In this contemplation, the person reflects on the veiled Platonic Forms that save him from the fires of desire for a short time, and that is the best one can hope for. In the story of Ixion, the only thing that stops his wheel from spinning is when Orpheus plays his mythic lyre. Orpheus, whom some Church Fathers have identified as a type of Christ in mythology, is the model to save us from suffering.[295] Orpheus is a symbol of both art and Christianity then. Through religion and art, one can transcend this desire and save us from it. It is through the experience of the beautiful that suffering can be alleviated rather than expanded.

Plato's optimistic view of desire leads one to a love for higher things. Schopenhauer has a rather gloomy view but offers some pain relief medicine for our condition. Regardless of who is right, both believe that beauty, as I have described it thus far, is how we can deal with our desires. For Plato, we desire more and more through beauty until we reach the Forms. For Schopenhauer, desire is temporarily satisfied through the process of beauty, where we reflect on the forms, or what Kant would call aesthetic ideas. For Plato and Kant, everything we love and desire is always a step beyond our understanding. As Nehamas suggests, to call something beautiful is not a conclusion but an invitation to engage and love more.[296] It is the start of deepening desire. The art we love is something we do not fully understand.

The desire to learn about it, as we learn about those we love, ultimately impels us to love beyond the particular artwork and outward toward the world, others, and God. As Nehamas

---

[295] (Friedman, 2000)
[296] (Nehamas, 2007, pp. 75-8)

states, "Beauty [is] the emblem of what we lack."[297] When we experience beauty, we recognize that we lack it and pursue it more. Beauty in art leads to a movement. Alejandro García-Rivera, a contemporary theologian, claims that we must move beyond Baumgarten's theory of aesthetics – a science of sensory cognition – and instead replace it with an aesthetics that moves the human heart.[298] And one that moves to action in the world. Pleasure in art is not evil in any sense, but it comes short when producing a fulfilling, purposeful human life. Art, through beauty, has a tremendous potential to restore purpose in our lives. What is needed is an art that leads to love through beauty.

Once we experience beauty that leads to love and desire, we are prompted to do something with that. Plato recognized that the ignorant want to remain in place, whereas the wise search for beauty in the world to lead a good life. They search for ascent despite the pain it has. Because love involves desire, it is inherently not always pleasurable. In fact, it might mainly consist of pain, but it is worth it because it brings fulfillment to our lives. Beauty is a sort of sacrifice that makes for a more meaningful life. Scruton says, "Sacrifice is the core of virtue, the origin of meaning and the true theme of high art."[299] When one leads one's life in sacrifice for something good and worthwhile, that is the mark of a beautiful life because it has meaning – and one that is inherently good.[300] And so art and beauty are not mainly about pleasure but more about love, which sometimes lacks pleasure but is ultimately joyful. It might be painful because of the lack, but it is a joy because it is for the sake of something meaningful.

---

[297] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 77)
[298] (García-Rivera, 1999, pp. 9-12)
[299] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 193)
[300] There is a question of art and ethics, but I unfortunately cannot get into that issue in this paper, but assume that the meaning one finds in art is a good of some type, but expressed in degrees.

Although desire is a lack, which is painful, the remedy to motivate action is through desire. Sartwell claims, "We must start desiring again or relinquish the world."[301] Beauty prompts desire, leading us to greater wisdom, love, and virtue. According to Diotima,[302] the poet[303] gains wisdom from experiencing beauty and other virtues. But the desire for beauty ultimately produces a beautiful object. Beauty impels creativity. Art is an attempt at giving form to the Form of beauty itself. When we participate in the creative process, we reify our experience of the beautiful and move closer to the divine through an elevated Dionysian sense of participation in the process of beauty. Through creating, we sacrifice, where we give our time – our lives – to make something, and art becomes beautiful because of that sacrifice.

Although my uncle's life was short, his painting mirrors his life in this way where it has an incomplete feel. Overall, Mine, too, mimics that effect to honor his life. *Frankie's World* is about a longing to be reunited with him, like how one might wait for someone to join them for coffee at the kitchen table. It's about a desire to be reunited with him one day. It's also a religious painting in that we wait for Christ to knock on that door and come and sit with us.[304] And the coffee mugs, too, echo this, where the cup on the table is distant from its source: the carafe on the counter. It's about longing, like how art causes a similar longing and love. My painting is in response to his painting and my love for my uncle, whom I have never met yet *know* and love least of all through his art. And that's the point of art – to fall in love and live one's life forward in sacrifice for a higher meaning. The point of life is not to *like* art for art's sake, as nice as that may be. As de Mello says, "The secret of human life is not falling in love with illusion" – it is

---

[301] (Sartwell, 2004, p. 65)
[302] (Plato, 2007, 209a)
[303] Or in our case the artist generally.
[304] "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20 NABRE)

not falling in love and remaining with the postcards of our lives. Instead, “the ultimate meaning of human life is to get in touch with the Absolute, to discover the Absolute, to achieve fusion, union with the Absolute.”[305] Art leads to love beyond itself, and it is something that makes us love more. Yet, how do we respond? Perhaps in writing back. Creativity, possibly, is the only appropriate response to love.

[305] (de Mello, 2010, p. 7)

Creativity

Creativity is a proper response when we love something or someone. For example, young couples might write poetry or sing songs for their beloved when they fall in love. When we engage with the arts and love an artwork or an artist, we respond to it by creating. Warhol, the anonymous medieval artisans, Botticelli, Raphael, Malevich, the iconographers, Uncle Frankie, and Yves Klein have all left a mark on me. My response was painting and sculpting.

