

Jasper Johns target with plaster casts

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Understanding Jasper Johns' Target with Plaster Casts During the early 1900s, the trend in visual arts speaks strongly of expressionism particularly in the United States. Abstract expressionism finds its meaning on concepts based on structures and techniques that stand to symbolize meaningful subject matter usually of social events or personal experiences. Prominent artists such as Jackson Pollock who introduced the technique 'pouring' and Harold Rosenberg who is iconic for his 'action painting' are just two of the great names from the school of abstract expressionism. Another great name from this era is Jasper Johns. But unlike Pollock and Rosenberg, Johns' art makes use of non-introspective style. Non-introspective style finds no significance in the art itself but rather finds its meaning on the art object or the real object within the art. Johns believed that abstract expressionism void the real meaning from the art objects and thus preferred to express his work through Dadaism—the integration of both the medium and the visual art to understand its meaning. Hence, it challenges the viewers to redefine the stereotypical representation of the arts and look at it in a more inquisitive light.

The influence of Dadaism to Johns' work is evident on his Target with Plaster Casts.

Though Johns made use of primary colors—red, black, and yellow to color his target; the base was done in layers. The colors he used were strong and very straight forward. Looking at the art, one might find no abstract meaning but language through the use of primary colors. Since artists make use of color, shape, medium, or environment to convey separate meaning, combining each element morphs the art to represent a new meaning that viewers would

have to decipher. In this case, Johns made use of the technique and color to convey meaning: the predominant red color depicts violence; black is representative of both calm and control; while yellow symbolizes jealousy. The cyclic pattern of black and yellow represent human's capacity for emotion and survival instinct to control. The background being red represents violence. Violence in this sense is the basis from which human controls his emotions. This idea is further emphasized on the plasters of human organs—foot, face, hand, ear, penis, heart, breast, and lungs, placed above the target. Ergo, Target with Plaster Casts is Johns' expression of how human reality is able to define society. Of course there cannot be an exact definition for his art but he was able to convey the idea of bringing substance to an art object and for it to hold its own meaning.

For those who might have viewed Jasper Johns' art and are not acquainted with the artist, it would be fairly easy to misunderstand his work as an abstract art with the plaster providing symbolism, sign, and definition to the target. I for one would look at the different dimensions of his work and would rather interpret it based on the medium, colors, figures, sizes, and shapes of the art object/s. Jasper Johns' art reminds me so much of John Cage's idea of music. When Cage realized that his brand of music did not appeal to the public due to the lack of emotional depth, he redirects his music to represent his own philosophy and tries to communicate universal concepts of emotions through music. The same philosophy goes with Jasper Johns' art; his work does not communicate well with the public's stereotypical representation of arts. But then again, the viewers are not interested on the theory behind the art. Johns' use of non-introspective style finds no finite interpretation on the

art itself but finds its artistic value on the interpretation of the viewers. This is probably the biggest contribution of Jasper Johns as an artist in pop art—he filled the gap between two societies, the art world and the public.