

# **Humanities 110: Discovery and Discernment Through the Arts**

## **Selected Readings**

Jennifer Hunter, Sharon Baldwin, Mitzi Vite Hernandez, Miranda Wilson, Sergio da Silva, Elizabeth Pingry, Matthew Hepworth, & Benny Yumul



# Table of Contents

Credits	1
1. Chapter 1: Appreciating the Power of General Education and the Allegory of the Cave	3
1.1. The Art of Discernment	5
1.2. Allegory of the Cave and Making Connections	15
1.3. Good, Better, Best	19
2. Chapter 2: Beauty and Creation	23
2.1. Creation	25
2.2. Adam and Eve	33
2.3. The Creation Stories from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia	35
3. Chapter 3: Visual Arts	41
3.1. Introduction to the Visual Arts	43
3.2. The Artist's Personal and Artistic Process and Vision	53
3.3. Visual Art Examples	59
4. Chapter 4: Seeking After the Good	67
4.1. See Life Whole	69
4.2. Art & The Good	75

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## Chapter 1: Appreciating the Power of General Education and the Allegory of the Cave

*Navigate this chapter through the topics below.*

The Art of Discernment
Allegory of the Cave and Making Connections
Good, Better, Best



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## The Art of Discernment

*In virtually all universities, general education courses are required as part of a degree program. You will gain much from studying a wide variety of subjects. Not only will you broaden your basic knowledge, but you will also increase your critical thinking skills. The humanities speak to the heart, men's aspirations for the good and the beautiful.*

### In This Section You Will Study:

- [The Why](#)
- [Two Ways of Reaction to the Heart and the Mind](#)
- [Considering Art Forms](#)
- [Art and Subject](#)
- [Art and Nature](#)
- [Ponder and Prove](#)

As you began your formal education at Brigham Young University - Idaho, there were probably many questions running through your mind concerning the classes you took. In virtually all universities, general education courses are required as part of a degree program. You will gain much from studying a wide variety of subjects. Not only will you broaden your basic knowledge, but you will also increase your critical thinking skills and hone your academic prowess.

We use quantitative reasoning in many settings and in every profession, from the kitchen to the business ledger. The US Constitution and the tradition of the rule of law have had a tremendous influence on nations well beyond the borders of the United States. In our technology-driven world, we are bombarded with science and pseudo-science; we need to be able to tell them apart. As travel and communication have become easier, an understanding of other cultures can make us better equipped to deal with the people we meet in business, church, or on the street. But why the arts? Why would the Church Board of Education mandate that sacred tithing funds be used to offer classes for every BYU student in the fine arts? We all use a number of skills learned in general education courses. Writing is important to people, but what about the heart?

“...You need technology. You need the professions. You need all of those things, but we need the heart also, and the humanities speak to the heart, men’s aspirations for the good and the beautiful.”

—Gordon B. Hinkley ([LDS Church News, March 19, 2005](#))

## The Why

We all use a number of skills learned in general education courses. Writing is important to people in every profession. We use quantitative reasoning in many settings, from the kitchen to the business ledger. The US Constitution and the tradition of the rule of law have had a tremendous influence on nations well beyond the borders of the United States. In our technology-driven world, we are bombarded with science and pseudo-science; we need to be able to tell them apart. As travel and communication have become easier, an understanding of other cultures can make us better equipped to deal with the people we meet in business, church, or on the street. But why the arts? Why would the Church Board of Education mandate that sacred tithing funds be used to offer classes for every BYU student in the fine arts?

Consider this statement from the 19th century scholar, John Ruskin: “Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.”

In relation to the idea of embracing art as something that can edify your life, consider the following statements:

“No one can feast his or her eyes on the art of Michelangelo and not see the hand of God. Michelangelo himself knew it, as he expressed in this statement: ‘The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection.’” (M. Russell Ballard, “Filling the World with Goodness and Truth,” ([Ensign, July 1996](#)))

“In the first place, some wise being organized my system, and gave me my capacity, put into my heart and brain something that delights, charms, and fills me with rapture at the sound of sweet music. I did not put it there; it was some other being. As one of the modern writers has said, ‘Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast.’ It has been proved that sweet music will actually tame the most malicious and venomous beasts, even when they have been stirred up to violent wrath, and make them docile and harmless as lambs. Who gave the lower animals a love for those sweet sounds, which with magic power fill the air with harmony, and cheer and comfort the hearts of men, and so wonderfully affect the brute creation? It was the Lord, our heavenly Father, who gave the capacity to enjoy these sounds, and which we ought to do in His name, and to His glory. But the greater portion of the sectarian world consider it sacrilege to give way to any such pleasure as even to listen to sweet music, much more to dance to its delightful strains. This is another short sermon.” (Brigham Young, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, April 9, 1852)

In our world, we are bombarded with information—much of it in the form of music and visual images. How can we sort through this sea of information? What are these enduring “remarkable qualities” contained in the humanities that President Hinkley mentions? We will be exploring these questions and concepts throughout this course.

