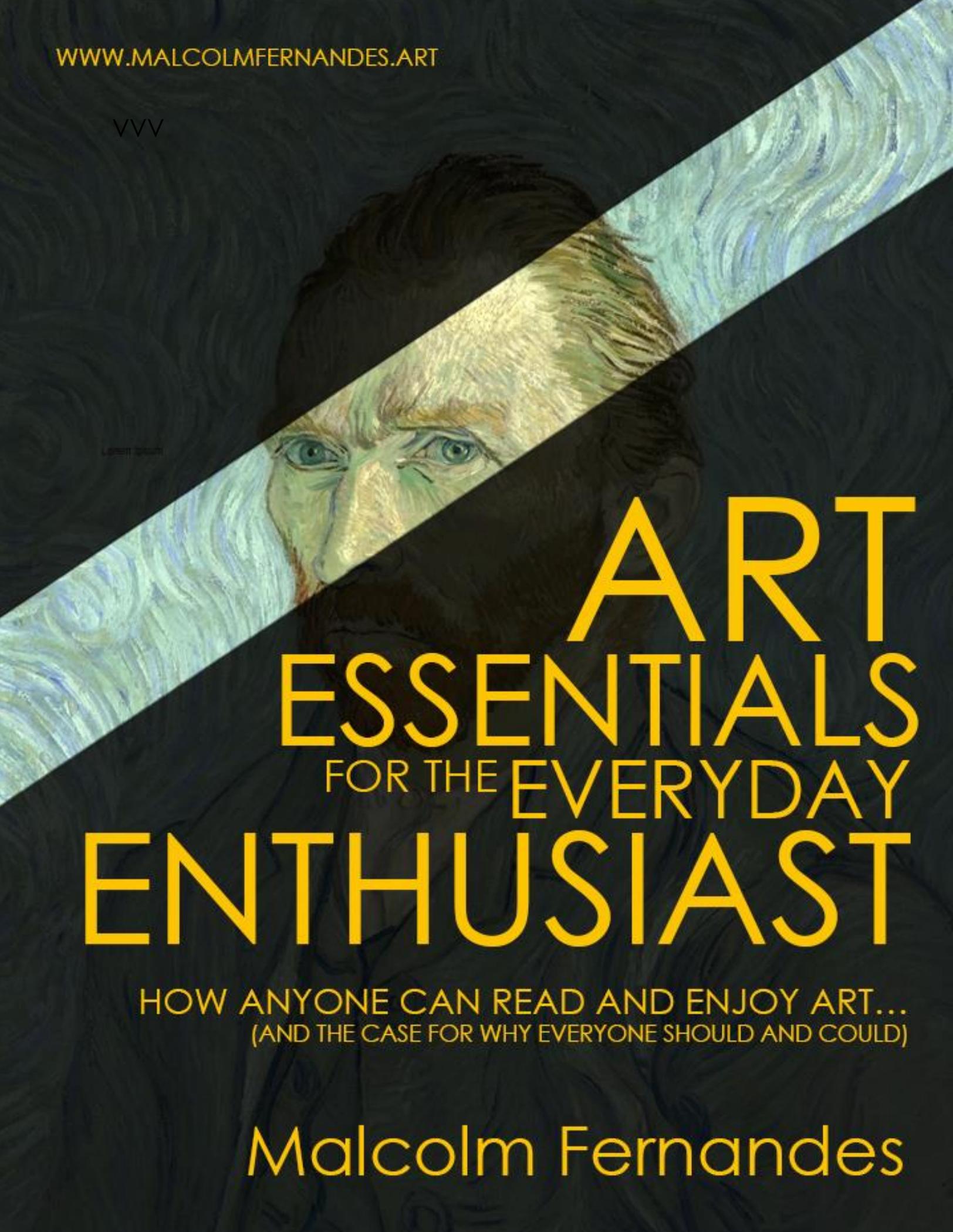


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ART ESSENTIALS FOR THE EVERYDAY ENTHUSIAST

HOW ANYONE CAN READ AND ENJOY ART...
(AND THE CASE FOR WHY EVERYONE SHOULD AND COULD)

Malcolm Fernandes

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Cover Image: Self Portrait, Vincent van Gogh, 1889, Oil on canvas, Collection Musée d'Orsay
Cover Design: Malcolm Fernandes

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“Art washes away from the soul the
dust of everyday life.”
– Pablo Picasso.

Welcome, and thanks for downloading your copy of Art Essentials for the Everyday Enthusiast

Contrary to popular assumption, art is for everybody.

It really is!

Art is the ultimate manifestation of the values of freedom, desire and human expression. Art is that part of human activity that lies on the very outer edges of human thought and endeavor in a space reserved, yet undefined and borderless.

Unfortunately (due to the lack of widespread quality education on the subject), there are several misconceptions about art — especially fine art.

These include (and are definitely not limited to):

1. Art is decoration / ONLY meant for interior design
2. Art needs to be beautiful
3. Art is reserved only for those with God-given talent
4. Art is reserved for the fortunate / you must be rich to enjoy art (or buy and collect it)
5. Artistic excellence is and has to be identical to photographic accuracy
6. More colours are always better
7. Etc.

Well, the fact of the matter is that art is a means of expression and is, therefore, essentially, a human need (see link to Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs in the Further Reading section at the end), and more so — a human right.

Now, just like everything else there is good and there is bad art. An infant standing on a stage, crying his lungs out definitely meets the "expression" criteria of what art is, but it certainly is not good art (if it can be called art at all). And no one really wants to see a child crying now, do we? Contrast that to Shakespeare standing on the same stage reciting his poem — Sonnet 20, or Tagore — Where the Mind is Without Fear, and you have something very, very different altogether.

And that begs the question:

What would be the difference between an infant's temperamental tantrums as compared to a recital by Shakespeare or Tagore?

Of course, with evolving times, new technology, modern materials, varied schools of thought etc. the boundaries of what people call art will keep on expanding. The one constant in all definitions of art is, however, the human aspect to the work — the intentions, actions, decisions, skills, integrity of the artist, the ability of the artist to exert their will and create and express thoughts and ideas that are inherently theirs and therefore by default — unique.

Even in the case of AI (artificial intelligence) driven art, the question today (it may not be so tomorrow) is the one — who is the human artist that created the AI program in the first place? Why is it made the way it is? What was their intention? How? Etc.

So, what is art?

But first, an awareness of a more fundamental consideration is warranted:

What does it mean to be human?

If art is an expression of everything that is human then it is only reasonable that we begin by bringing some awareness to what it means to be human.

In the context of art, there are two aspects to this question:

1. The philosophical (or theoretical)
2. And the physical

Philosophically, it's a simple question, but it brings with it a world of complexity, contradictions, and mystery that is human life and everything that come with the human experience. Poets, priests, philosophers, politicians, scientists and, most of all, artists have all sought to answer this ultimate puzzle throughout the ages. All art (especially fine art) is, in one way or another, the documentation of human emotion, expression, and the experience of the individual artist and/or those they represent.

Physically, on the other hand, we experience life through the five senses. In the context of art, sight is (or has been up until now) our primary sense. But our physical senses have a particular set of quirks that are important to be aware of.

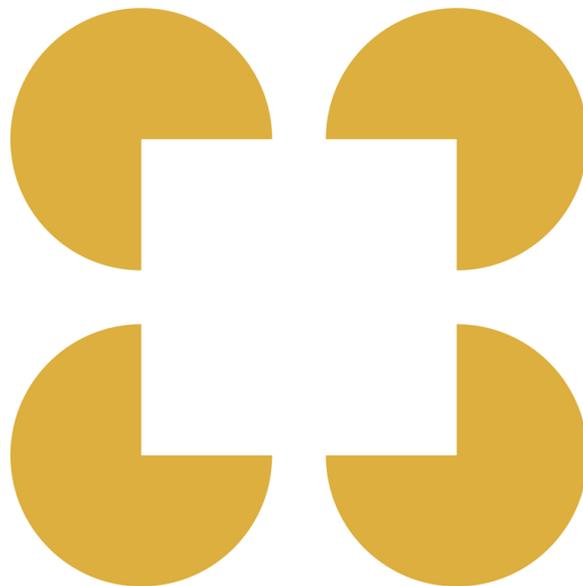
For example: they say seeing is believing, right? Well, actually... what we see and what we think we see are two different things. There are physical AND psychological “distortions” that take place when we look the world.

This happens in a number of different ways:

1. We tend to — in vision and in narrative — fill-in that which “seems to be” incomplete to us — and this is true for all people from all over the world.

An example:

Look at the image below — what do you see? Is the square really there? Or are we filtering out patterns that are uniquely familiar to us?

