

Can art change the way we view the world

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Can Art Change the Way We View the World? Susan Agee Classics

inPhilosophyof Art - P346 Gregory Steel Fall 2012 For centuries, art has been interwoven throughout the history of mankind. From primitive carvings on cave walls and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, to the Sistine Chapel and the Mona Lisa, artistic creations have enthralled the human race. Art may be a window to the creator's world; it has potential to instill desire in the viewer to do something they have never done, be somewhere they have never been and inspire to fulfill a dream or goal.

Additionally, Art may possibly allow the artist to illustrate their own perception of a place or even attempt to deceive the viewer. However, to truly understand how we see the world we must delve a little deeper than the obvious, which is through our senses, particularly sight. In order to comprehend the world around us, we must first realize that thoughts are based on perception foremost and that those ideas then create a subjective model of the world, constructed from experience, memory, logical inference, and our brain's ability to map out its own internal representation of our individual surroundings.

Therefore, whether it is through visual art, literature, poems, sculpture, photography or cinema, art may very well be able to change the way we see the world, by changing our perception. The first recognizable art dates from at least 38,000BC in Europe, Africa, and Australia. They are the products of minds as intellectually capable and sophisticated as our modern ones and they were just like us, despite the fact that their society was slightly more primitive than ours. Works of this early period are not simple, as if created

by a child, but in fact they are quite complex pieces depicting animals, humans and symbols.

Additionally, drawings similar to maps, as well as carvings, portable art and elaborately decorated animal skulls have been found in caves all over the world. In the book *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* by David Lewis-Williams, the author describes these items stating “ many of these pieces bear images of animal, fish, birds and, less commonly, what appear to be human figures as well as complex arrangements of parallel lines, chevrons and notches. These objects d’art as people tend to think of them, were made from bone, mammoth ivory, amber and antler” (Lewis-Williams 2004).

Were these ancient artists creating images to simply communicate with others or were they expressing their emotions in the only way they knew how? Although there is no way to tell for certain the artists’ intentions, it is evident that this “ art” played a role in prehistoric society. Still, art has not always had the same meaning as it does today. In fact, in the time of the philosophers Plato, Socrates and Aristotle the idea of art was related to the Latin word *ars*, which means craft or specialized form.

These individuals based their views of art on the notion that the artist must be trained for his craft and each had differing, yet very similar ideas about art and its place in society. For instance, Socrates believed that paintings and poems “ stand triply removed from the real; that is, there are two realms of existence more real than art objects, the Forms themselves and the things of daily life. The basis for this view is the assumption that the goal of art is the imitation of mundane reality” (Wartenberg, 13). Our brain has developed

a way of viewing the world over millions of years of evolution that enables us to succeed and survive.

Natural selection has tuned our brains so that we may navigate, manipulate, and meaningfully differentiate our environment and the objects contained in it. So what we see in our minds is a functional model of the physical world, which closely approximates it but is not identical to it; certainly not in the way we are in the habit of assuming. But still this traditional skepticism about perceptual experience has often created questions as to whether we can know that things are as we experience them as being, or if the visual world is a grand illusion.

To illustrate this idea that perceptual experience may be different than what is real, consider the optical illusion. Artists such as Charles Allan Gilbert and M. C. Escher were masters of the craft of illusion in art. For example, in 1892 Charles Allan Gilbert drew a picture that he called "All is Vanity". This piece of artwork is an ambiguous optical illusion using a skull, which has been the object of many pieces of this type, where we see more than one thing in the picture. If we view the overall image, we see a human skull. When we focus on the details of the picture, we see a woman looking in her vanity mirror. If we look at a close-up, cropped image of "All is Vanity", we don't see the skull we just see details of a woman sitting at her dressing table. However, if we expand our view, even without seeing the entire image, once we know we're going to see a skull, we can't help but see it. Also, when we look at the picture from a distance, because of all the black surrounding it, once the details of the woman get distorted we still only see a skull. Additionally, M. C. Escher used his expertise in mathematics to create his optical illusions in art.

He was fascinated with tessellations, which are arrangements of closed shapes that completely cover the plane without overlapping and without leaving gaps. Typically, the shapes making up a tessellation are polygons or similar regular shapes, such as the square tiles often used on floors. Escher, however, was fascinated by every kind of tessellation – regular and irregular – and took special delight in what he called “metamorphoses,” in which the shapes changed and interacted with each other, and sometimes even broke free of the plane itself.

The regular solids, known as polyhedra, held a special fascination for Escher. He made them the subject of many of his works and included them as secondary elements in a great many more. In the woodcut “Four Regular Solids” Escher has intersected all but one of the Platonic solids in such a way that their symmetries are aligned, and he has made them translucent so that each is discernible through the others. Additionally, among the most important of Escher's works from a mathematical point of view are those dealing with the nature of space. In the book “The Magic of M.

C. Escher” J. I. Locher states “this unique interplay between insight and limitation, between possible and impossible worlds has given Escher’s body of work a wholly personal presence in the panorama of visual arts” (J. I. Locher 2000). His woodcut “Circle Limit III” is a good place to review these works, for it exemplifies the artist's concern with the dimensionality of space, and with the mind's ability to discern three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional representation and Escher often exploited this latter feature to achieve astonishing visual effects.

To get a sense of what this space is like, one can imagine that he or she is actually in the picture itself. Walking from the center of the picture towards its edge, he/she would shrink just as the fishes in the picture do, so that to actually reach the edge one would have to walk a distance that, to the individual, seems infinite. Indeed, being inside this hyperbolic space, it would not be immediately obvious that anything was unusual about it – after all, one has to walk an infinite distance to get to the edge of ordinary Euclidean space too.

However, if one is observant enough, he/she might begin to notice some odd things, such as that all similar triangles were the same size, and that no straight-sided figure we could draw would have four right angles; that is, this space doesn't have any squares or rectangles. In addition to ambiguous and mathematical illusions, there is a process known as anamorphosis. There are two types of anamorphosis: perspective or oblique and Mirror, or catoptric. It requires the viewer to use special devices or occupy a specific vantage point to recreate the image.

While some of these works of art are more advanced than others, one thing remains constant; the perception of depth in a two-dimensional illustration. With mirror anamorphosis, a conical or cylindrical mirror is placed on the drawing or painting to transform a flat distorted image into a three dimensional picture that can be viewed from many angles. The deformed image is painted on a plane surface surrounding the mirror. By looking uniquely into the mirror, the image appears as it should in natural form.

Just as Escher and Gilbert were masters in creating works of illusion with their drawings, so too are the artists that give life to their renditions of this

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type. Salvador Dali was among many other artists of his time to have been intrigued with this form of art and utilized this technique in many of his paintings. Modern day artists of this sort use sidewalks, underpasses, buildings and pavement as their canvases. This type of art is referred to as “3D art” and it has been seen everywhere from London to New York.