

Ideas and Problems in Art

Art as recognition

The seal of approval.

One of the ways I was taught to think about Art is this: Art is when you have a great idea and express it well. This statement sounds like a nice general definition of Art but the definition is not without error, or at least it is not without unresolved ambiguity. After all, how are “great” and “well” qualified? By what criteria are great-ness and well-ness defined? Moreover, what does it mean to “express” an idea? Does the expression have to be physical to be valid? Can the expression be purely emotional or mental? If we examine the statement further, we can delve deeper and ask- what is an idea? Why must art come from an idea? Can art be the response to a purely emotive, sensual, spiritual, or even accidental condition? Ultimately, the ambiguities inherent in stating that “art is when you have a great idea and express it well,” imply that there can only be Art when:

1. The criteria for establishing great-ness and well-ness are in place.
2. We know what it means to “express.”
3. We define what an “idea” is.

If we establish these three points for ourselves, we, as viewing participants, can recognize “Art” - Art as the well executed expression of a great idea. We look around and say to ourselves, “yeah, that’s a work of Art; that’s a great way to express that great idea.” At its base, the recognition of “Art” is fundamentally a cognitive point where a *logical, understandable* connection occurs between the abstract ideas we identify as being expressed and the physical properties of the work. The work becomes art because we can *understand* the ideas and accept the physical object as a *logical* expression of that idea. The stronger the ability of the physical work to match the construct of the viewer’s ideological model, the more the work obtains Art-hood. Like the words “good, or “great,” “Art” is a label of value, the worth of which is reflective of the level of cohesion between our perception of a work and our intellectual formulation of how it could perform the work’s principle ideas. When we really examine the statement, - “Art is when a great idea is expressed well,” effectively, art is not the great expression of a great idea, it is the label affirming our *understanding* of the expressed idea-form. In this case, to say, “That’s art,” is really an abbreviated way of saying “Yes, that is an important idea and I understand how the physical properties of the work relate to that idea because the work’s physical features are in line with my own sense of how that idea could be represented.”

The work is meaningless.

Don’t try too hard to... let them make it.

Art-hood, regardless of the object or act, relies on the relative strength and validity of the logical or emotional connections we, the viewing participants, can make. The strength of these bonds depends on our rational and creative ability, our ability to identify meaningful information - or find meaning in information, and our ability to accept the idea’s importance in our own world view. These abilities, in turn, rely on our neurological structure, chemical balance, and biological state, all of which provide the physical systems by which vision and perception takes place. What all of this establishes is that worldly objects are really mind-interpreted objects. The problem with assigning art the functions of conveying “meaning” or “emotional resonance”, is that things take their meaning from the context of their spatial and temporal order within the