Furthermore, when we know we are loved, we respond in kind. Socrates believed that when poets are divinely inspired and *possessed* by the gods, that's when they sing their poems.[306] Here, the gods – or for us Christians, God –possess us in eros, a love particularly for us. That love changes us. In a Christian sense, our being loved by God and loving God also produces something creative that affects the future of our relationship. Creativity is birthed by love.

We desire to create because creativity – as a response to love in either direction – is how we flourish. Diotima claims that a good life consists of possessing the good and desiring to possess it forever.[307] According to her, we possess the good forever by giving birth in beauty."[308] We are all pregnant in this sense, and we can give birth in beauty in two ways: through giving birth to children biologically or by giving birth in virtue, which leads the soul up her ladder toward the Form of the Beautiful. The latter happens by making "beautiful accounts" or, in other words, art. A life spent in beauty gives birth to beauty of its own. One becomes pregnant by loving something beautiful first and then responds by creating something beautiful. When we actively engage in beauty, we create beauty ourselves through an act of creativity, which can

[306] (Plato, Ion, 2013)
[307] (Plato, Symposium, 2007, 205d1–206a12)
[308] (Plato, Symposium, 2007, 206b7–8, e5)

happen through art, although not exclusively. For Plato, the contemplation of beauty is "a whole mode of life that combines creative thought and considered action and transforms the desire to possess beautiful things into the urge to create in their presence beauty of one's own."[309] And it is only through this process that Plato believes human life is worth living.[310] We create to have a good life for ourselves, but we can also create for others and their benefit.

Our creative activity is not just for our ultimate good but also for the good of others. Collingwood claims that the artist "undertakes his artistic labour not as a personal effort on his own private behalf, but as a public labour on behalf of the community to which he belongs."[311] The artist's work is for the benefit of others so that everyone can come to self-knowledge through art. For Collingwood, art is a medicine for what he terms "the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness."[312] Corruption of consciousness is how we think and feel without proper self-awareness. It manifests itself in unreflective prejudice, bias, bigotry, and self-hatred. Art, however, helps a community transcend these unconscious or subconscious tendencies and bring them to the level of consciousness so that they may be healed through clarification. Art can be more powerful when made for particular communities than hypothetical universal ones.[313]

Today's art museums and galleries do not necessarily bring clarity to communities through art. Instead, they are either anthropological or about art appreciation for its own sake.[314] The former model treats art as cultural artifacts and only seeks to explain its significance in the

---

[309] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 132)
[310] (Nehamas, 2007, p. 137)
[311] (Collingwood, 1938, pp. 314-5)
[312] (Collingwood, 1938, p. 336)
[313] I thank Daniel Flores, SJ for introducing me to the idea of community based art.
[314] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003)

context of its historical period. Artworks remain as historical artifacts. The latter aims to only give a formalist rundown of the work, which does not facilitate beauty and extract meaning for contemporary audiences. In this view, art is about aesthetic pleasure rather than a search for meaning. Neither of these models does the healing work that might be called for in the 21st century, where people are increasingly lonely, lost, and feel a greater sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness.[315] Additionally, our communities are increasingly polarized, villainizing others outside that community. We need an art now that *does* something besides exist for historical curiosity or aesthetic pleasure. We need an art that can help individuals search for and find meaning in their lives and that can bring communities together through greater self-consciousness. Creativity, then, is not just for the good of the individual but can also be good for the community in which she resides. Beauty is a virtuous cycle and only needs more artists to create more and more.

Genius

But what if there are not enough artists to do this task? Who are the people who can do this work to create beautiful things? In a conventional view, artistic geniuses only come once in a lifetime. So it seems rather pessimistic to believe that "beauty will save the world"[316] when there are so few *good* artists to do so. For Kant, the artistic genius was the only one who could provide this experience of beauty through art. Genius, for him, is the "faculty for the presentation of aesthetic ideas."[317] Unfortunately, genius is something that cannot be taught to him. It requires creative imagination.[318] It would be akin to something supernaturally endowed, like Socrates's

[315] A recent report notes that nearly 3 in 5 young adults (58%) report that they lack purpose or meaning in life (Making Caring Common, 2023).
[316] (Dostoevsky, 1981, p. 370)
[317] (Kant, 2000, §49)
[318] (Kant, 2000, §47, 49)

idea of the poet's divine inspiration.[319] Kant, however, believes that natural genius requires an aesthetic education to nurture that capacity. Art is not about following rules, such as assembling furniture from IKEA. It requires this mystique that only the genius can have. Here, Kant echoes Aristotle, who believed that poetic composition belongs "to a naturally gifted" person.[320] For Aristotle, this "genius" was "something that cannot be [learned] from someone else, but is a sign of natural talent."[321] If this is the case, then it seems that only a few gifted people have hope for a good life in Diotima's sense. Suppose creativity in response to love and beauty would make a good life. In that case, only a select few, like Monet and Matisse, are blessed enough to have it if we take Kant and Aristotle seriously. Why would God only endow a select few *from birth* with the opportunity for a good life and abandon the rest? This doesn't seem right.

There is hope, but it requires breaking this commonplace assumption that talent for creating beautiful things is innate. Vasari, among others, mythologized the artist's life to such an extent that today, we hold that geniuses are only those few who break the barriers and create true beauty. Vasari's illustration of Michelangelo as a sort of godsend has been damaging. We have continued to do the same recently, with the likes of Picasso and van Gogh. Artistic genius is a concept that binds people in unfreedom from living a full, creative life. How many people do not engage in artistic practice because they think they are less than or not good enough? How many people resign themselves to watching others create instead of doing it themselves? Consider the work of Grandma Moses, who started painting at seventy-eight. Or think about Matisse, who found new avenues to create when he became too ill to paint. A creative life is available to *all*, but it requires a change of mindset about who can bear the title "artist."