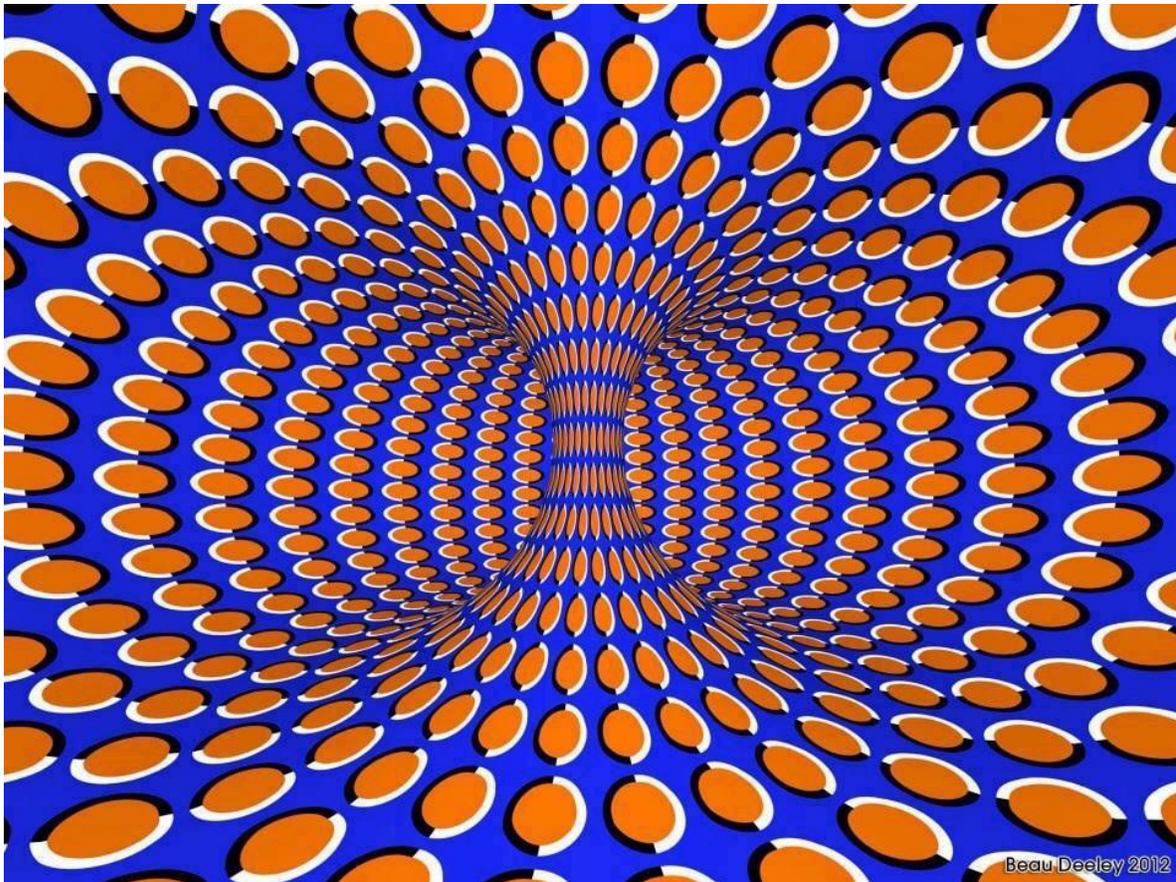


2. We are also unwittingly affected by what is called priming and can be made to perceive things in a certain way based on the order of how things are presented to us.

Priming is the psychological phenomenon in which the exposure to one particular stimulus influences the behavior/ decision making of the individual with regard to what comes immediately after — without the individual being aware of this influence.

(PS: in our media/tech/information rich world today, we are intentionally AND unintentionally all being primed ALL the time. See the link in the Further Reading section below for more on priming and how the human brain sees things.)

3. We also see colours, value, gradations, shapes and movement differently based on the different contexts (the popular optical illusions that show distortions in shape, movement, etc. are examples of how the eye can trick us). Look at the work by Australian artist, Beau Deeley, below. There's a very particular feeling that this work creates in us. As viewers, we may not know how or why this happens — yet it does.



Is it moving or still?

In practical terms, the greatest artists through the ages have known about many of these “quirks” in human psychology and perception and have often been masters in perspective manipulation, shape creation, value arrangement and colour control so as to conjure up the emotions in the viewer that they specifically wish to, through their work.

In short, art is about being human. And a conscious awareness of HOW we think, feel, perceive and work as human beings is a great starting point to reading, experiencing and enjoying the beauty of art and indeed the beauty of being who we are — whoever we are.

We are all different in a thousand different ways. But we have a gazillion more things in common than we do in our differences. We are — all —human.

Now, let get to it...

What is Art?

To my mind Wikipedia has a brief yet most comprehensive definition of art. It defines Art as a diverse range of human activity and resulting product that involves creative or imaginative talent expressive of technical proficiency, beauty, emotional power, or conceptual ideas.

Art is the application of creative skill and imagination, *typically* in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, etc. producing works to be appreciated for their beauty, content or emotional power.

Today, this expression can also take the form of virtual, auditory, contextual, conceptual and experiential works too.

The **Elements** of Art

Art is a powerful language. Through it, people communicate thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Like most languages, the language of art has its own unique vocabulary. Unlike other vocabularies, however, the vocabulary of art does not solely depend on words (although it may contain words). Rather, it is made of other elements — most often visual in the case of visual work.

Art can also be made with the medium of sound. And it can be conceptual in nature too. Art in these two mediums can consist of additional **elements** over and above the visual.

We shall list these out accordingly.

The Elements of Visual Art

1. **Colour:** Colour is that property possessed by an object which produces different sensations on the eye as a result of the way it reflects, refracts, or emits light. Now, colour theory is vast and can get complicated but for the purposes of this guide we will keep it simple. There are three aspects of colour that matter to the layman:
 - **Hue:** is the name of colour as we know it
 - **Value:** is the lightness or darkness of a hue. A colour's value changes when white or black is added
 - **Intensity:** is the quality of brightness, saturation, strength or purity of a hue. High intensity colours are strong and saturated. Low intensity colours are dull and weak
2. **Line:** Geometry defines a line as a one-dimensional figure which has length but no width. While this is accurate, in art this definition can also be extended by saying that a line may be two or three-dimensional, visible, or even implied or abstract.
3. **Shape:** An element of art that is two-dimensional, flat, or limited to length and width. All shapes are limited to one of two classes:
 - **Geometric:** These look like they were made with a ruler or some other drawing tool
 - **Organic:** also called free form, these shapes are not regular or even.

4. **Form:** A form is a shape that has a third dimension. Like with a sculpture or architecture, you can actually experience the three dimensions by walking around the work. A form encloses volume; includes height, width AND depth (as in a cube, a sphere, a pyramid, or a cylinder). Form may also be free flowing.

5. **Space:** It refers to the distance around, above, below and within things. All objects take up space. It is an element of art by which positive and negative areas are defined or a sense of depth achieved in a work of art.

6. **Texture:** An element of art that refers to the way things feel, or look as if they might feel if touched.

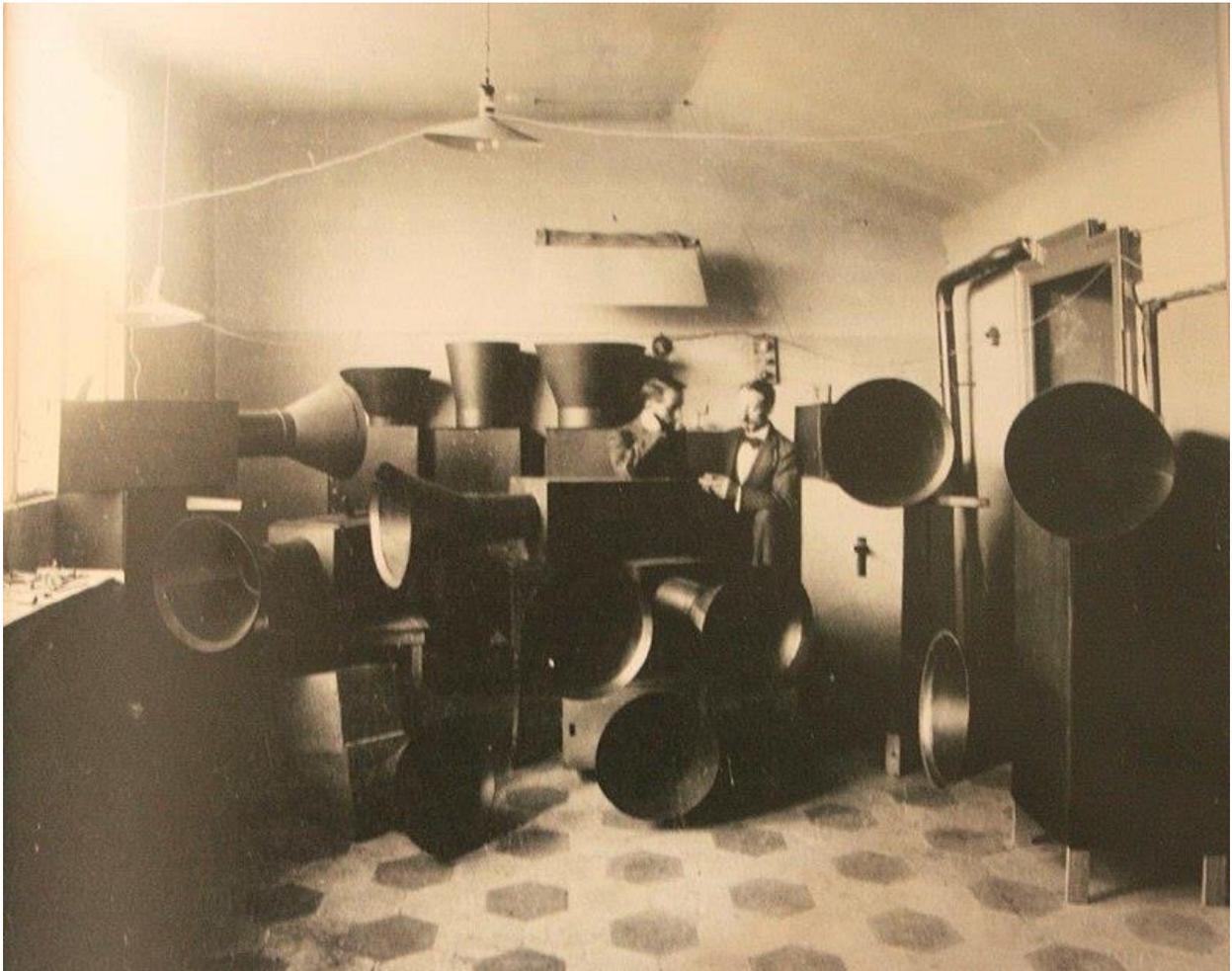
The Elements of Sound Art

Sound art is a hybrid art form that bridges visual art and sound. It is a form of contemporary art that uses sound as a channel for creative expression. The pitter-patter of rain, spoken word, poetry, silence itself, and even contemporary uses of ASMR can all qualify as sonic art. Sound art is more of an aural experience than visual art, but visual elements can coexist with sound. For example, composer John Cage and Dada artist Marcel Duchamp collaborated on Reunion (1968), a concert in which Cage and Duchamp played a chess game where moves triggered Aleatoric music via photoelectric cells under the chessboard.

