

# Arts impact on society

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Art is an extremely private experience, yet, it is meant to be shared with the public. Society, as a whole, examines the art produced and has the right to approve, disapprove, acknowledge, ignore, praise and abuse it. The public or society has not remained constant over the years. In the time of the Renaissance, for example, only a select few were "society." They commissioned art, were patrons of the arts and their artists. Today, almost anyone can share in the experience of art. They can attempt to create, view and act as a critic.

Does art make the world a better place, or is it quite useless? This is a very ancient riddle, and no one has solved it yet. A similar question - has art truly had any impact upon society? Has it fashioned or molded minds? Has it shaped opinions and altered how people feel or think? Is it practicable in or relevant to society and its individuals' daily lives? Art reflects life. It is a portrait of history, whether it is history of the current moment or an event in the past or something of the imagination.

Art has captured an event, clarifying its existence and representation to society. The portraits of the French Revolution by David, Benjamin West's portrayal of the death of General Wolfe and Poussin's recreation of the Rape of the Sabine Women all strive to provide a version of historical events. Society, in turn, can accept or reject these portrayals of true events. Sometimes, as in the case of Goya's depiction of the French behavior during their conquest of Spain, art inspires a deep hatred of a certain nationality. Art encapsulate a country's culture during that time period.

Rembrandt, Rousseau, Monet, Hogarth, Whistler, Jan Steen, Frans Hal and Breughel depict for their generation the world as they see it. They affect future society by providing concise, if sometimes imaginative, depictions of daily life. Brughel the Elder paints peasants, Jean Baptiste depicts lower-class life and Daumier's subjects in "The Third Class Carriage" are not the lofty work of Gainsborough. The wit and graphicness of Hogarth in "The Rake's Progress" or the imposing work of Thomas Eakins' "The Gross Clinic" provide historians with clues and pictures to a vastly different way of life.

Jan Steen's "The Eve of St. Nicholas" provides a way to uncover how people spent Christmas in the early 17th century in the Netherlands. Art has encouraged feelings of patriotism and national pride. Goya's, "The Third of May, 1808," the Americans portrayal of their revolution and countless other artists across the centuries have provided an impact extending beyond the work. Depictions of Washington crossing the Delaware, and portraits of battlefields, at home and abroad, are scenes that inspire society.

These works also remind the public of their past, what has been sacrificed or accomplished and what they can aspire to in the present or future. Artwork has also provided clues to lives long over and species since disappeared. Holstein provides us with portraits of people long dead e. g. Henry VIII, Erasmus of Rotterdam, as Rubens does with his painting of Marie de' Medici. Goya's masterful and psychologically rich work "The Family of Charles IV" lays bare the natures and relationships of this royal family for all of society to view.

Art has also provided examples of garden styles, structures to be imitated and fashions to follow. Artwork has allowed us to glimpse lives and lifestyles. At one time, dressmakers in the colonies used the artwork found in magazines and depicted in reproductions of paintings to create the latest in fashionable clothing. Art shaped a fashionable society where none had existed before. It allowed the Americans to be as up-to-date as their European counterparts. In the same manner, George Caleb Bingham with his painting "Fur Traders on the Mississippi" allowed Europeans a glimpse of another life.

The art works by the Jewish artists trapped in the concentration camps of World War II preserve for all time the horrors of war and the inhumanity inflicted by one race upon another. Art has also been a medium to help spread a culture. Art of propaganda during war is a classic example. Posters urge people to support their troops. Marketing ploys ask consumers to buy locally or purchase a specific product. Pop art is probably one of the most influential societal tools of the modern and post-modern age. The best possible example is Andy Warhol. His Campbell Soup Cans are now icons.

Art has stirred the imagination of all nations from the earliest time. It has helped roused patriotic fervor, brought new ideas and culture to light, raised questions and rewritten or reinterpreted historical events. Art has provided clues to the past and advanced questions about the future. Its impact continues to be felt emotionally. For, above all, art touches us beyond the intellect, reaching down into society's emotional core. In the end, the greatest impact of art is its ability to provide us with the truth about the world seen through the eye of an artist.

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