---

[319] (Plato, Ion, 2013)
[320] (Aristotle, 1996, (17, 1455a32–33))
[321] (Aristotle, 1996, (22, 1459a4–6))

I argue that artistic genius can be taught because genius is about *ideas* – not intuition. For Hegel, art, like philosophy and religion, connects us with *Geist* – the Spirit of the age – which contains all knowledge, which is forever in flux.[322] The human being starts off alienated from this *Geist*, but it is through education that the individual connects with the spirit and can participate within it. Integration happens through language learning, engaging with the arts, and studying history and other subjects. The person moves from concerns of the subjective spirit, such as one's own thoughts and emotional states, to that of Absolute Spirit, where they can know more universal qualities of being human. For Hegel, art is a manifestation of Absolute Spirit. Presenting aesthetic ideas then is *not* natural. One is not born already connected to the *Geist*. Instead, one connects with this spirit by studying other subjects. Becoming a genius in the Kantian sense requires being knowledgeable about *ideas*. It is not something innate. Edward Clapp, author of *Participatory Creativity,* claims that ideas are creative – not people. [323] Therefore, we can form geniuses in the classroom by introducing students to ideas.

Renaissance artists – some of the most "genius" artists in art history were known for their broad array of study beyond artmaking. The term "Renaissance man" indicates this phenomenon. What makes an artist creative is their grasp of knowledge outside of the studio. The basis of creativity, then, lies in an understanding of other subjects. In Hegel's view, theology, philosophy, and art history would be the top three that would inform an artist most because these belong to the self-reflective realm of Absolute Spirit.[324] According to Danto, art education must transcend

---

[322] (Hegel G. W., Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, 2007)

[323] (Clapp, 2016) Furthermore, Clapp challenges the idea of the artistic genius by noting communities create not individuals alone. Famous artists are assisted in their work by the ideas of others, along with their efforts. Creative genius is never a solo act and there are many people behind the scenes who make creation possible.

[324] This is not to say that the other subjects lack such depth or potential, but if we had to choose some subjects, I would say that a good starting point would be these three. In addition to art history, the study of literature, or theatre or others arts would also be appropriate.

its introspective nature, which is an art education for art's sake, where the artist only cares about art and form and nothing beyond those things. It also must be more than teaching skills, such as how to paint and sculpt. To produce an experience of beauty requires the other moments of Absolute Spirit – theology and philosophy. Danto concludes, "What we all thirst for is meaning," and it is through the combination of art, religion, and philosophy that it can be found.[325] My only caveat with Danto's sentiment is that he thinks philosophy and religion can no longer afford meaning in a pluralistic world.[326] Religion and philosophy can still provide such a meaning, but according to Hegel, art must first inform them. However, the problem has been that Christianity and philosophy have discarded art in favor of a purely discursive program. Christianity has been kitschified,[327] and philosophy has retreated to the world of metaphysics or empiricism – where both fail to actually talk about *value* – what makes life worth living.[328] Both can provide meaning and value, but artistic beauty can help salvage these vehicles and restore purpose to our lives.

What students need to make meaningful art – to be geniuses – is a source of meaning outside of art. And as Graham argues, art cannot replace religion because, ultimately, religion has the ethos that art can reveal.[329] Ultimately, genius is a universal potential available to all, and it can be enhanced by teaching theology and philosophy – at least – in conversation with the arts. If

---

[325] (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 188)
[326] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003, p. 137) Here he mentions a rather depressing episode where a suicidal friend asked for some philosophical guidance to which Danto could not direct him to anything at all. He sees philosophy has lost its way in providing meaning and instead removes itself to the world of metaphysics alienated from the concerns of everyday life.
[327] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 189)
[328] See J. Habermas and how postmetaphysical philosophy no longer can discuss ethics. As a result he claims, "Thus philosophy must pin its hopes on art. Only in aesthetic experience, freed from the spell of anthropocentric thinking, do we encounter something objective capable of awakening our sense for the good" (Habermas, Justification and Application, 1993, p. 74). Additionally, philosophy can translate religious values to the secular sphere via the translation proviso (Habermas, Between Naturalism and Religion, 2008, pp. 131-2).
[329] (Graham, The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion, 2010, p. 186)

genius is widely accessible on this view through a more holistic education, then everyone not only can be an artist, but everyone is one. Joseph Beuys claims that everyone *is* an artist because creation is at the heart of the human experience.[330] Everyone can fall in love and create in response. No threshold of knowledge needs to be attained before one can present aesthetic ideas, although this can be enhanced through education. Even children can create art with some meaning – presenting *some* aesthetic idea.

While in St. Louis, I taught an afterschool elementary and middle school art program at Presentation Art Center.[331] I teach about some famous artists typically, and then we delve into a project together. Some students are more determined to make something, and I will give them the freedom to do so. One middle school student, let's call him Mike, has always wanted to make these clay dinosaurs. He would make one, and then once dry, he would be too rough with it, or if he wasn't careful in assembling it, it would fall apart. He would like to smash them sometimes. Mike would throw it out and then get started on another one. One day, this student was joking with some others saying that his dad never came back with the milk,[332] implying that his dad left his family. He then said that he was serious – that his dad never returned, and now he lives with his mom. Being concerned, I took him aside and asked if he wanted to speak about it, and he became outraged and started swearing at me. We then had a conversation about his language. After he apologized, I said he didn't have to share about his dad, but I only invited him to if he wanted to do so. He started to cry, and I sat with him, but he never shared about his dad. I offered that he could continue working on his dinosaur in another room as he didn't want to return to the

[330] Mentioned in (Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History, 1997, p. 125)
[331] An impressive institution that needs to expand and scale rapidly across the nation in parishes everywhere. Presentation Arts Center started out of a parish, Our Lady of the Presentation Parish in Overland, MO by the wonderful Sister Brenda Fritz, D.C. whose mission is to make the arts accessible to all.
[332] A horrible joke about absent fathers spreading on the internet nowadays.

classroom with the other students. I brought him his project, and he began working. I went to check back in with the other students.

