

# Philosophy of art

[Science](#), [Geography](#)



Can the Practice of Art be Fully Justified? In general, most people tend to believe that they learn something from art. Also, there is a strong belief among many that works of art (all be it mainly good works of art) can certainly help bring on beliefs and knowledge of the world. Actually, some may even go as far to say that they can effectively achieve this in a way that no other past time can. There are though naturally many who would disagree. There are many people who simply believe art is just a 'diversion' or an 'amusement'. It is a question of the relative legitimacy of the role that art plays within society as a whole that has always been a subject of contention. For those who have the first belief, art makes a contribution to society that is both essential and legitimate; while for those who have the opposite view, art is literally a trivial pursuit that can be easily substituted by any other similarly trivial past-time. What appears obvious is the fact that most of us certainly gain something from our interaction with art. However, the problem that I shall be attempting to address within this essay, paying particular attention to the discipline of painting, is whether our experiences with art can actually produce knowledge and beliefs that are justifiable and whether they do so in a way that is unique to them. Also, I will attempt to argue the case that the answers to these questions are yes, by showing that our aesthetic pleasure is something that can be mutually shared within both our own culture and between cultures that are otherwise so different from our own, while at the same time telling us something more important about the world. It must be said that just about all artists are at least partly motivated in their creative activities by a need to try and understand truth much in the same way that any other knowledge seekers such as

philosophers and scientists. If we look at the word 'fact' we find that it actually comes from the Latin word *factum*, which literally means something that is done or made. If we then look at the word 'artefact' we obviously see we have a link here between the words art and fact. In the same manner, we can look at the word fiction and find another link between something that has been created and the truth. This is because the word fiction has several meanings including imitation, which is literally copying fact, and also feign, which is literally creating with imagination. This is a particularly interesting point because someone who feigns something is creating with their imagination and the outcome could be either the truth or fiction or perhaps even literally neither. Therefore, although we usually see fictions as being false, artistic fictions - including paintings - can potentially contain the truth or at least part of the truth. Here we can take the examples of the picturesque landscapes that were painted in the eighteenth century, a period that saw a great deal of social change. These painters would depict scenes of a rural existence that exposed the falsity of the idea of social harmony. While the paintings were fictional, there was an underlying element of truth and reality behind the aesthetic and pictorial elements. As we already discussed many art theorists or philosophers argue over the exact nature of art. Most will agree that art does involve a way of looking that generally leads to some kind of understanding. In other words, art can provide a different point of view that can definitely change our perception of reality. Paintings can do this by literally altering reality, which can give the result of telling us what is really important rather than just what is. Let us take here as an example some of the expressionist paintings where the painters were at liberty to

alter the more realistic elements of the paintings and distort them drastically in order to highlight the essential points that may be for example in the case of a portrait the real psychological character of the sitter. They can dispense with all that is trivial about our general lives and leave only what really matters. To put things in a different way, although a map can effectively show us where a place is, a painting of this particular place will tell us what makes this place important. Or to look at another example perhaps we would get more from looking at the Yellow House by Vincent Van Gogh than we would from standing in the street where the 'yellow house' sits. This is because looking at the painting includes an extra aspect and that is using the 'free play' of our imagination. By free-play of the imagination, I mean to say all those elements of reality that are hidden to us normally and that the imagination can bring to the fore. Again all those figures within the Van Gogh paintings for example dispense with the trivial aspects such as the correct and precise dimensions and rather concentrate on highlighting the essential points either of the individual's personality or perhaps something essential about their existence in the world. So as we have seen paintings have the ability to simplify things so that we can see what really matters, but they can also show us more – things that we have never noticed before. In her work "Truth and Representation" Rosalind Hursthouse puts this in the following way: " Artists create their own visions of the world in their pictures, and we discover, with a thrill of recognition, previously unrecognized aspects of our familiar unpictured world." (Hursthouse 276) Here Hursthouse is backing up the idea that paintings can open up points of the world that we didn't previously know and in this way can lead us to ideas that perhaps we have