The Basic Elements of Sound Art are:

1. **Sound Source:** the source from which the sound emanates
2. **Timbre:** is the tonal quality of a sound. This quality makes it distinctive of a particular singing voice, musical instrument, or other source
3. **Volume:** is the degree of loudness of a sound. Also called amplitude, it is defined by the intensity of the vibration of the particles of the medium.
4. **Pitch:** Is the frequency (measured as Hz), and is determined by how fast or how slow the vibrations of the particles happen in specified medium.

Besides the above elements, sound art can also incorporate other elements like texture, duration, dynamics, tempo, and physical design and structure.



Luigi Russolo and his assistant Ugo Piatti in their Milan studio in 1913 with the Intonarumori (noise machines). Russolo is may be best known as a painter associated with the Futurist movement, but he's also considered one of the first sound artists.

The Elements of Conceptual and Experiential Art

Conceptual art, also referred to as conceptualism, is art in which the concept or idea involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic, technical, and material concerns.

In addition to the visual elements listed above, conceptual art may consist of the following elements:

1. **The idea/theme /story /emotion:** This consists of the primary subject of a work or the topic on which it is based. This is usually intangible and can be expressed or implied indirectly.
2. **The Medium:** This is the actual materials, medium, substance, stuff, performance, interaction etc. used to communicate the idea of the work. The medium used in this type of art is critical because the medium itself may be the subject of the work or the primary artistic statement. An example of this is in 'And Archive' by Indian artists, Thukral and Tagra, which is a collection of works that includes books, games, and an interactive setup that focuses on public engagement to communicate the subject of their work.

The **Principles** of Art

Knowing HOW the various ELEMENTS OF ART are put together is key in enjoying and understating a work of art.

Like with any language, knowing the vocabulary is not enough. You must also know how the words go together — the rules of grammar.

The same is true for art.

But instead of rules, the language of art has principles.

These principles, or guidelines, govern how artists organize the elements to create a final work.

These principles include the following:

1. **Balance:** a way of combining elements to add a feeling of equilibrium or stability to a work of art. Major types are symmetrical and asymmetrical.
2. **Variety:** a principle of design concerned with diversity or contrast by using different shapes, sizes, colours etc. in a work of art.
3. **Unity:** is the arrangement of elements and principles of art to create a feeling of completeness and cohesiveness.
4. **Harmony:** a way of combining elements in an artwork to show similarities by using repetition and gradual change.
5. **Emphasis:** a way emphasizing one element versus others in a work of art to create a comparison/ hierarchy in the work.
6. **Proportion:** a principle of design that refers to the relationship of certain elements to the whole and to each other. This is not limited to size. Any element of art can be used to create proportional relationships.
7. **Movement:** a principle used to lead the viewer's eye throughout the work and to create a feeling of action.
8. **Rhythm:** a principle of design that puts a repeated visual pulse in a work, created by the careful placement of repeated elements, lines, gradations, colours, motifs, etc.

Experiencing Art

The Guiding Questions Checklist

Have you ever looked at a work of art and wondered if there was more to the work than you understood?

Works of art are sometimes like mysteries. It is usually not enough to look at the surface of the object. And let's face it, many minimalist, conceptual and modern works do, *at first glance*, seem entirely underwhelming (Marcel Duchamp's **1917** readymade sculpture called Fountain for instance which consisted of a porcelain urinal kept on its side and signed "R. Mutt", for instance). Many of these same works, however, are extremely bold, radical, layered in context, meaning and expression.

With all types of fine art, you need to dig beneath the surface to understand as much as you can about the work in order to appreciate it.

And this can easily be accomplished by putting some structure to this task.

So, you're looking at a work of art (better still standing in front of it — in person 😊). What do you do?

Let's go through a simple four-step process of
experiencing art.

Feel — **D**escribe — **A**nalyse — **I**nterpret

Feel

First off — Just take in the work. Look at it. Breathe. Feel whatever you feel and be present with the sensations and emotions. Give the work a few seconds to do its thing.

Then ask yourself the following set of guiding questions:

- How do you feel?
- What does the work say to you?
- What does this work remind you of? Why?
- How does this work of art relate to aspects of your own life, perception?
- Do you find the work agreeable? Why?
- Do you not find the work agreeable? Why not?
- Compare this work of art to other images/objects that you have seen, either in a museum or in your everyday life. How are they similar? How are they different?

Describe

Then ask yourself the next set of simple questions:

- What is the title of the work?
- Who is the artist? What is their background?
- What medium or material is the work made up of?
- What is the size of the work?
- When was it made?
- What is the style of the work? What are its physical/ visual/ auditory/ experiential properties?

Analyze

There are three possible ways of looking at an artwork for the purpose of analyzing it:

- Look at its **composition**: emphasis is put on how the artwork is constructed, it's composition, use of value and colour, lines space etc.
- Look at its **subject**. In this aesthetic view the subject and the manner it is handled is given priority
- Look at its **content**. Here the mood, feeling and impact is given most importance in the analysis

Questions to help guide the analysis of the artwork:

- What is the style of the work/artist?
- What is the process used to create it?
- How was the work composed? (In art, composition is the way the art principles are used to organised the elements of colour, line, shape etc.)
- How are the elements of art used?
- Of all the elements, which one do you think is the primary element used in the work? Why?
- How are principles of art incorporated into the work?
- Are there symbols, repeated elements, motifs, lines, angles, colours etc. in the work?
- How effectively does everything come together? Do the art elements and principles employed support the overall effect that the work creates?
- How does the artist communicate the mood/ subject/ story/ message/ idea /feeling?

Interpret

The key here is context. Ask yourself the following set of guiding questions:

- What is the intension of the artists?
- What is the subject of this work? Is there a story behind the work? What is the message/ idea expressed?
- What is the mood or feeling being communicated?
- How effectively is the intended subject/ mood being communicated?

PRO TIP: Even after giving it some time, if a work stumps you, then don't be afraid to ask someone about it – a gallery representative, owner, or even the artist if they are around.

Fortunately, developing a casual understanding of art is not all that difficult. It is true that some people devote their entire lives to studying the minutest details of an artists' work, but there's no need to become an expert in order to enjoy art. All it takes is a moderate attention to detail, a little bit of patience, and a willingness to reflect on your own feelings.



Conceptual Art

Marcel Duchamp, 1917, Fountain, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz at the 291 (Art Gallery) following the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibit, with entry tag visible. Who was marcel Duchamp? What is the subject of this work? Is it art in the first place? If art is a language, what was the artist trying to say with this piece? What feelings/ reaction/ questions was he trying to raise?

Ways to **Enjoy** Art

Let's look at a few ways to enjoy art:

1. **Seek out and look at the original work:** The power and impact of art is much better felt in person as compared to looking at pictures online or in books. Also, many times, especially in printed reproductions, the colours and textural qualities of art works are often distorted when compared to the real thing.
2. **Visit art galleries, museums and shows.** Look out for upcoming art events, festivals, and exhibitions.
3. **Use your smart phone to experience art:** If you can't visit art in person, take advantage of technology and look it up in AR or VR. The Google Arts and Culture Mobil App is one such incredible tool that is freely available to view and experience art from around the world. (See the Further Reading section at the end). You can use this app to view actual works of art from around the world in Augmented Reality (AR), AND you can do so on your very own smart phone).
4. **Take your time:** Look at the work, take it in. Pay attention to how you feel and your reactions; feel the shapes, lines, colours — their energy, tensions and resolutions

5. Look up art and read about it

6. **Connect with people:** Don't be intimidated by art, artists or other art enthusiasts. Also don't think that you must understand art intellectually before you can appreciate it. You don't need to learn everything about art before ever setting foot in a gallery or museum. If an artist is around, speak to them. Ask questions and let him know what you feel about their work. If there's an attendant/ rep/ owner of speak to them too.
7. **Contact artists** and request visits to their studios even if it's just for fun
8. **Support art in your community.** And if you want to take the ultimate leap, especially if your new to art, then go ahead and borrow, buy and collect art you like.