When I came back, there was no more dinosaur. Instead, Mike made this flower growing out of a rock, surrounded by what appeared to be a body of water. I asked him about his new project, and he told me that the flower grows out of this rock surrounded by salt water. Unlike other flowers, it grows with salt water and doesn't need soil. And it is on this island – alone in the middle of the ocean – yet flourishing. It was then time to go. He then crunched up his creation before I could stop him, put it back in the clay bag, and went outside to get picked up.

I wish I could say that Mike became my best student after this experience. I also wish he hadn't destroyed this incredibly beautiful flower that he had made, which reflects his own life. This young man, abandoned by his father, sees himself as this flower blossoming while fed on salt water, deserted and with shallow roots. Surrounded by an ocean of loneliness, he still sees himself as having the potential to thrive. Mike has a shallow knowledge of art history and philosophy, and he has made it clear to me that he doesn't believe in God and hates church. Yet, he produced this powerful aesthetic idea through his artwork that speaks to what it means to be abandoned and how one can grow from pain and neglect. Anyone who has been cast aside, rejected, left behind, or even ghosted can resonate and learn something from what Mike created. I have a handful of other stories where children can generate aesthetic ideas – make something beautiful – even if they are unaware of what they are doing. If even children can generate aesthetic ideas, then genius seems to be a universal human trait and not one reserved for the demigods that Kant and Aristotle give too much credit to.

At a basic level, being human means being an artist because being human means being creative. Being creative is a basic instinct we have in response to love. If we are made in the

image of God the Creator, then one of our fundamental attributes is creativity. As Nicholas Berdyaev, a Ukrainian philosopher, states, "Creativity stands in no need of justification from the religious or any other point of view; it is its own justification in virtue of the very existence of man; it is that which constitutes man's relation and response to God."[333] Berdyaev also claims, "It is imperative to bear in mind that human creativity is not a claim or a right on the part of man, but God's claim on and call to man. God awaits man's creative act, which is the response to the creative act of God."[334] Creativity belongs to *everyone* who can create something beautiful in the Kantian sense. It is our response to being created and loved in the first place by God. This response cannot be limited to a few, as if they were born as more-than-human. Everyone is an artist – and that thought is beautiful because it means we are all *free* to pursue a good life where we can imitate the Divine Artist.

Aesthetic Education

But if everyone is an artist, then why teach art? Why would we need an aesthetic education at all? Ancient civilizations worldwide created art long before aesthetic education was even a concept, so why teach when it appears so natural? Children also speak languages as early as two years old. Yet, we still find it necessary to teach them language in school. We teach them language so that they can express themselves to a greater degree. The same happens with creativity. Aesthetic education is meant to empower young people to exercise their creative powers in a way that deepens their own capacity to create beautiful things and thereby have a more meaningful life.

[333] (Berdyaev, 1951, Ch. 8)
[334] (Berdyaev, 1951, Ch. 8)

However, we are in a state where art education is not valued. It is typically the first thing to go when budget cuts are proposed. Arts are often considered subjective luxuries that are superfluous to a 21st century education.[335] When we misunderstand what art and beauty are, then there is no wonder why the arts are not valued. In conventional understanding, art is just pretty pictures that deal with the world of personal self-indulgence regarding the cathartic emulsion of emotions, which remains – at best – an alternative form of psychological therapy. Art is just an optional hobby for a few. In Hegel's view, it remains at the level of subjective spirit,[336] which consists of a self-consciousness isolated from societal considerations and doesn't reach art's true nature as a moment in Absolute Spirit.

Furthermore, if people aren't going to become professional artists and instead become accountants and lawyers, then why teach art at all? Art and beauty are essential for knowledge and a good life, requiring us to rethink these concepts. Aesthetic education with the "love of beauty as its goal" calls for a revival today.[337] According to Scruton, "aesthetic education matters more today than at any previous period in history."[338] I agree, but a critic might question why this is valuable today.

Aesthetic education is crucial today because artistic beauty gives meaning to our individual and collective lives. Friedrich Schiller, a German Idealist philosopher, proposes that aesthetic education is vital because it creates a harmonious society. He wrote his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*[339] in the aftermath of the French Revolution, where he claims such a

---

[335] For more information, see (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011) and other resources by the National Endowment for the Arts.
[336] (Hegel G. W., Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, 2007)
[337] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 187)
[338] (Scruton, Beauty, 2009, p. 188)
[339] (Schiller, 1965)

revolution was inevitable because the aristocracy of France failed to educate the masses in aesthetics. The aristocracy kept the arts for themselves in their palaces and châteaux while depriving the public of beauty that denigrated their tastes and morals. For Schiller, people acted morally only after engagement with the beautiful. And so the fact that the Third Estate used the guillotine so ruthlessly was a result of a moral deficiency rooted in an aesthetic one. Translating his argument to the present, arts education makes people ethically better, and this might help transcend some of the intractable problems of the day, namely post-truth, polarization, and populism.[340]

Schiller, too, believed that art had other value besides preventing revolution. Art was a means to create joy in individuals and society. It was also a way to facilitate the love of God. Art bridges the spiritual realm and builds good character and community. Art was also a means to set humankind free to be good. Conversely, Plato believed that mimesis generally produced a morally wicked populace.[341] Others, like G.E. Moore, an analytic philosopher, see that that which is good must also be beautiful.[342]And Kant sees the beautiful as a "symbol of morality."[343] Generally, art doesn't make people *act* virtuously but helps inform value. It molds one's imagination. In Hegel's terms, art doesn't make bad people good via *Moralität* or their moral behavior. Instead, art informs *Sittlichkeit* – or one's ethical values.[344] It is through beauty that a person's values change. Their condition altars through beautiful experiences. It is through the presentation of aesthetic ideas that an ethic is informed, and these are refined in conversation

[340] (Naím, 2022)
[341] (Plato, The Republic, 1992, 602c–608b)
[342] (Moore, 1993, pp. 135-6)
[343] (Kant, 2000, §59)
[344] (Hegel G. W., Phenomenology of Spirit, 2017; Hegel G. W., Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3, 2011, p. 407)

with others. Ultimately, it is through art and beauty for Schiller that brings meaning – or value – to our lives, where without it, we devolve into violent chaos.