never thought of before. Paintings can therefore alter reality in order to uncover and highlight the hidden meanings and show what is important and this can surely help us to make better sense of the world. => You need examples!! Perhaps this is why art has always been such an important part of our culture throughout history. So can painting and other art forms offer a way of understanding the world better, and can it do so in a way that is different to other forms that are looking for knowledge? For certain, human beings have always felt the need to understand the basic questions of why we are here and who are we. These are the questions that both science and philosophy have continually tried, and most of the time, failed to answer. It can be said that art can answer these questions more satisfactorily than the above subjects can. In his introduction to Hursthouse's " Truth and Representation", Oswald Hanfling writes that in " concepts such as those of art, knowledge and truth do not spring up at random; they are reflections of human needs and interests, of the situation in which we find ourselves and our perception of the world in which we live." (Hursthouse 4) Again, we can take as an example here the rural landscapes of a couple of centuries ago where the reality of the hardships involved in the life of someone working on the land could be illustrated. Or perhaps Picasso's famous paintings of the poor and needy that are always there to remind us of how some are missing the essentials in life while others enjoy untold riches. Humankind has always found it necessary to make art, as well as view it, as a way of understanding the nature of the world better. Also, as Joan Eileen has argued in her work " Art and Knowledge", it has to be said that painters don't always just try to depict the events and people of the present but also events and people in

history such as, for example, the numerous paintings of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. They also of course can paint pictures of a possible future by using the free-play of the imagination and combining certain elements together and perhaps exaggerating some of them. Therefore, painters create new visions of the world as we have seen but they also can re-tell old stories and make predictions for the future. They tell us how things once were, how they are, and how they will be. Therefore, art is different from other types of play simply because it is about something in other words it has content, and this content can be explored as we so wish. Perhaps we can now agree that art can have a huge influence on people. Many people have related how having been to an exhibition their perception of reality has altered to the point where they are determined to become better people. Some people I remember having seen the beautiful art that was made in the Muslim world have stated they began to see this culture in a totally new light; how can I not respect a culture that is capable of producing wonderful paintings such as those? said one. Also, it appears that it a fundamentally human characteristic to express ideas by way of creating works of art and it has always been that way. However, the question remains as to whether the world is a fundamentally better place due to this influence. It seems that the social, economic, political and religious problems that have existed in society since history began are as real today as ever. In fact, some may say that things are actually getting worse in this respect. However, if we look closer at the past a little closer we find that where religious tolerance, for example, was extremely rare. Today, however, religious tolerance appears to be more of a rule than a rarity even among political leaders and philosophers.

Although there is no data to prove that art has had something to do with this I believe that it has. The reasons for this are mainly because of the fact that it is hard to think of 'others' as bad or ignorant if in some way we connect to the other's art in a way that touches our soul. How can anyone look at those beautiful pictures of the Buddha and not be moved and affected in a way that makes them want to understand the Buddhist culture better. Art theorist George Legrady argues in his work entitled "Image, Language, and Belief in Synthesis that, " competence in reading visual imagery is an acquired skill similar to the process of learning language, a social activity defined by the norms of a particular culture". (Legrady 267) Paintings that show a people's spiritual side, whether it is love of their own culture or of their hopes for the future and even of their gods, that have some effect on us as viewers makes it hard to retain any prejudice against these people. This is because as the philosopher Immanuel Kant first noted in his Critique of Pure Judgement, aesthetic pleasure is something we can expect others to experience at the same time as ourselves. Art, I believe helps us to see other people and their culture in a different, more positive way, as something to be admired and hopefully in the future understood. Yes, I do believe that art alter our perceptions of the world in a way that is positive and justifiable. However, this doesn't necessarily happen immediately, it takes time but eventually it can certainly lead our minds onto higher levels of thought. It can also help us see the beauty in life a little better and, seeing as our appreciation of beauty is 'disinterested' in other words there is no factual purpose in the act, in learning to see the beauty of life and the world we live on , we will perhaps decide to take better care of it. This is why art can add an extra value to the

process of evolution we all are a part of. As the writer Aldous Huxley once said, "The more we learn the more we see" (Lester 62) and perhaps we could also say the more we see the more we learn. Paintings and other artworks continue to influence society massively, usually by way of emotional impact. Perhaps art alone can influence us well beyond the level of the intellect, and that is because it can reach us by way of the heart.

Works Cited Hursthouse, Rosalind, "Truth and Representation,"  
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