Tackling Misconceptions About Art

So, let's go through the common misconceptions about art:

1. Art is decoration / ONLY meant for interior design. Art needs to be beautiful.

The question of beauty is a philosophical one and has been debated since the times of the ancient Greeks. Yes, art can be beautiful – indeed, most art, especially through the ages, has been and is extremely beautiful. The definition of art however has evolved today. The need and scope of art has expanded ten-fold. Today (and for the foreseeable future) art functions, as we have seen, as a whole different language with its own vocabulary — a means of expression of all aspects of the life, society, and the human condition. Art is so much more than decoration. One could even argue that it is essential to human survival, development, and prosperity.

2. Art is reserved only for those with God-given talent

This is not true. Anyone and everyone willing to learn about it can master it. Did you know that one of the most famous artists of all time — Vincent Van Gogh, worked hard and struggled to learn his craft. He produced more than 900 paintings and many more drawings and sketches. Van Gogh, however, sold only one painting during his lifetime — Red Vineyard at Arles. Today his works are considered as some of the most beautiful and most sought after ever.

3. Art is reserved for the fortunate / you must be rich to enjoy art (or buy and collect it)

This is not true. Of course, the work of successful artists sell for millions, however there are many more artists who can be very affordable. Look around for good art and decide to invest in time, money and resources to acquiring art. Everyone deserves to enjoy art. And indeed, in the most prosperous, stable, and developed of societies around the world — most people do.

4. Artistic excellence is (and has to be) identical to photographic accuracy

This is not true. Learning the skills needed to paint realistically is critical to a person's success in art. Once mastered, it gives them the freedom to create work that matches their skill – *if they so desire*. Then again, if a master painter decides to create a portrait with squiggly lines that look like the drawing of a 10-year-old, it begs the question — why? What is the story? What is the subject? What is the master trying to say? How are the squiggly lines created? Is it really “easy” to create? Is it really random or thoughtless?

5. More colours are always better, etc. etc. etc.

What all if this really comes down to is taste, intelligence, development of ways of perception and human values. Look around and you will find that greatest works of art were created with no more than just a few colours, controlled design, intelligent content and emotional use of the elements and principles of art.

READING AND ENJOYING ART

A Case Study

Let's take an in-depth look at one major work of art and see how we can go about putting some of the concepts mentioned above into practice.

Draupadi at the Court of Virata Raja Ravi Varma

Oil on Canvas, 110 cm x 172 cm, 1897

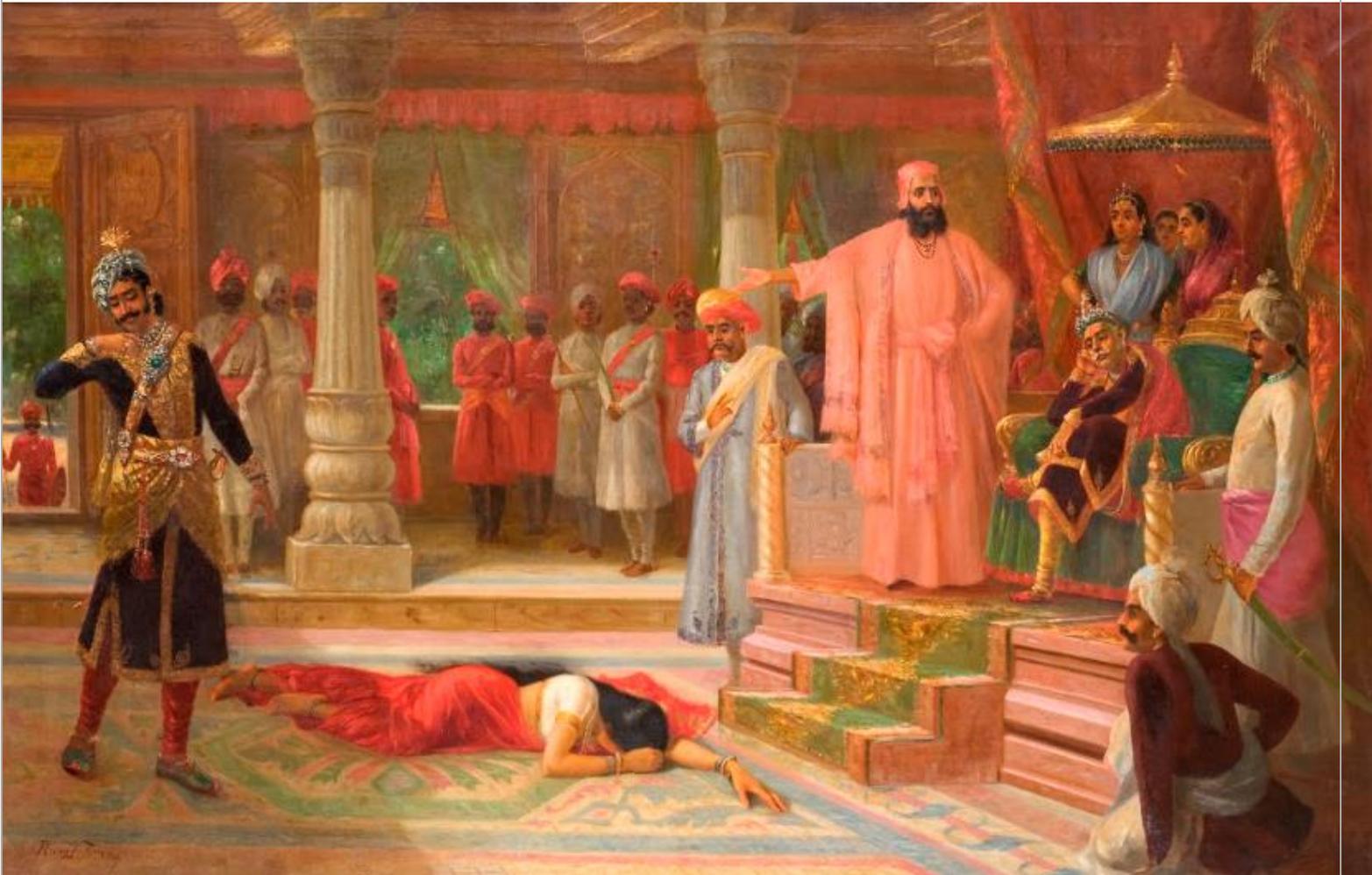


Image original source: Sree Chitra Art Gallery, Thiruvananthapuram
Curatorial rights: The Ganesh Shivaswamy Foundation, Bengaluru

What do you do when you first spot this work?

Of course, you could glance at the image and a few seconds later scroll past it looking out for the next, but like we've seen, that would be missing the point now, wouldn't it? I believe the above work is one among the best that Raja Ravi Varma (RRV) created during his life time. And it's not difficult to find out why. All you have to do is follow the guiding questions checklist in the previous section. Do this with a few artworks and you'll be able to read and appreciate the great masterworks in no time.

So, let's go through the four-steps listed in the Experiencing Art section above. Remember to use the questions to reflect on the various aspects of the artwork and see what you come up with.

STEP 1: Feel

Look at the work on page 34. Take it in. And take your time. Breathe and go with the flow. At this stage, let the work itself do the heavy lifting. Feel whatever you feel and be present with the sensations and emotions that it stirs up inside you. Feel the figures in this painting. Feel the painted shapes, lines — their energy, tension etc. in the scene.

Then ask yourself the following set of guiding questions: How do you feel? What does the work say to you? What does this work remind you of? etc.

This scene is one of high drama. Everyone knows the narrative that this image depicts and Varma masterfully organizes the setting, designs the environment and the characters and places each one of them in a very specific spot — in fact, this is one of Raja Ravi Varma's best works because of how successfully he is able to translate the emotion of the moment with meticulous composition and flawless execution (we shall dive into a detailed analysis in a moment).

STEP 2: Describe

Look at the work and seek to describe everything you know about it in simple terms.

Category: Painting

Title: Draupadi at the Court of Virata

Artist: Raja Ravi Varma

About the Artist: Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906) was one of the most celebrated and prominent artists of India. Varma took inspiration from diverse sources like the Vedic verses, the Kathakali dance dramas, and the interpretations of Sanskrit epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Varma also printed affordable oleographs of his paintings, making his artworks accessible to the Indian public.

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Physical Dimensions: 110cm x 172 cm

Created: 1897, Location: India

The style of the work and its appearance: As with most of his other work, RRV usually combined European realism and techniques of the 1800's with Indian sensibilities and storytelling. His works are one of the best examples of the fusion of European academic art with a purely Indian sensibility and iconography. This painting is a stunning example of this.

STEP 3: Analyze

Now, here's where the magic of this work can really be appreciated. Let's tackle this together.

Try to get deeper in your descriptions. Remember, there are three ways of looking at an artwork for this purpose:

1. You could look at its **subject** or
2. Its **composition** or
3. Its **content**

NOTE: Don't be afraid to use a ruler (or even the edge of a piece of paper or a business card) to roughly measure and compare the various elements of the picture to help with this.

We shall take the composition view of analysis here — i.e. how RRV has put the art together — and go through this in individual observations.

- The painting is dramatic in its setting and is created in a horizontal rectangle.
- There are more than 20 figures, each one of them placed and rendered with exquisite skill.
- Varma captures the emotion of pride, shock, disappointment and helplessness on each figure with the utmost care.