[Doctrine and Covenants 123:12](#), says, “For there are many yet on the earth among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it.”

While Doctrine and Covenants 123:12 directly applies to the teachings of the restored gospel, it also has a great deal of merit when considering the virtuous, lovely, of good report, and praiseworthy ([Article of Faith #13](#)). We would have more of these qualities in our lives if we knew where to find it.

There are two ways of reacting to the arts: the heart and the mind. In this chapter, we will explore how the heart and the mind react to the arts so that we can have more of the qualities in our lives described in Article of Faith 13.

## Two Ways of Reaction to the Arts: The Heart and the Mind

In ancient Greece, philosophers were struck by the dual nature of humans. On one hand, we can be rational, analytical, thoughtful creatures. At other times, people can be so ruled by their emotions that rationality seems to be wholly cast aside. The Greeks described both aspects of the human condition by ascribing them to two of their deities, Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo was the god of truth, lyric poetry, and the sun. He represented the rational, logical aspects of humanity. Dionysus, by contrast, was the god of wine and fertility. He ran around with satyrs (half-man, half-goat creatures—another duality). He represented the emotional, irrational nature of human beings. Throughout the centuries people have sought to explain and discuss this duality. It has been loosely referred to as classical (Apollo) and romantic (Dionysus), as intellectual and emotional, and as the head and the heart. For our purposes, we will continually make reference to the Apollo and Dionysus dichotomy.



Apollo and Dionysus

Image from [nypl.getarchive.net](http://nypl.getarchive.net) CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain

As humans, we are a bundle of contradictions. That's why we simultaneously want to get good grades and don't want to study hard. We want to be married in the temple yet find ourselves attracted to the "bad" boys or girls. We all have ideals that we ardently believe in but don't live up to, and often the ideals themselves are contradictory—we want to have a successful career and be a model parent at the same time. The ancient Greeks embraced these contradictions and expressed them in the worship of a god or goddess that best embodied a particular emotion or viewpoint, like in the case of Apollo (the classical and logical side) and Dionysus (the romantic and emotional side).

This is perhaps best illustrated in two different religious cults that were both important in ancient Greek worship, the cults of Apollo and Dionysus. Worshippers of Apollo wrote and performed poetry and music that was logical, balanced, orderly, and clear. Apollonian music appealed more to the intellect than to the emotions. Musicians sang hymns to Apollo and accompanied them on the lyre (a plucked, stringed instrument like a small harp). It was ideal for meditative solitude, the perfect accompaniment to an afternoon of careful and quiet reasoning.

In contrast, Dionysus was the god of wine, and by extension, the god of unbridled emotion, of wild revelry. Worshippers of Dionysus sang and danced to music that was loud and rhythmical; instead of a single lyricist singing a quiet, simple, meditative tune, Dionysian festivals featured a full chorus chanting all the words together, dancing and acting out the drama, all accompanied by a noisy, nasal, double-reed instrument called the aulos, which was not a particularly beautiful instrument, but one that could be heard over the din of the Dionysiacs. The ultimate form of worship for Dionysus was the tragedy, a play that displayed men and women in the grip of passion, singing and acting and dancing in a great communal celebration of man's humanity. Instead of reason, tragedy was all about emotion—the emotions of the characters in the tragedy and the emotions the audience feels as they behold it.

While some art is very obviously aimed at emotions and other art is clearly more analytical, it is safe to say that both logical and emotional elements exist in all works of art. Some works of art achieve their quality largely through excellence in the structural details. Other musical works of art, such as an Indian raag or raga, with all its richness and mystery, draw on more subtle emotional elements. In fact, the word raag is said to have been derived from the Sanskrit word rang, which means "color" in many Indian languages. So we can say a raag is a work that "colors the mind" with a particular emotion. In the end, both of these kinds of musical art feature structure. Both also carry emotional appeal, but in nearly every work of art one aspect, either the logical or the emotional is dominant. The greatest works, like a Bach Fugue or an Indian raag, have the capacity to affect us logically and emotionally. Our pleasure is enhanced by understanding both the emotional and intellectual elements of the works we encounter. We'll be able to analyze the logical and emotional elements of various art forms.