In the age of mechanical and digital reproduction and the emerging world of artificial aesthetic production, Apollonian art gains more dominance. Less people create, and more people consume. Creativity is handed off from human beings to synthetic technology. Aesthetic education is then urgent to reinforce the importance of creation because it is that action that gives meaning to our lives and the lives of others and connects us with the divine. Creativity helps us retain our humanity. Yet, the creativity to teach needs to be about how to teach people to generate meaning in art. We can teach students how to make non-beautiful art, such as kitsch or commercial, but only beauty is valuable. Unlike other aesthetic qualities, beauty is the only value in art that "defines what a fully human life means."[345] What this requires, then, is that students not only learn about theology and philosophy and how to appreciate art but also how to create it by synthesizing these elements.

An aesthetic education must be participatory – Dionysian – and not kept in the realm of passive appreciation – or the Apollonian. Plato and Aristotle both believed that art was valuable in the education of young people. Plato thought that all Mangnesia's children and adult citizens must continue singing and dancing to bolster their virtue.[346] Plato, then, would agree with Schiller and Hegel that art informs value, which is at least one reason why art is essential. Participating in aesthetic activity makes for a better city. Aristotle conversely thought that adults should eventually cease doing such creative acts and instead should hire professionals so that they can *appreciate* the music rather than create it.[347] With his thoughts on "genius," Aristotle

[345] (Danto, The Abuse of Beauty, 2003, p. 15)
[346] (Plato, Laws, 2008, II 664d)
[347] (Aristotle, Politics, VIII 6, 1340b35–39)

would not have seen it *possible* for all to participate. Some are good musicians and poets, and others are bad. And what matters is creating *good* art for contemplation's sake, not creativity's sake. Their differences indicate how we could proceed with an aesthetic education in the 21st century. Aristotle is stuck in a purely Apollonian mode of appreciation where there is no sense of participation on behalf of the audience – perhaps in an imaginative, active sense – at best. Meanwhile, Plato is Dionysian, and he sees that through creating, virtue is bolstered, and a flourishing life is possible. In our time, aesthetic education cannot remain at the level of art appreciation. Nor one that only requires students to perform the songs and plays of "the greats." Although both are necessary, a Dionysian aesthetic education requires student participation and creation, like how the early Jesuit schools had students act in plays and recite their own poetry.

An arts education must be participatory. We now see why arts education is essential, but the problem is to find out how to do this. Nelson Goodman, founder of Project Zero at Harvard University,[348] once said, "The state of general communicable knowledge about arts education is zero."[349] After the rise of modern art, arts education has been lost. Before, arts education was primarily a matter of craft, where students worked in an atelier under a mentor to learn their technique and theory and then replicate. However, this system of teaching has generally been lost.[350] But how do we teach about art in the 21st century when art is such a vast and confusing array of practices and processes? The reunification of arts, theology, and philosophy in an arts curriculum could foster an aesthetic education in the 21st century to revive the early Jesuit marriage of its spiritual and cultural mission. By integrating topics from theology and philosophy into art projects and by discussing how art expresses theological and philosophical aesthetic

[348] An institute dedicated to understanding learning in and through the arts.
[349] (McHugh, Abramowitz, Liu-Constant, & Gardner, 2020)
[350] Although it is on the rise again with the growing Atelier movement.

ideas, we can begin to make art more salient again. When students study these three subjects together and engage in them actively, they will be better artists who can create more deeply beautiful objects and have a more fulfilling life overall.

This does not mean that we discard skill to make students conceptual artists. In fact, students must have artistic skills to generate and produce aesthetic ideas with more nuance, accuracy, and effectiveness. Additionally, conceptual art is good in part but lacks the creative participatory action that is valuable in art. Finding readymades and calling them art for idea's sake is fine, but when one *makes* something, it adds a lot more to the experience because it forces a more extended interaction with the embodied meaning of that artwork. Additionally, knowing different ways to depict something could give students more range in expressing these ideas. Artistic skill would require a knowledge of craft, such as how to technically paint and sculpt, and a sense of composition. Formalism is not the essence of art, but it is still important, and students ought to know how to properly compose pictures and use techniques to *present* aesthetic ideas well.

Additionally, students should understand what has come before in art history. Art production should not be divorced from art history because learning about the art before can help students continue the conversation rather than endure the burden of starting it themselves. When students can *actively* appreciate beauty in art of the past through their imagination, the instructor acts as a critic, inviting students to meet new artworks that can inform their lives. Students can explore works of the past not just in anthropological or formalist modes but as a means to find meaning for their lives *now.* Furthermore, students should be encouraged to create their own art in response. Art is not a solo activity but is always in conversation with what has come before,

and this link should be reinforced rather than ignored for the sake of self-expression. In fact, self-expression will be enhanced by learning from others rather than creating in isolation.