- While the colours used **appear** warm in the digital reproduction above, this painting is more than a hundred years old and it would be safe to say that the colours have probably changed quite a bit. Visiting the artwork in person would be the most ideal way to gauge its colour composition but that may not be a luxury for most people. The next best option is to look up high resolution photographs online OR use the Google Arts and Culture Augmented Reality App on your mobile device to literally walk around the painting.
- While there are several characters in the picture, one look at it and it's clear that the subject of the painting is Draupadi herself.

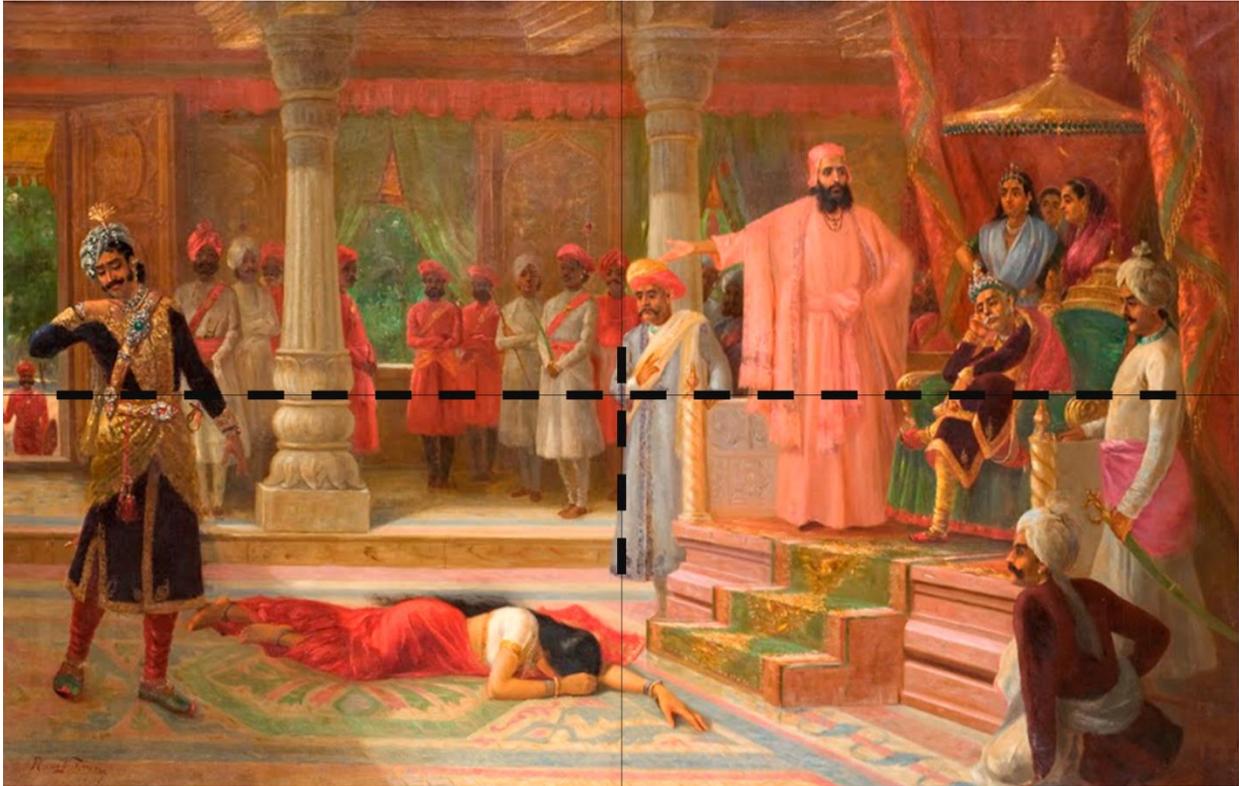
To look at how RRV achieves this more clearly, we're going to modify the image of the painting by increasing the contrast and decreasing brightness of the entire picture. This was done below by using the presets on MS PowerPoint.

- RRV masterfully ensures we subconsciously know that Draupadi is the subject of the work by attracting our attention to her. He uses **two tools** at his disposal to do this (and in the process perhaps even makes a point about the light and the dark sides of the figures they contain?):
 1. RRV divides the whole picture (virtually at the center) into two by placing one part in the shadows and another in the sun light... (the jagged red line below marks this division). This gives him two main sections where the characters are placed. Draupadi is lying on the bottom part of the light-zone.

2. RRV then plays with value (see elements of art section) and puts the lightest-light in the picture up next to the darkest-dark — the black of her hair versus the white of her blouse



- To look at other devices that RRV uses in composing this picture, let's bring the colour of the image back up and run a simple vertical and a horizontal line through the center of the image...



...and immediately we learn that the composition isn't random.

- Notice how the whole picture is divided into two sections:
 1. The accused and the victim on the left (along with the silent court in the background)
 2. The priest, king and his entourage on the right

- Also note how the left edge of the figure in the white (shown by the dotted black line) perfectly aligns with the central vertical
- The central horizontal (shown by the horizontal dotted black line) aligns with the top edge of the dais on which this figure's left hand is placed.
- This central horizontal also catches the top of the waist band of Keechaka, on the left.
- The same line aligns perfectly with the banding on the left pillar, the knee of the King, and the left arm rest of his throne.
- This clearly tells us that the whole picture is divided into 4 quadrants, with Draupadi on the floor on the bottom left quadrant and the gaze of the King, priest, and his entourage on the top right.
- Their line-of-sight immediately creates a — well, line (implied, in this case), that aligns with the diagonal from the top-right corner of the picture to the bottom-left corner (known as the Baroque diagonal), and is, perhaps, the main direction of force in the picture.

Awesome, right? But wait: there's more...

RRV masterfully keeps our eyes locked inside the picture guiding us on a particular path. And this really starts with Keechaka:

- Notice how Keechaka's head is framed by the door in the background.
- The bright white stippling of the jewels on his turban also frames his face.
- From there, there's a rhythm that is created in the lines of heads (and turbans) in the background as they draw our eye in a wave-like manner across to the right
- This implied line then conforms to the outstretched right arm of the priest, runs up and pasts his head and down his left and brings our attention to the King's face and the emotion it carries (by now we have experienced the various emotions of four characters so far).
- Moving from the king, the fold lines in the clothing of the queen then take us up to **her** face, then to the faces of her maidens and circling down to the two men on the extreme right — their gaze taking us to Draupadi.

And here's where the master artist shows his genius...

- Notice how the back of Draupadi runs along and aligns with the bottom of Keechaka's dark clothing?
- Now, this line really takes the eye further to the left and out of the picture (indicated by the arrow moving left and out below).

BUT RRV subverts this instinct of ours. How?

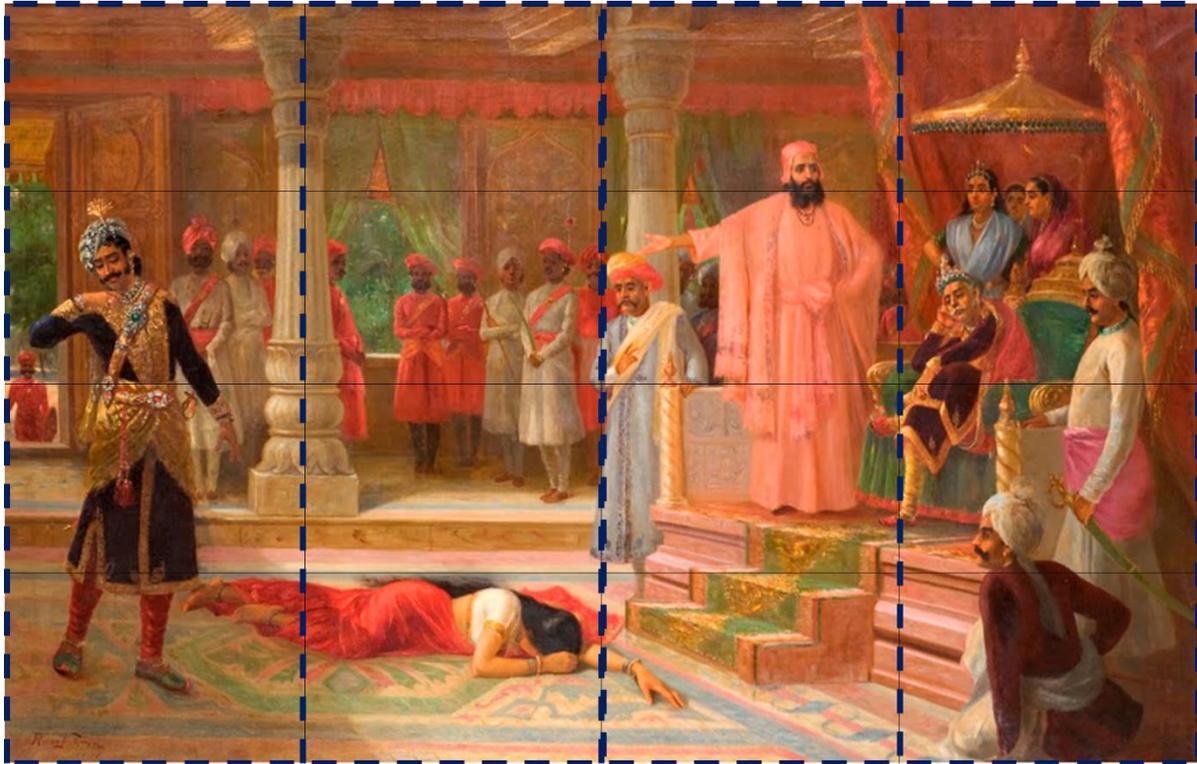
- He places another figure in the distant background — the soldier standing outside the court (and shown here in the yellow box on the left).
- This figure should typically be far more faded due to atmospheric perspective (due to the distance into the background at which he stands from the us, the viewer.) Instead RRV paints the figure in darker values **but** places him against a light ground, ensuring his form catches our eye... bringing it back along the diagonal of Keechaka's right hand and back up to his face — and the circle continues, thus keeping our eyes inside the scene.



- Thematically, the setting can also be divided into a foreground and a background. The foreground occupies the top right AND the bottom two quadrants.

And there's even more...

- Further adding quarter verticals in our picture "grid", it reveals more about the placements of figures and other elements of the scene — notice how NOTHING IS RANDOM in this work!

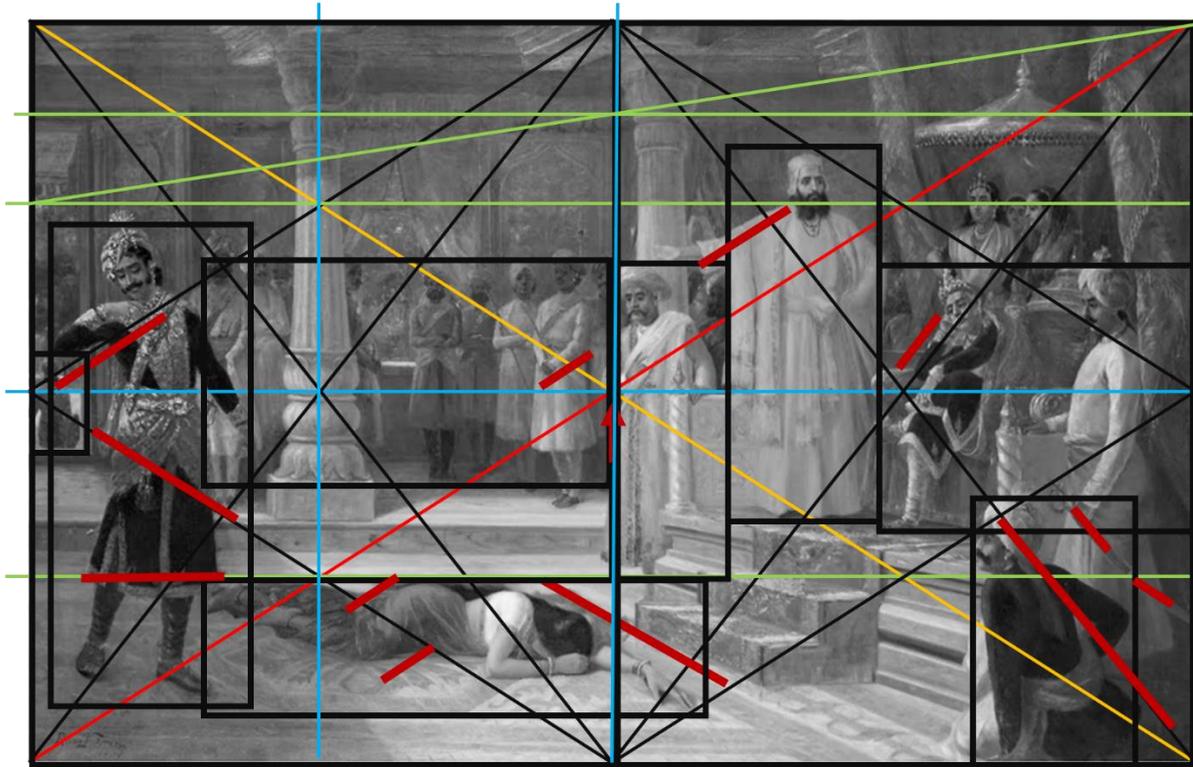


- In this format each vertical quarter frames each of the main characters separately:
 1. Keechaka stands virtually in the center of the first
 2. Draupadi is the theme of the second (remember: RRV put's her in the light with the most powerful contrast.)
 3. The Priest is the central figure of the third and
 4. The King the figure in the fourth

Additionally, notice:

- How the top horizontal quarter line runs through the face of the priest (and those of the queen and maidens)
- The bottom horizontal quarter line runs along the back of Draupadi
- The pillar in the background on the left is aligned in its center with the first quarter vertical
- The falling curtain above the king, the left edge of the umbrella above the king's throne and the king's foot align with the third quarter vertical
- ...

- And a host of other coincidences and alignments come to life when the picture is further subdivided geometrically as shown in the below image



STEP 4: Interpret

The key here is context. Remember the guiding questions: What is the intension of the artist? What is the subject of this work? Is there a story? What is the message, idea, feeling expressed by the work? What is the mood?

- **The Story:** We know from records and documentation that this was one of the first pictures that RRV was commissioned to paint for the Picture Gallery at Trivandrum. This scene is from the 'Book of Virata', the fourth book of Mahabharata. It discusses the 13th and final year of the Pandava's exile. The five brothers, Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva, along with their wife Draupadi decided to spend the year in the court of Virata. They assumed different identities and Draupadi became Malini — the hairdresser of the queen. Keechaka, a commander in Virata's army is attracted to Draupadi and molests her. In the painting, RRV captures the moment when chased by Keechaka, Draupadi enters the court of Virata seeking justice. Her husband Yudhishtira is standing in disguise in the court, unable to protect his wife. Draupadi is lying face down in anguish, humiliated and shamed. Keechaka is unapologetic and proud because according to him she is just a servant of the queen. And the court silently stands by and watches in the distance.

A final word on this work

All-in-all:

1. RRV has shown that he is master of his craft — this work is meticulously designed and nothing is arbitrary.
2. The overall effect of tension and drama is amplified by the use of masterful design choices and exquisite execution.
3. RRV manages to use the expressions on the characters and the setting itself to tell a very compelling story — thus captivating the viewers eye, mind and heart with consummate success.
4. RRV will remain one of India's greatest for a long time to come



Picture Credit: Collection of Manu S Pillai

Case Study Conclusion

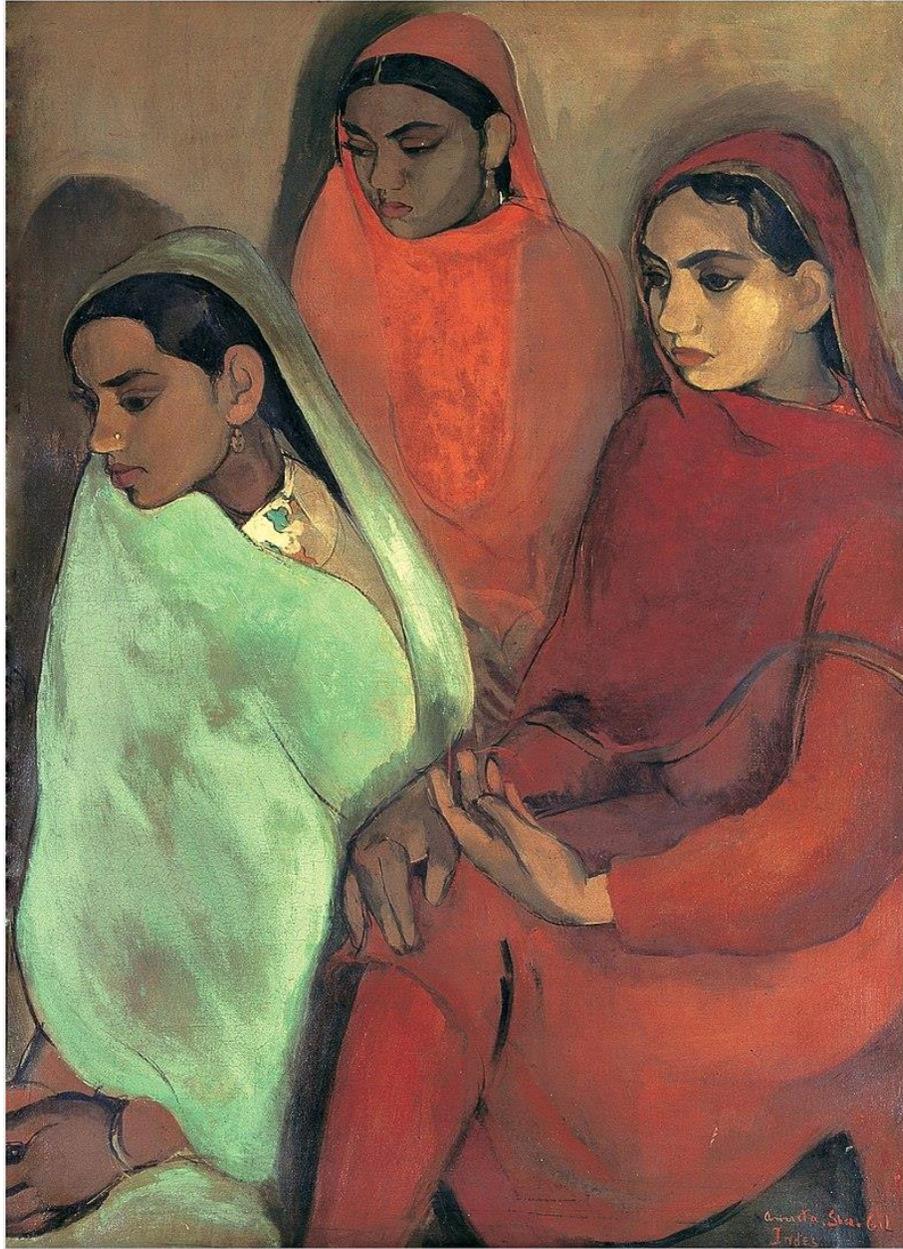
Like we've seen, there's more to art than just the making of pretty pictures. Art, as a field, is vast and holds something for everyone from creators to viewers. It really is essential to the values of expression, creativity, human development the development of society and freedom itself.