## Considering Art Forms

In our exploration of the arts, we'll be focusing on several art forms: painting, sculpture, music, literature, and cinema. Of course, there are other mediums as well, but examining these previously mentioned will give us adequate skills to analyze others as well.

Certain art forms, like music or literature, could be considered time art. These works of art don't occupy a physical space such as time, as they have a definite temporal beginning, middle, and end. For example, the Book of Mormon begins, "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents" marks the beginning while the end is marked by Moroni's: "And now I bid you farewell, I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen." As a work of art moves along through time, we might consider if there are repeating patterns, or if the highs and lows of the artwork are temporally spaced in what seems to us a natural way.

Some forms of art (painting, sculpture, architecture) could be considered space art. In other words, these works occupy physical space and are experienced, or (received, and consumed,) in a spatial order: top to bottom, back to front, and so on. The issue of time doesn't come into the evaluation of space art as it does with time art. From a time standpoint, we can't answer these questions about a painting: Where is the beginning? What about the middle? Where does it end? How long will it take to experience the work? Statues exist in space more than in time just as novels exist in time more than in space.

There are some art forms that combine their existence in both time and space. A play exists in physical space: on a stage, yet a play clearly has a delineated temporal beginning, middle, and end. Consider, for example, the transformation that takes place when a work of art moves from time to space. If you read William Shakespeare's Hamlet, you have experienced the art in time.

Consider what happens when the play is staged or filmed. Act 1 Scene 1 of the play is the beginning, but now we are also going to consider spatial elements. What kind of set is created? How do the actors move? Does the spatial arrangement of the characters contribute to an atmosphere of tension and unease? These elements allow us to deepen our understanding of this work. Other forms that are combined art include dance and cinema.

## Art and Subject

Many works of art are created to represent or explore a specific subject. Subject in art answers the question, “What is it about?” Literature is an art form that nearly always has a subject. Paintings and sculptures are mostly representations of subjects. Architecture is, however, an art form that does not usually depict a subject. Architecture is mostly functional. It is an art form based more on “What for?” rather than “What is it about?” Music occupies an interesting middle ground in the realm of Subject. Some works of music were composed with a specific subject in mind, like Handel’s Messiah. Others were written simply as expressions of musicality, like the great traditions of folk music of indigenous cultures throughout the world. Music with a subject is known as program music. Music without a subject is called absolute music.

When a work of art is associated with a specific subject, we can consider it along those terms. When we understand the subject being presented, it gives us an opportunity to make some personal evaluation of the work. We can ask how effectively the artist has depicted the subject, but remember that the quality of the depiction is often more important than the quality of the subject. This leads us to an important consideration in the arts: the relationship between art and nature.

## Art and Nature

Pablo Picasso is reported to have said that “art is the lie that tells the truth.” Isn’t this paradoxical? When you looked at Michelangelo’s Moses, did you find yourself saying “He’s in really good shape for a man of 80 years old,” or did you think about a powerful prophet and leader? That’s likely what Michelangelo intended. The spiritual power of Moses can be in part revealed to us through the artificiality of the sculpture.

This artificiality is much of what appeals to us as we look at human creation. When informed that his wife has died, William Shakespeare’s character Macbeth responds with this:

“She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle;  
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing.” (*Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5)

After you’ve read the original language, read this modern-day translation below and consider the meaning:

“She should have died sometime in the future. The word *future* used to mean something, but not anymore. Time now moves slowly, one day after another, until the end of time. Everything we’ve done in the past doesn’t matter. Those things just lead us to our death. Then our lives can go out like a candle being blown out. Life is just a shadow, like a bad actor on the stage. Then, it’s over. It’s like a story told by an idiot, full of sounds and passion, but meaning nothing.”

Macbeth's monologue is an unrealistic statement from a bereaved husband, yet it reveals the futility of a life of evil. This is a profound exploration of the human condition—something that art allows us to ponder, like our place in the world and the very meaning of life. The truths this speech reveals to us represent in large measure the art of William Shakespeare.

Another example of using unrealistic elements from visual art is Nok terracotta sculptures from the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. The people who created these sculptures lived from about 500 BC to 200 AD. The heads on the terracotta sculptures from this group are larger than the figures' bodies, which, of course, is unlike a real human body. The sculptures' striking facial features are abstract, with oversized, oval eyes and highly decorative hairstyles. They do not look realistic, but they still clearly express emotion, although the exact nature of the emotion and their purpose is not known.



Kneeling figure, Nok culture.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#) CC0

Nature certainly is the source of a vast number of art subjects. An obvious and famous example of nature in art is the woodblock print, *Under the Wave of Kanagawa* (the Great Wave), created by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai between 1830–1832. Notice how the artist cleverly plays with perspective to make Japan's grandest mountain, Mount Fuji, appear as a small



triangular mound within the hollow of the cresting wave.



Under the Wave of Kanagawa (the Great Wave).

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Great_Wave_off_Kanagawa.jpg)

It is important for us to stop and clearly ponder the distinct differences between art and nature. The words of two French authors can lead us to some productive thinking about art and nature. Honoré Balzac speaking of art said, "The mission is not to copy nature, but to express it." Think how a work of art isn't an exact copy of nature. Michelangelo's famous Moses statue at first glance seems lifelike with its dramatic musculature and wonderful proportions, but at its heart, the statue is unnatural. Moses wasn't all one color; his hair, eyes, skin, and robe were not all variations of white. The light that people saw coming from his head ([Exodus 34: 29–35](#)) wasn't two marble horns. Moses wasn't stuck inside a niche when he descended from Sinai either; he was capable of movement and speech. If we want to be particular, we must admit that this statue is not realistic. And yet, the reality of what Michelangelo is exploring is profoundly accurate.



Moses, Michelangelo, 1513–1515, San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome.

Photo Credit: [Livioandronico2013](#) at [Wikimedia](#). CC BY SA 4.0

In this context, one can more easily understand the words of author André Gide: “I admit there is only one thing that is not natural: art.” And yet so often we explain to others that we like a particular painting, movie, or piece of music “because it seems so real.”

Maybe that’s not exactly what we mean. Perhaps we’re saying that the work of art has communicated something very deep in us that relates to our own reality. The art has spoken to our construction of things. Take a moment and read this excerpt of a poem (translated into English) by the Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi:

Spring has come and joyfully  
The birds greet her with glad song,  
While at Zephyr’s breath the streams  
Flow forth with sweet murmurings.

Her chosen heralds, thunder and lightning,  
Come to envelop the air in a dark cloak;  
Once they have fallen silent, the little birds  
Return anew to their melodious songs.

Translation and the original can be found at [Antonio Vivaldi](#)

Vivaldi then used these lines of poetry as the basis of his famous violin concerto, [Spring](#), from his larger set of works, known as the Four Seasons. Listen to the first movement. Listen for the way the solo violin imitates bird calls by playing short notes at a high pitch, and how lower-string instruments depict a gently flowing stream by playing flowing, connected notes. The listener hears the thunder when the lower stringed instruments rapidly move the bow back and forth on the same note (this is called tremolo). The violin solo then plays a rapid tone to represent the lightning.

People have loved these compositions for close to three centuries. Hearing it in conjunction with the poetry makes it even more enjoyable, and yet serious reflection leads us to some interesting questions: Does any species of bird sound like that? Does a



stream flow stay within the confines of a set musical key? Does the noise lightning makes resemble a rapid violin? Logically, we know the answer to this is an emphatic “no,” yet there is something in this artificiality that speaks a truth to us — an artistic truth.

## Ponder and Prove

The idea of artistic truth is closely tied to the “Ponder and Prove” step of the [BYUI Learning Model](#). It requires effort to reflect on the truths in a work of art. Some are obvious; others might be called “hidden treasures.” Think about music you’ve heard that expresses this truth, even though the piece has artificial characteristics (it is art after all). Musicians often interplay human emotion, artistic truth, and artificial characteristics to create music that challenges conventional boundaries and engages listeners on multiple levels. Consider Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor with the Ode to Joy sung by a choir. Perhaps a more recent group to consider is Piano Guys or One Republic.



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## Allegory of the Cave and Making Connections

*Study: Allegory of the Cave*  
*Greek Philosophy*  
*Making Connections with the Cave*  
*The Story of Marilyn*. Discernment is the ability to judge well or the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure. Not understanding what is around us is true, beautiful, and good makes this a difficult task.

### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [Allegory of the Cave](#)
- [Greek Philosophy](#)
- [Making Connections with the Cave](#)
- [The Story of Marilyn](#)

The necessity of opening our eyes in life to the truth and beauty around us is enhanced in many ways. As you read in the last chapter, the Humanities help do this. One major way a serious study of the Humanities helps us is in further cultivating the power of discernment. Discernment is the ability to judge well or the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure. Not understanding what is around us is true, beautiful, and good makes this a difficult task. There is also an important spiritual aspect of discernment. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we are blessed with the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Spiritual discernment helps us to understand or know something through the power of the Spirit. For example, it helps us perceive the true character of people. If we are able to discern through reason and spiritual enlightenment, we will be able to navigate this earthly existence in a much more developed and appropriate way. The ancient Greeks were aware of this.

### Greek Philosophy

Greek philosophy began in the 6th century, but now the general public does not know any of the names of philosophers who came before Socrates, who died in 399 BC. Unfortunately for us, we do not have any words directly from Socrates because he didn't write anything down. However, his most famous student, Plato, learned from Socrates and developed ideas from his teacher. In Plato's book entitled *The Republic*, Plato uses an allegory to explain a number of things that have been greatly expanded over the centuries. Its original intent was to show that our (humankind's) ultimate goal should be ever striving toward The Good, or all that which is really true and real, which is represented by the sun. We are all blinded to this by the world around us.

## The Allegory of the Cave

### Making Connections with the Cave

Joseph Smith is easily seen within the allegory of the cave. In this analysis, Joseph was sitting in the cave looking at the shadows on the wall and recognizing something was off. Due to the great religious contention in the area that Joseph Smith grew up in, he stated, “During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties ... In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong ... In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them is right, which is it, and how shall I know it?” ([JSH 1:8–10](#)) It is at this point that Joseph Smith read [James 1:5](#): “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God ...” Joseph was able to notice that the shadows on the wall were not true reality. Something was wrong. It didn’t make sense to him. Joseph was able to stand up, breaking his shackles, to see a new and better way. Missionaries go out and try to help people do the same. For any of you who have served missions, you will recognize it is not easy to even help people recognize that they are missing something in their lives.

As imperfect humans, we can all improve, become someone better, and find a more enlightened way to live our lives. But do we spend the time or even the inclination to do so? Do we try to discern not only the world around us but what is within us? The time period that we live in has become an age of distractions where we lose precious time on things that may not really matter. We are not suggesting that there is not a place for social media or video games. However, in 2023, the average Internet user spent 150 minutes a day (almost 2 1/2 hours) on social media ([techjury](#)). This statistic does not include video games, TV, movies, and so on. Think about your time usage. How often have you decided to watch five minutes of videos that turned into one or even five hours?

### The Story of Marilyn



Elder and Sister Hafen.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of BYU-Idaho Special Collections & Archives.

Marie Hafen, wife of former President of Ricks College (now BYU-Idaho) and later member of the First Quorum of the Seventy Bruce Hafen, tells this story:

A friend I will call Marilyn is enjoying a far richer life today than would have been the case if the world of books and beauty had not opened her eyes and her mind. Marilyn grew up in a small town where the most important things in her friends' lives were being popular and being seen with handsome, athletic guys. She dated a young man who was a natural leader, but at the time he had no serious aspirations for his life. Then Marilyn went with her family to pick up her brother at the end of his mission.

For the first time in her life, Marilyn opened her eyes to the size and wonder and richness of the world: She visited great art galleries and historic cathedrals; she saw the remnants of aristocracy and the grimness of urban poverty; she sang hymns in a foreign tongue; she saw mountains and oceans she never knew existed.

When she returned, her hometown was not the same. Looking at everything with new eyes, she realized that she was far from ready to make serious commitments to her immature boyfriend. From that time on, her thirst for learning took her far beyond the days when the city limits of her hometown had been the limits of her aspirations.

Now Marilyn's continuing curiosity and broad vision of life enhance her well-developed religious faith. Her life is more full, her service to others is more meaningful, and her children share her insights—all because she reached beyond the boundaries of a teenage mind to touch the broader boundaries of an educated mind. (Hafen, [2023](#))

This Humanities course is designed to start you on the same path as Marilyn—to move you beyond your present boundaries and open your mind, heart, and spirit to the world of artistic creation.



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## Good, Better, Best

*You will study: Being 1% Better Good, Better, Best being 1% better. In this section, you will learn how to be better than you are now. In This Section, You will study how to become 1% better than you were before you were born.*

### In This Section

You will study:

- [Being 1% Better](#)
- [Good, Better, Best](#)

### Being 1% Better

As imperfect humans, we can all improve, become better, and find a more enlightened way to live our lives. But do we spend the time or even the inclination to do so? Do we try to discern not only the world around us but what is within us? Some say that the time period that we live in is known as the Information Age in which human history is characterized by the shift from industrial production to one based on information and computerization. But with this ease of access to information, we are experiencing an Age of Distractions where we lose precious time on things that may not really matter. We are not suggesting that there is not a place for social media or video games. However, in 2022, the average Internet user spent 147 minutes a day (almost 2 1/2 hours) on social media. This statistic does not include video games, TV, movies, and so on. Globally, the average technology user spends six and a half hours per day looking at a screen (Howarth, 2023). Think about your time usage. How often have you decided to watch five minutes of videos that turned into one or even five hours?

#### REMEMBER:

One of the acts of discernment necessary in life is the choice of our time and the choice of media.

### Good, Better, Best



**Good – Better – Best**  
Dallin H. Oaks

"We should begin by recognizing the reality that just because something is good is not a sufficient reason for doing it. The number of good things we can do far exceeds the time available to accomplish them. Some things are better than good, and these are the things that should command priority attention in our lives.... Some uses of individual and family time are better, and others are best. We have to forego some good things in order to choose others that are better or best because they develop faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and strengthen our families."

"Good, Better, Best" Ensign, November 2007, p. 104-108

Elder Dallin H. Oaks' talk on "[Good, Better, Best](#)" offers valuable insights into the principles of prioritization, goal setting, value-based decision-making, and continuous improvement. These principles can be applied to the concept of becoming 1% better every day by helping individuals make choices that lead to personal growth, the achievement of goals, and the optimal use of their time and resources.

You may have heard about the British cycling team that made a 1% improvement in a host of tiny areas which ultimately led to five riders winning the Tour de France. Sir Bradley Wiggins won the Tour de France in addition to several World and Olympic championships in both the track and the road cycling events. As of this writing, he is the only rider to have won championships in both. What made the difference? The British cycling team chose the best uses of their time and made consistent efforts to improve, no matter how small the increments. Their efforts lead to exceptional outcomes and demonstrate that choosing the best choice, even in small amounts can result in extraordinary experiences in various aspects of life.

A study of the humanities does so many different things to improve the individual. One of these benefits is to help individuals discern that which is beautiful, that which is truthful, and that which is good. This course will examine all of these areas beginning with the creative process itself next week. The importance of this is to recognize, among other things, how artists follow the process by which God created the heavens and the earth.

Watch the following video from Elder Oaks.





[Watch on YouTube](#)

Elder Dallin H. Oaks' talk on "Good, Better, Best" offers valuable insights into the principles of prioritization, goal setting, value-based decision-making, and continuous improvement. These principles can be applied to the concept of becoming 1% better every day by helping individuals make choices that lead to personal growth, the achievement of goals, and the optimal use of their time and resources.

A study of the humanities does so many different things to improve the individual. One of these benefits is to help individuals discern that which is beautiful, that which is truthful, and that which is good. Artists discover new creative possibilities and self-awareness through their artistic journeys, while audiences engage in discernment and interpretation, leading to a deeper appreciation of art's significance and impact. These elements collectively contribute to the profound role of the arts in personal and cultural exploration and expression. This course will examine all of these areas beginning with the creative process itself next week. The importance of this is to recognize, among other things, how artists follow the process by which God created the heavens and the earth.



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## Chapter 2: Beauty and Creation

### Bringing Order to Chaos

*Navigate this chapter through the topics below.*

Creation
Adam and Eve
The Creation Stories from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia



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## Creation

*This course seeks to understand principles associated with beauty and creativity as they relate to the arts. We will examine the creative process and vision of artists, composers, authors, and filmmakers. In varying degrees, each will follow in the footsteps of how God created things by bringing order to chaos.*

### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [Beauty and Creation: Bringing Order to Chaos](#)
- [The Second Law of Thermodynamics](#)
- [The First Law of Thermodynamics](#)
- [Three Major Themes](#)

### Beauty and Creation: Bringing Order to Chaos

Over the course of this week, you will have the opportunity to examine the creative process and vision of artists, composers, authors, and filmmakers. In varying degrees, each will follow in the footsteps of how God created things by bringing order to chaos through paint or brushstrokes, notes, words, and film frames to portray the vision and purpose of their creation.

This course seeks to understand principles associated with beauty and creativity as they relate to the arts. One effective way of learning is to associate ideas that we already understand to situations that are less familiar to us. We will take this approach as we seek to learn about the arts by applying truths regarding the creation of the earth to artistic creations.



A detail of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, by Michelangelo.

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia](#). Public Domain.

From the scriptural accounts of the creation of the earth, we learn several important truths about the creative process in general. These principles are as true for creation in the arts as they are for the creation of the universe.

The Book of Genesis starts with these words: “In the beginning, God created heaven and the earth” ([Genesis 1:1](#)). Herein we find the first principle of creation: things don’t just spontaneously come into existence—they are fashioned by a creator. No painting, no piece of music, no poem, novel, play, film, dance, building, or any other form of art ever came into existence on its own. Each work was the result of a deliberate act of a creator.

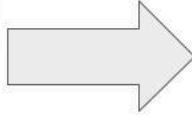
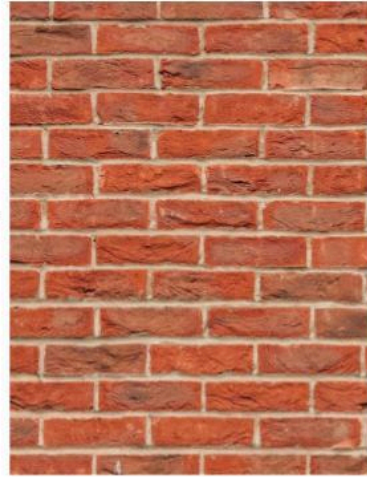
The fact that every creation is the result of a conscious choice of a creator leads to another related principle: things are created for a reason. In the Book of Moses, we learn the reason why God created this world: “;For behold, this is my work and my glory— to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”([Moses 1:39](#)). There are a myriad of reasons why people create works of art, but we will discuss these at a later time.

Returning to Genesis, we continue reading: “And the earth was without form, and void” ([Genesis 1:2](#)). Without form means without structure or order or organization—or, to use a word we borrowed from the Greeks, it was chaos. Because the earth was in this chaotic state, it was void or useless, ineffectual, and empty. We will refer to this throughout the chapter, but Genesis goes on to describe the series of steps the Lord followed as He created order out of chaos, separating the light from the dark, the land from the water, and so on.

## Disorder



## Order



Fallen Bricks. Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#), CC BY-SA 4.0; Brick Wall. Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#), CC0

## Creation is the process of creating order out of chaos

This is a concept that has been understood by philosophers at least as far back as the ancient Greeks, but it was expressed more recently in 1824 by French scientist Sadi Carnot, who in 1824 first expressed what is now known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

## The Second Law of Thermodynamics

This law describes a natural phenomenon known as entropy, which is the tendency for molecular disorder. More simply stated, the Second Law of Thermodynamics is that the natural state of things is chaos and that orderly things tend to revert to a state of disorder unless acted upon by an outside force. Summarizing an article about this law by prominent molecular biologist Lyle Watson, Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley writes this:

*Left to itself, everything tends to become more and more disorderly, until the final and natural state of things is a completely random distribution of matter. Any kind of order is unnatural, and happens only by chance encounters. These events are statistically unlikely and the further combination of molecules into anything as highly organized as a living organism is wildly improbable. Life is a rare and unreasonable thing" (Nibley, 1992).*

According to Watson and other scientists, the Second Law of Thermodynamics dictates that there shouldn't be order in the universe, yet it is a highly ordered system. Still, as Nibley points out, there is a core of secularist scholars who accept that the natural state of the cosmos is chaos and that the probability that molecules could arrange themselves into a single living organism is infinitesimal, but will also ironically insist that our whole solar system somehow defied this law and became orderly by sheer chance. As Nibley wittily puts it, "I don't know any religious person who ever had greater faith than that." Regarding the obvious existence of order in the universe, Alma teaches that "all things denote

there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” ([Alma 30:44](#)).

When orderliness at first glance appears to occur randomly, it will in the light of all the facts prove to be the result of a conscious and deliberate act. As the poet Alexander Pope expressed in his *Essay on Man*, “This but a part we see, and not a whole.”

If the natural state of things is chaos and organized things tend to fall apart, then as some scientists have concluded, there must be another force, which counteracts **entropy** (chaos) and tends towards symmetry and coherence. This allows organized matter to exist. The opposite to this orderly force is sometimes referred to as **syntropy** (you may have heard it called negentropy). Scientists still do not fully understand this force, but they know it exists because we are here we are, not random particles of matter, but as living, breathing organisms. In the scriptures, another term is used to describe the organizing force in the universe: the light of Christ.

*This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlightened your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings;*

*Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—  
The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things” (D&C 88:7–13).*

At this point, it might be worthwhile to consider why orderliness is so important. We have already concluded that when the earth was without form, it was void, or useless. It had to be organized in order to achieve its purpose. Moreover, there seems to be something divine about orderliness. Speaking to Joseph Smith, the Lord stated, “Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion” ([D&C 132:8](#)). As we explore the notion of order in the arts, we will identify some of the patterns, structures, and design elements commonly used in visual art, music, literature, and architecture.

The opposite of creation is destruction. God is a creator who seeks to produce order, harmony, balance, and beauty; Satan is a destroyer who promotes confusion, strife, contention, and ugliness. The more we seek after order, whether it is in our lives and families, or in creating art, the more we become like God. When people cannot (or will not), find beneficial means to express their creativity, they follow Satan’s example and become destructive.





The pale spiral galaxy NGC 4921 as photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

## From the Book of Abraham's Account of the Creation of the Earth, We Discover Another Truth about Creation.

The Lord states, "We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take off these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell" ([Abraham 3:24](#)). Creation is not a magic act wherein something is conjured up out of nowhere. Rather, creation is the process of organizing existing materials. Many in the Christian world believe in the idea of creation *ex nihilo* (Latin for "from nothing"). Christian theologians developed this idea in the 2nd century AD as they blended ideas from Greek philosophy with scripture. Perhaps they thought that it made God more majestic if He could create the world out of nothing, but it completely opposes common sense. It is impossible to make anything from nothing. For example, we make a cake by combining existing ingredients together: flour, oil, eggs, sugar, baking powder, and flavoring, and producing something different altogether.

Read these scriptures regarding the creation of humankind:

- [Genesis 1:27](#)
- ([Genesis 2:7](#)

From these scriptures, we learn that God organized our mortal bodies from the same elements that are found in the earth: hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, iron, magnesium, and so on, and that He formed them into the shape of His body and that he enabled our spirits to inhabit our bodies so that we become a living soul.

Our spirits, too, are not created *ex nihilo*, as we learn in Doctrine and Covenants, "For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy" ([D&C 93:33](#)). In another place, we read,

“There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes; We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified we shall see that it is all matter” ([D&C 131:7–8](#)).

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## “Nothing, not even our spirits, is made from nothing”

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These verses suggest that the soul of man is composed of two kinds of matter: refined matter for our spirits and a coarser element for our bodies. We also learn that these two forms of matter need to be inseparably connected in order for us to receive a fullness of joy. **The point here is that nothing, not even our spirits, is made from nothing. Thus, Creation is the process of organizing elements, or stated another way, everything is made out of something.** This principle is also encapsulated in a scientific law: the First Law of Thermodynamics.

### The First Law of Thermodynamics

The First Law of Thermodynamics describes the fact that matter and energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only be transformed. Water can become ice when exposed to cold temperatures, or it can become vapor when it evaporates, but it never ceases to exist. This is what the Lord was referring to when he told Adam and Eve, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” ([Genesis 3:19](#)).

Can you see how this principle applies to the arts? Let’s look at a few examples. How do artists create a painting? They take pigments derived from plants or minerals and organize them into patterns on some kind of surface. How do poets create poems? They take existing words and sounds and organize them into meters and rhyme schemes so as to communicate ideas and feelings. How do musicians create music? They organize beats and vibrations to create melodies, harmonies, and rhythms.

## Three Major Themes

In this course, we will focus on three major themes that can be related to creation, life, relationships, experiences, and of course the arts. These are: Beauty, Truth, and Good.

For example, the creation of the earth gives us insight into the concept of beauty. In [D&C 59:16–19](#), we read this:

*Verily I say, that inasmuch as ye do this, the fulness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth;*

*Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards;*

*Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart;*

*Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul.*

In these verses we learn that God created everything that we need to survive: food, clothing, and shelter. But what’s interesting here is that He made them in such a way as to give us pleasure, to “please the eye and to gladden the heart

(["D&C 59:18"](#)). "He gave us not just that which we needed to "strengthen the body (["D&C 59:19"](#))," but He made them in a manner that would "enliven the soul (["D&C 59:19"](#)))." He could have said, "All you need for food is tofu, so here you are." No, he created all kinds of animals and fish and grains and fruits and herbs and spices in all kinds of shapes, sizes, colors, textures, flavors, and smells to give us pleasure in life. Muhammad is said to have stated, "God is beautiful, and He loves beauty (["Islam Today"](#))." Some of our course goals are to gain a greater understanding of the nature of beauty, how beauty "enlivens the soul" and how beautiful art in all its forms can draw us closer to God.

We tend to think that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but there are natural laws associated with beauty just as the laws of thermodynamics are connected to creation. