

# Portrait of the artist as a young man



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Overanalyzing Art Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man People have been defining art as “ good” or “ bad”, “ proper” or “ improper” , or simply worthy or not since the first art was sketched on a cave wall. In the novel A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce, Stephen Dedulas continues the trend of passing judgment on art and beauty. However, art is merely an expression and beyond that it cannot be judged. Yet many people still look for formulas that can explain art in clean cut, single way. And although there may be art that is timeless and magnificent, art is anything that brings joy to the artist.

And anyone who limits themselves to only the art that fits with their specific formula is missing out on so much other art that the world has to offer. In A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, by James Joyce, Stephen Dedulas takes a philosophical approach toward art. As the novel progresses, Stephen searches for a definition and meaning in beauty. He comes to understand that art is, “ to press out again, from the gross of the earth or what it brings forth, from the sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of our soul, an image of beauty we have come to understand-that is art” (Joyce 185).

Stephen provides an idealistic explanation of art in which he connects the naturalistic world with the spirit of the artist in order to create something that is truly beautiful. Although Stephen does admit that what is beautiful to one person may not be beautiful to another, he explains that the beauty of an object can be appreciated in terms of its " integras" (wholeness), its " consonantia" (harmony), and its " claritas/ Quidditas" (radiance). Stephen explains these are the three essential levels to understanding beauty.

The first step is to, “ apprehend its wholeness” (189) and therefore separate it from the rest of its surrounding. The next step is to assess the art as if to break it apart and analyze it. Finally, “ the esthetic image is made a universal” (190) in *Claritas*. Ultimately, he explains, the moment an individual comprehends and appreciates these qualities of an object of art, its beauty gives off a spiritual experience filled with emotion. Stephen continues to explain how an individual can tell the difference between proper and improper art.

He describes, “ Beauty expressed by the artist cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens or ought to awaken, or induce, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an idea, terror, a stasis called forth, prolonged and at last dissolved by what I call the rhythm of beauty” (Joyce 184). Stephen states the theory that art should invoke esthetic emotions. These emotions are confined only to the intellect and are incapable of manifesting themselves in a physical manner Art must provide an esthetic stasis for it to be proper.

It cannot be based purely on Kinetic desires of the audience. Stephen then explains the three categories art can fall under beginning with lowest form, the lyrical, epical, and the highest form the dramatic. Stephens quest for meaning and definition in art and beauty is proven successful at the end of the novel. With the help of other philosophers such a Plato, Stephen finally found the definition he was searching for. In his theory he provides a definition of art and qualifications for beauty.

Although this theory is what Stephen has been looking for, many aspects of it overlook the purpose of art and overanalyze beauty. Stephen spends so much time trying to find a definition of art that he has not time to enjoy. And therefore he found a logical definition for art but never really found art for himself. Although Stephen derived a brilliant definition for art, he was searching to define something that should just be enjoyed rather than defined. Art comes in so many different shapes, forms, sizes, and colors.

But they are all beautiful because they are different. Art comes from the expression and beliefs of artist and that's what makes it beautiful. For example architecture is always different based on the location, empire, or time period it was made in. But each is beautiful because it tells the story of the artist. So rather than looking for a meaning that could suit so many forms of art people are better off just enjoying it for what it is. Stephen spent so much time thinking about it that there was not a single point in the novel that he actually enjoyed beauty.

Stephen puts a large focus on the emotion that is invoked by the audience upon viewing the art. But art is a reflection of the owner cannot be judged based on the belief of the audience. Of course there is art that is so beautiful to certain people that it brings about a so called esthetic stasis, but that may be different for each individual. So art should be “judged” or just reacted to by the emotion and passion put forth by the artist while creating it. If the artist creates something for his own pleasure or just for the sake of art, then it is true art.

In his theory Stephen also refers to beauty being, “ a splendor of truth. ” And truth is one of the key components of art. If there is truth and passion, even if it's not pleasurable to the eye, the object created is art. Passion is what creates the greatest art in the world. So maybe children can be considered the greatest artist in the world. They draw and create things that they see every day with their own eyes in the simplest manner. But every house, car, tree, or stick figure a child draws is done with such care and joy that no adult can tell them their art is not worthy.

Children, of all people, don't usually have an ulterior motive to their art, and that's exactly what art should be. The presentation of artwork, whether a photograph, sculpture, architecture, or painting is important as work itself. It is not meant to serve an ulterior purpose rather it should purely be an end in itself. Beauty and art should simply be enjoyed and accepted on their own terms and not constantly be categorized and judged. That's why nature probably has the purest beauty. Its untouched, un-judged, and cannot be categorized and put in a gallery.

True artist put their art out in the world because it brings them joy. Therefore there is so much art in the world, it's so easy to find. People spend so much time evaluating art that they miss the simple but beautiful art right in front of them: a child's picture, someone playing poker, or even the art of mastering the stock market. So instead of searching for the definition, Stephen should have spent some time enjoying beauty and art. The pictures that are in between the essay are each very different but yet are all art. The first picture is of Venice beach and a wall covered in graffiti.

At first glance people tend to overlook it. However, there is so much more to it. Graffiti is an expression of its owner, and although it may be different than the typical art in a gallery, it truly beautiful. The next picture is classic architecture of Greece. It looks very simple, just blue and white, with not a lot to it. But its Greece's architecture that dates back to their history just like many other forms architecture do. Finally, the last picture is of Yosemite National park. The picture looks very serene and untouched and brings about natural beauty.