Let's look at some more art in the next section.

Experience Exercises

It's time to test what we've learnt and challenge ourselves!

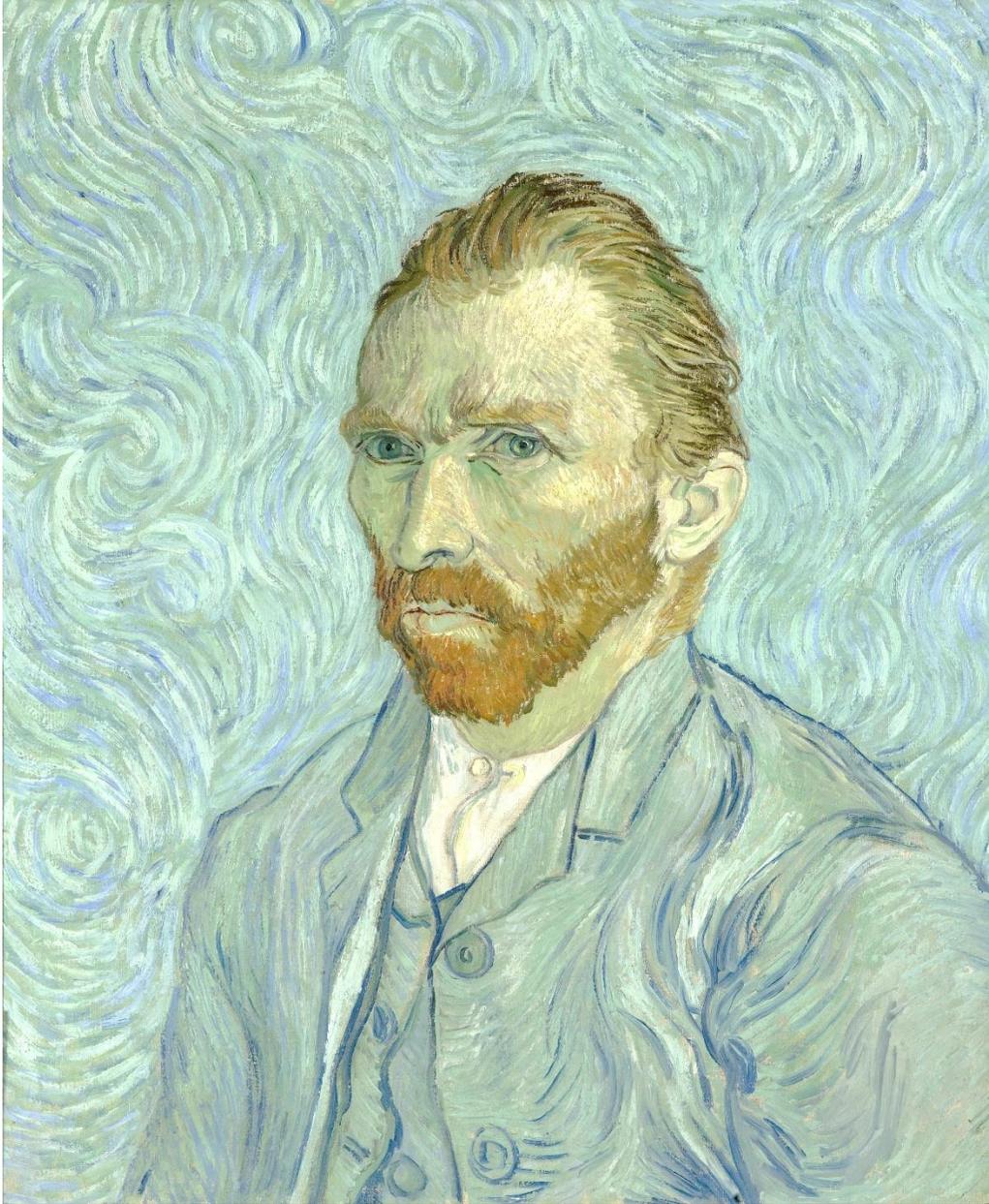
Look at the following works of art and, on a note book, list down the answers to the simple guiding questions under each image.



Painting
Amrita Sher-Gil, Group of Three Girls, 1935, NGMA, New Delhi.

Guiding Questions

1. How does this work make you feel?
2. What do you think is the subject of this work?
3. What is the primary element (of art) used in this work?



Painting
Vincent van Gogh, Title: *Self-Portrait*, 1889, Musée d'Orsay

Guiding Questions

1. How does looking at this work make you feel?
2. What is the primary element (of art) used in this work?
3. What are the top two principles of art used here?



Sculpture
Abastenia St. Leger Eberle, Title: Windy doorstep, 1910

Guiding Questions

1. What do you think is the main theme/idea/story behind this work?
2. How has the artists created the feeling of movement in this work?
3. What do you think is the subject of this work?



Painting

Vincent van Gogh, Title: The Starry Night, 1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Guiding Questions

1. What is the primary element (of art) used in this work?
2. How does looking at this work make you feel?
3. Do the elements/principles used have an impact on your feelings regarding this work?

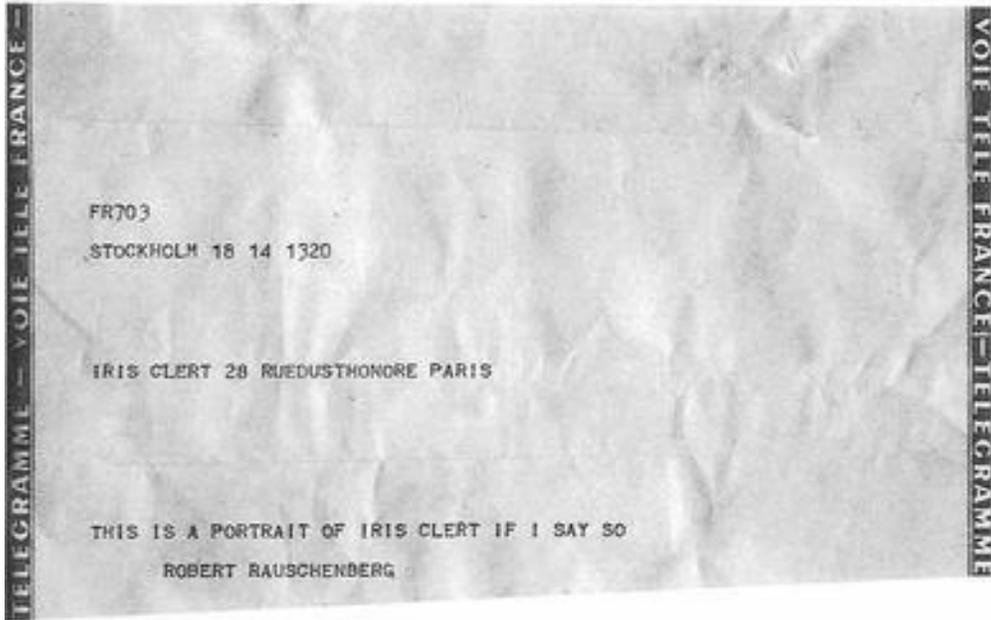


Conceptual Art

Anish Kapoor, Title: Turning the World Upside Down, Israel Museum, 2010

Guiding Questions

1. How does the use of the principle of Proportion impact this work?
2. When was this work was created? Is there a relationship between the work and the time period when it was made? What could this relationship be?
3. Would you classify this work as art? Why/ Why not?

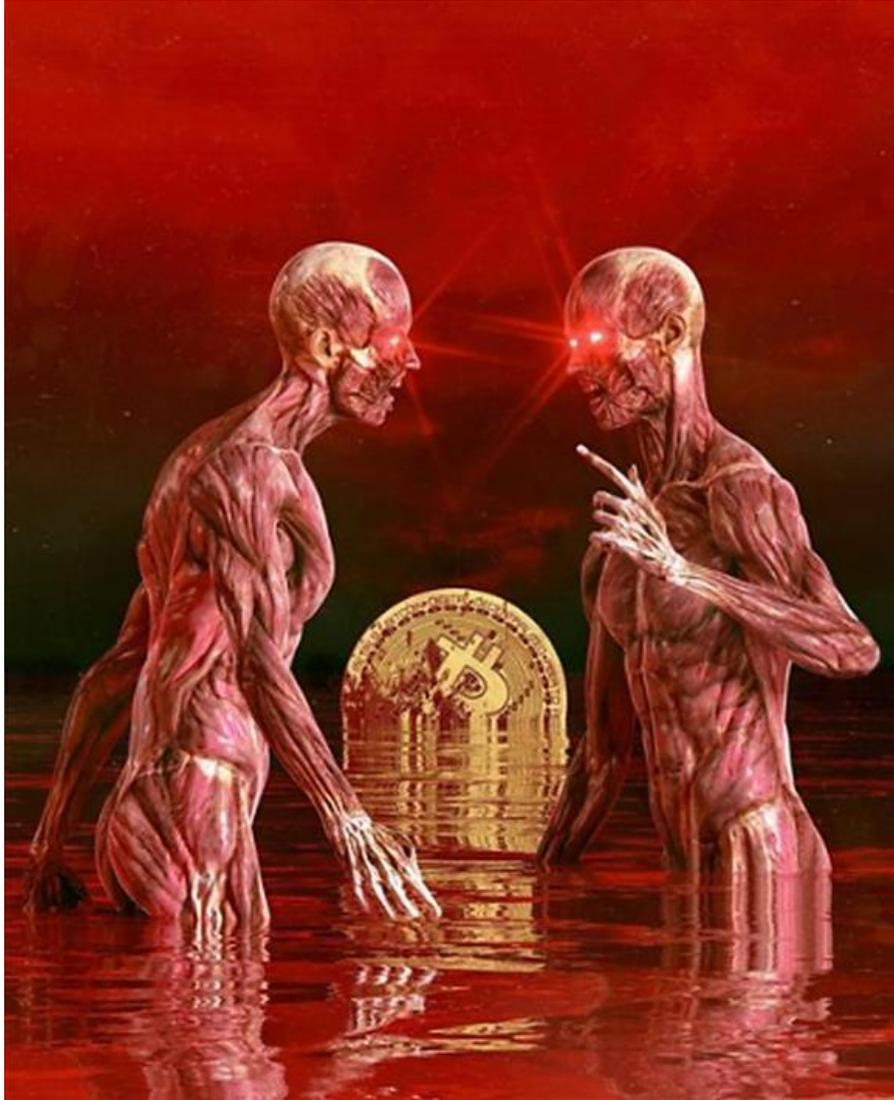


4.

Conceptual Art
Robert Rauschenberg, Title: Portrait of Iris Clert 1961

Guiding Questions

1. What do you think is the subject of this work?
2. Would you classify this work as art? Why/ Why not?
3. What do you think the artist is trying to capture/ say with this work?



Digital Art

Beeple, Title: CRYPTO TWITTER, 2022, Instagram Post © @beeples_crap

Guiding Questions

1. Would you classify this work as art? Why/ why not?
2. What is the artist trying to capture/ say with this work?
3. How does the use of colour impact this work?



Op Art

Bridget Riley, Title: *Shadow Play*, 1990, oil on canvas

Guiding Questions

1. Do the elements/principles used have an impact on your feelings regarding this work?
2. How does the use of the principle of Rhythm impact this work?
3. Managing the proper use of colour is a skill in itself. There are a variety of colours used in this work, yet they somehow DO NOT clash with each other; how has the artists managed to maintain this UNITY?



Sculpture/ Conceptual
Mark di Suvero, Title: Ave, 1973, Dallas Museum of Art sculpture garden

Guiding Questions

1. How would you feel standing under this work?
2. What is the name of this work? Could the name be a clue to what this artist is trying to make you feel?
3. How does the use of the principle of Proportion impact this work?

Top 10 **Art Terms** to Know

Just like any other field of expertise, there are hundreds if not thousands of terms and jargon used in art. Besides the ones that have already been covered in this book, we'll look at just a few of the most common:

1. **ABSTRACT ART:** Art that is not realistic. Also called non-objective art, can be defined as any art in which the depiction of real objects has been entirely discarded and whose aesthetic content is expressed in amorphous, organic or geometric patterns of shape, form etc.
2. **ART CRITICISM:** is the discussion or evaluation of visual art. A goal of art criticism is the pursuit of a rational basis for art appreciation. But it is debatable if such criticism can transcend socio-economic-political circumstances of the times.
3. **CLASSICAL:** In Greek art, the style of the 5th century B.C. Loosely, the term "classical" is often applied to all the art of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as to any art based on logical, rational principles and deliberate composition.

4. **FINE ART:** An art form created primarily as an aesthetic expression to be enjoyed for its own sake. The viewer must be prepared to search for the intent of the artist as the all-important first step before interpretation, communication or analysis.
5. **IMPRESSIONISM:** A painting technique in which the artist concentrates on the capturing the effects of light and colour.
6. **MONOCHROMATIC:** Having only one colour. Descriptive of work in which one hue - perhaps with variations of value and intensity - predominates.
7. **REALISM:** Any art in which the goal is to portray forms from the natural world in a highly representational manner. Specifically, an art style of the mid-19th century, which fostered the idea that everyday people and events are worthy subjects for important art.
8. **PERSPECTIVE:** The representation of three-dimensional objects on a flat surface so as to produce the same impression of distance and relative size as that received by the human eye.
9. **STUDY:** A detailed drawing or painting made of one or more parts of a final composition, but not the whole work.
10. **STYLIZED:** Descriptive of works based on forms in the natural world, but simplified or distorted for design purposes.

Top 14 **Art Styles** to Know Of

Of the many styles of art through the ages, the following are some of most common:

1. **ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM:** 1940's New York painting movement based on Abstract Art. This type of painting is often referred to as action painting.
2. **ACTION PAINTING:** Any painting style calling for vigorous physical activity; specifically, Abstract Expressionism. Examples include the work of Jackson Pollock etc.
3. **ART DECO:** An art style of the 1920s and 1930s based on modern materials (steel, chrome, glass). A style characterized by repetitive, geometric patterns of curves and lines.
4. **ART NOUVEAU:** An art style of the late 1800's featuring curves and swirling shapes based on organic forms.
5. **AVANT-GARDE:** A group active in the invention and application of new ideas and techniques in an original or experimental way. Some avant-garde works are intended to shock those who are accustomed to traditional, established styles.

6. **BAROQUE:** A theatrical style usually associated with European art and architecture ca. 1550-1750, characterized by much excessive ornamentation with curves rather than straight lines, and usually gaudily ornate.
7. **CONCEPTUAL ART:** An art form in which the underlying idea or concept and the process by which it is achieved are more important than the actual tangible work.
8. **CONTEMPORARY ART:** Generally defined as art that has been produced since the second half of the twentieth century.
9. **CUBISM:** A style of art pioneered in the early 20th century by Pablo Picasso and others. In the most developed form of Cubism, forms are fragmented into planes or geometric facets, like the facets in a diamond; these planes are rearranged to foster a pictorial, but not naturalistic, reality; forms may be viewed simultaneously from several vantage points; figure and background have equal importance; and the colours are deliberately restricted to a range of neutrals.
10. **DADA:** A movement that emerged during World War I in Europe that purported to be anti-everything, even anti-art. Dada poked fun at all the established traditions and tastes in art with works that were deliberately shocking, vulgar, and nonsensical.

11. DIGITAL ART can either be understood as any artistic work or practice that uses digital technology as part of the creative or presentation process, or more specifically as computational art that uses and engages with digital media. Digital art has several sub-categories including Digital illustration, GIF Art, Crypto Art and Net Art.
12. IMPRESSIONISM: A painting technique in which the focus is capturing the changing effects of light and colour. Often this style can be characterized by its use of discontinuous brush strokes and heavy impasto.
13. MINIMALISM: A style of painting and sculpture in the mid-20th century in which the art elements are rendered with a minimum of lines, shapes, and sometimes colour. The works may look and feel sparse, spare, restricted or empty.
14. PERFORMANCE ART: Art in which there is no concrete object, but rather a series of events performed by the artist in front of an audience, possibly including music, recitation, audio-visual presentations, or other elements.
15. SURREALISM: A painting style of the early 20th century that emphasized imagery and visions from dreams and fantasies, as well as an intuitive, spontaneous method of recording such imagery, often combining unrelated or unexpected objects in compositions.

Further Reading

Art Awareness and Education:

http://ngmaindia.gov.in/ngma_bangaluru.asp

<https://artsandculture.google.com/>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/>

https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/

<https://www.tate.org.uk/>

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs

How the Human Eye Works:

<https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/brain/optical-illusions-and-how-they-work>

Please Note: Some links above may not be clickable. If you get a click error, please copy paste that link directly into your browser

And That's a Wrap!

Thanks again for downloading and checking this post out. I sincerely hope you have found the information here fun and insightful.

Fine Art is a significant part of our history and development as a species; when art is created it almost always is a direct reflection of the people that make it AND the people that consume it. It reflects on their tastes, sensibilities, skills, thoughts, feelings, experiences and more.

Like with music, literature, theater, film and the scores of other creative fields, through art we hold a mirror up on ourselves, the times, and the society we live in. And we live in fortunate times indeed where the limitations of geography, access to information and access to new ideas, views, and experiences can be overcome with just the click of a few buttons.

I hope you continue on your journey to experience the best of what human creativity can offer, and I wish you well.

Thanks again. Take care!

Malcolm

www.malcolmfernandes.art

PS: stay tuned to my blog/social for more case studies, analysis, insights, updates on art and more. And do feel free to connect.

Later!

“Life is art. Art is life. I never separate it.”
– Ai Weiwei

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ART
ESSENTIALS
FOR THE EVERYDAY
ENTHUSIAST

HOW ANYONE CAN READ AND ENJOY ART...
(AND THE CASE FOR WHY EVERYONE SHOULD AND COULD)

Malcolm Fernandes