Ultimately, I think that, unlike most philosophers discussed, Schiller's life models what an excellent aesthetic education looks like for a flourishing life. Schiller was not only a philosopher and a historian, but he was also deeply interested in theology and wanted to study it at a young age. More importantly, he was a practicing artist. Schiller successfully combined theory and praxis in his life. He wrote several dramas, such as *The Robbers* and *Don Carlos*. Schiller not only discusses what aesthetic education should look like but *shows* it. He provides a great model for an arts education, where one integrates art, theology, and philosophy to create something beautiful.

Conclusion

Hegel is wrong in saying that art no longer has anything to give religion. We have not reached the end of art, and art can still be a powerful tool to inform our religious imaginations and give meaning to our lives. Art can still contribute to life in the spirit. Contra Hegel, it is not to be discarded as ineffective. Instead, as the early Jesuits intuitively realized, the spiritual mission can be accomplished by cultural means. Art and religion are one. However, in the 21st century, some clarification is required regarding how this can happen when the arts have undergone a rapid and substantive metamorphosis.

In sum, I posit eight theses on this process that I believe I have provided and demonstrated throughout this paper.

1. Art is clarified as embodied meaning apart from representationalism and Formalism.

2. Beauty and art are combined in that beauty is an experience of extracting meaning from an art object through the generation of aesthetic ideas, which, in Kant's terms, leads one up Diotima's ladder toward knowledge of God.
3. Emotion and religious feelings in art are subsumed cognitively under Kant's aesthetic ideas with support from Collingwood's concept of clarification contra Croce and Tolstoy's Expressivism.
4. For art to have a mystical quality, it must be Dionysian, which requires action, and Apollonian, where it is contemplative, and this dyad of contemplation in action comes about through the active use of the imagination.
5. The active use of the imagination with an art object, distinct from less or non-imaginative arts like kitsch and propaganda, is vital to producing aesthetic ideas that lead to various interpretations of the work.
6. There is no single correct interpretation of a work based on an artist's intended interpretation; instead, beauty requires a variety of correct interpretations that generate conversation, creating communities of love around beautiful objects.
7. Beauty, the presentation of meaningful aesthetic ideas through the active use of the imagination, prepares someone to love something – distinct from a hedonistic liking – provoking a creative response.
8. Creativity, the process of making beautiful things, is a process that belongs to all humankind, and it is not limited to geniuses in the Kantian and Aristotelian sense; however, an aesthetic education is still required to foster such activity through education in moments of Absolute Spirit: art, theology, and philosophy.

List of Illustrations

Bibliography

Alston, W. P. (1991). *Perceiving God.* Ithica: Cornell University Press.

Aquinas, T. (1981). *Summa Theologica.* (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Trans.) London: Christian Classics.

Aristides, J. (2006). *Classical Drawing Atelier.* New York: Watson-Guptill Publications.

Aristotle. (1992). *Politics.* (T. A. Sinclair, & T. J. Saunders, Trans.) London: Penguin Group.

Aristotle. (1996). *Aristotle: Poetics.* (M. Heath, Trans.) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Asaṅga. (2019). Mahāyānasaṃgraha. In *A Compendium of the Mahāyāna: Asaṅga's* (K. Brunnhölzl, Trans., Vol. 1). Boulder, CO: Snow Lion.

Austin, J. L. (1952). *How to Do Things with Words.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Austin, J. L. (1970). *Philosophical Papers.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ayer, A. J. (1952). *Language, Truth, and Logic.* New York: Dover.

Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text.* (R. Miller, Trans.) New York: Hill & Wang.

Barzun, J. (1974). *The Use and Abuse of Art.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Beckett, W. (1999). *Sister Wendy's 1000 Masterpieces.* New York: DK Publishing.

Bell, C. (1914). *Art.* London: Chatto & Windus.

Benjamin, W. (1996). The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. In W. Benjamin, M. Bullock, & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Selected Writings, 1938-1940* (pp. 251-283). Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Berdyaev, N. (1951). *Dream and Reality.* New York: The MacMillan Company.

Bloch, A. (2003). *Murphy's Law.* New York: Pedigree.

Brooks, C. (1947). *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry.* New York: Harcourt.

Brown, D. (2014). The Power of the Image to Effect Change. *The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies*, 13-18.

Cage, J. (2011). Lecture on Something. In J. Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (50th Anniversary ed., pp. 128-145). Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Calvin, J. (1845). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Vol. I). (H. Beveridge, Trans.) Boulder, CO: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Retrieved from https://www.ccel.org/ccel/c/calvin/institutes/cache/institutes.pdf

Carritt, E. F. (1931). *Philosophies of Beauty.* London: Oxford University Press.

Carroll, N. (1999). *The Philosophy of Art.* New York: Routledge.

Chignell, A. (2007). Kant on the Normativity of Taste: The Role of Aesthetic Ideas. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 415-433.

Chittister, J. (2001). Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light. *Religious Life Review, 40*.

Christie's. (2022, November 28). *'It's a piece of history': Andres Serrano transfigures his legendary photograph Piss Christ into a new NFT*. Retrieved from Christie's: https://www.christies.com/en/stories/andres-serrano-transfigures-piss-christ-into-nft-206ace81c7284ec58cb7b8978f2ec53c

Clapp, E. P. (2016). *Participatory Creativity.* New York: Routledge.

Collingwood, R. G. (1938). *The Principles of Art.* London: Oxford University Press.

Croce, B. (1965). *Guide to Aesthetics.* New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

Danto, A. (1983). *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Danto, A. (1993). Responses and Replies. In M. Rollins (Ed.), *Danto and His Critics* (pp. 193-216). Oxford: Blackwell.

Danto, A. (1997). *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Danto, A. (2000). *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World.* New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Danto, A. (2003). *The Abuse of Beauty.* Chicago: Open Court.

Danto, A. (2007). The Fly in the Bottle: The Explanation and Critical Judgment of Works of Art. In A. Danto, *Unnatural Wonders* (pp. 355-368). New York: Columbia University Press.

Davies, D. (2003). El Greco's Religious Art: The Illumination and Quickening of the Spirit. In D. Davies, & J. H. Elliott (Eds.), *El Greco* (pp. 45-72). London: National Gallery.

Davies, S. (2006, July). Authors' Intentions, Literary Interpretation, and Literary Value. *The British Journal of Aesthetics, 46*(3), 223-247.

de Mello, A. (2010). *Seek God Everywhere.* New York: Image/Doubleday.

Dickie, G. (1974). *Art and the Aesthetic.* Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dostoevsky, F. (1981). *The Idiot.* (C. Garnett, Trans.) New York: Bantam.

Eco, U. (1986). *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages.* (H. Bredin, Trans.) New Haven: Yale University Press.

Farago, J. (2023, September 17). The 19th Century's Most Scandalous Painting Comes to New York. *The New York Times*, p. 74.

Flowers, T. (Forthcoming). *Conversar at the Heart of Charism: The History of Jesuit Distinctiveness.*

Foster, H., Krauss, R., Bois, Y.-A., & Buchloh, B. H. (2004). *Art Since 1900* (Vol. II). New York: Thames & Hudson.

Friedman, J. B. (2000). *Orpheus in the Middle Ages.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

García-Rivera, A. (1999). *The Community of the Beautiful, A Theological Aesthetics.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.

Goldman, A. (1990). Interpreting Art and Literature. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 205-14.

Gombrich, E. (1995). *The Story of Art* (16th ed.). London: Phaidon Press.

Gombrich, E. H. (1969). *Art and Illusion* (2nd ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goodman, N. (1968). *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols.* Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Goodman, N. (1978). *Ways of Worldmaking.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Graham, G. (2010). *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art versus Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Graham, G. (2013). Art and Religion. In B. Gaut, & D. M. Lopes (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (pp. 509-518). New York: Routledge.

Graham, G. (2017). *Philosophy, Art, and Religion.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Greenberg, C. (1989). Avant-Garde and Kitsch. In C. Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (pp. 3-21). Boston: Beacon Press.

Guyer, P. (1997). *Kant and the Claims of Taste.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Habermas, J. (1993). *Justification and Application.* (C. Cronin, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (2008). *Between Naturalism and Religion.* (C. Cronin, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Hegel, G. W. (1975). *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art.* (T. M. Knox, Ed.) Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hegel, G. W. (2007). *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind.* (W. Wallace, & A. V. Miller, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.

Hegel, G. W. (2011). *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Volume 1: Manuscripts of the Introduction and the Lectures of 1822–3.* (R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, & W. G. Geuss, Eds.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hegel, G. W. (2017). *Phenomenology of Spirit.* (T. Pinkard, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Irvin, S. (2012). Artworks, Objects and Structures. In A. C. Ribeiro (Ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics.* New York: Continuum.

Irvin, S. (2013). Installation Art and Performance: A Shared Ontology. In C. Mag Uidhir (Ed.), *Art and Abstract Objects.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Isenberg, A. (1949). Critical Communication. *Philosophical Review*, 330-344.

James, H. (1873, March). The Madonna of the Future. *The Atlantic*.

James, W. (1958). *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* New York: Mentor Books.

Kandinsky, W. (1977). *Concerning the Spiritual in Art.* New York: Dover Publications.

Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason.* (P. Guyer, A. W. Wood, Eds., P. Guyer, & A. W. Wood, Trans.) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kant, I. (2000). *Critique of the Power of Judgment.* (P. Guyer, & E. Matthews, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keats, J. (1819, May). *Ode to a Grecian Urn*. Retrieved from Poetry Foundation: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn

Kirwan, J. (1999). *Beauty.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lamarque, P. (2002). Appreciation and Literary Interpretation. In M. Krausz (Ed.), *Is There a Single Right Interpretation?* (pp. 285-308). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Levertov, D. (1997). *The Stream & the Sapphire.* New York: New Directions Publishing Co.

Levinson, J. (1992). Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look. In G. Iseminger (Ed.), *Intention and Interpretation* (pp. 221-256). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Locke, A. (2012). Art or Propaganda? In A. Locke, & C. Molesworth (Ed.), *The Works of Alain Locke* (pp. 219-220). New York: Oxford University Press.

Loyola, S. I. (1992). *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.* (G. E. Ganss, Trans.) Chicago: Loyola Press.

Making Caring Common. (2023). *On Edge: Understanding and Preventing Young Adults' Mental Challenges.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Matherne, S. (2013). The Inclusive Interpretation of Kant's Aesthetic Ideas. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 21-39.

McHugh, K., Abramowitz, K., Liu-Constant, Y., & Gardner, H. (2020). *Project Zero: The First Fifty-Five Years.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from Project Zero.

McMahon, J. A. (2007). *Aesthetics and Material Beauty: Aesthetics Naturalized.* New York: Routledge.

McMahon, J. A. (2010). The Classical Trinity and Kant's Aesthetic Formalism. *Critical Horizons*, 441-464.

Moltmann, J. (1973). *Theology and Joy.* London: SCM Press.

Moore, G. E. (1993). *Principia Ethica.* (T. Baldwin, Ed.) Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Murdoch, I. (1997). The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists. In P. Conradi (Ed.), *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (pp. 386-463). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Murdoch, I. (2014). *The Sovereignty of the Good.* New York: Routledge.

Naím, M. (2022). *The Revenge of Power.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

National Gallery of Art. (2012, May 17). Barnett Newman's Masterpiece Stations of the Cross is Focus of Fifth "In the Tower" Exhibition at National Gallery of Art, June 10, 2012–February 24, 2013. Washington D.C., District of Colombia, United States of America. Retrieved from https://www.nga.gov/press/exh/3535.html

Nehamas, A. (2007). *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1956). *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals.* (F. Golffing, Trans.) New York: Anchor Books.

Nietzsche, F. (1974). *The Gay Science.* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.) New York: Vintage.

Nietzsche, F. (2004). *Human, All Too Human.* (M. Faber, & S. Lehmann, Trans.) London: Penguin Books.

Noë, A. (2011, December 4). Art and the Limits of Neuroscience. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/art-and-the-limits-of-neuroscience/

O'Malley, J., & Bailey, G. A. (Eds.). (2005). *The Jesuits and the Arts, 1540-1773.* Philadelphia, PA: Saint Joseph's University Press.

Otto, R. (1958). *The Idea of the Holy.* (J. W. Harvey, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.

Pew Research Center. (2019). *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace.*

Pillow, K. (2006). Understanding Aestheticized. In R. Kukla (Ed.), *Aesthetics and Cognition in Kant's Critical Philosophy* (pp. 245-265). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Plato. (1992). *The Republic.* (G. Grube, & C. Reeve, Trans.) Indianapolis: Hackett.

Plato. (2007). Symposium. In *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (pp. 34-40). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Plato. (2008). *Laws.* (B. Jowett, Trans.) Project Gutenberg. Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1750/1750-h/1750-h.htm

Plato. (2013). *Ion.* (B. Jowett, Trans.) Project Gutenberg. Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1635/1635-h/1635-h.htm

Pseudo-Dionysius. (2004). The Divine Names. In G. E. Thiessen (Ed.), *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader* (pp. 33-37). London: SCM Press.

Rabkin, N., & Hedberg, E. C. (2011). *Arts Education in America: What the Decline Means for Arts Participation.* Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts.

Rahner, K. (1981). *Concern for the Church.* New York: Crossroad.

Reiter, A., & Geiger, I. (2018). Natural Beauty, Fine Art and the Relation between Them. *Kant-Studien*, 72-100.

Rookmaker, H. R. (1994). *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Ruffing, J. K. (2000). *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings.* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Ruskin, J. (1889). *Modern Painters* (Vol. III). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Sappho. (2007). *The Poetry of Sappho.* (J. Powell, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sartwell, C. (2004). *Six Names of Beauty.* New York: Routledge.

Schiller, F. (1965). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters.* (R. Snell, Trans.) New York: Ungar.

Schjeldahl, P. (2000, November 20). The Urbane Innocent. *The New Yorker*, pp. 104-105.

Schjeldahl, P. (2010, June 28). True Blue. *The New Yorker*, pp. 72-4.

Schleiermacher, F. (1996). *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers.* (R. Crouter, Ed., & R. Crouter, Trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schleiermacher, F. (2016). *The Christian Faith* (3rd ed.). (P. T. Nimmo, Trans.) London: Bloomsbury.

Schopenhauer, A. (1966). *The World as Will and Representation.* (E. F. Payne, Trans.) New York: Dover.

Scruton, R. (2009). *Beauty.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Scruton, R. (Writer), & Lockwood, L. (Director). (2009). *Why Beauty Matters* [Motion Picture].

Searle, A. (1999, October 20). Tracey's Pants but McQueen's the Real Pyjamas. *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/1999/oct/20/20yearsoftheturnerprize.turnerprize1

Shaw, G. B. (2002). *Saint Joan, A Chronicle Play In Six Scenes And An Epilogue.* (D. Lainson, Ed.) Project Gutenberg Australia. Retrieved March 22, 2024, from https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200811h.html#C01

Smith, L. F., Smith, J. K., & Tinio, P. (2017). Time Spent Viewing Art and Reading Labels. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 77-85.

Sontag, S. (1966). *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Steinberg, L. (1996). *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Talbot, W. H. (1844). *The Pencil of Nature.* London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans.

Teresa, o. A. (2019). *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila.* (D. Lewis, Trans.) Overland Park, KS: Digireads.com/Neeland Media LLC.

The Society of Jesus. (1996). Formulas of the Institute of Popes Paul III and Julius III. In J. W. Padberg (Ed.), *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Official Latin Texts* (pp. 3-14). St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources.

Thom, P. (2000). *Making Sense.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Tolstoy, L. (2007). What is Art? In S. M. Cahn, & A. Meskin (Eds.), *Aesthetics: A Comprehensive Anthology* (pp. 233-242). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Vaccarino Bremner, S. (2021). On Conceptual Revision and Aesthetic Judgement. *Kantian Review*, 531-547.

Walton, K. L. (1970). Categories of Art. *The Philosophical Review, 79*(3), 334-367.

Walton, K. L. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weber, M. (1958). Science as Vocation. In H. H. Gerth, & C. Wright Mills (Eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (pp. 129-156). New York: Oxford University Press.

Weil, S. (1973). *Waiting for God.* New York: Haper Colophon Books.

Whelan, J. (2009). Fall in Love. In *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book.* Minneapolis, MN: Marquette University. Retrieved from https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/prayers-by-st-ignatius-and-others/fall-in-love/

Williams, T. (2010). Describing God. In R. Pasnau, & C. Van Dyke (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Winner, E. (2018). *How Art Works: A Psychological Exploration.* London: Oxford University Press.

Wolf, N. (2002). *The Beauty Myth.* New York: Harper Collins.

Wölfflin, H. (1950). *Principles of Art History.* (M. Hottinger, Trans.) New York: Dover.

Wollheim, R. (1987). *Painting as an Art.* New York: Thames & Hudson.