

Researching and Interpreting Art: Analyzing Whose Voice Matters

Authors : Donna L. Roberts

Abstract : Beyond the fundamental question of what is (and what isn't) art, one then moves to the question of what about art, or a specific artwork, matters. If there is an agreement that something is art, the next step is to answer the obvious, 'So what? What does it mean?' In answering these questions, one must decide how to focus the proverbial microscope -i.e., what level of perspective is relevant as a point of view for this analysis- the artwork itself, the artist's intention, the viewer's interpretation, the artwork's reflection of the larger artistic movement, the social, political, and historical context of art? One must determine what product and what contexts are meaningful when experiencing and interpreting art. Is beauty really in the eye of the beholder? Or is it more important what the creator was trying to say than what the critic or observer heard? The fact that so many artists -from Rembrandt to Van Gogh to Picasso- include among their works at least one self-portrait seems to scream their point -I matter. But, Is a piece more impactful because of the persona behind it? Or does that persona impose limits and close one's mind to the possibilities of interpretation? In the popular art text visual culture, Richard Howells argues against a biographical focus on the artist in the analysis of art. Similarly, abstract expressionist Mark Rothko, along with several of his contemporaries of the genre, often did not title his paintings for the express purpose of not imposing a specific meaning or interpretation on the piece. And yet, he once said, 'The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them,' thus alluding to a desire for a shared connection and revelation. This research analyzes the arguments for differing levels of interpretation and points of view when considering a work of art and/or the artist who created it.

Keywords : art analysis, art interpretation, art theory, artistic perspective

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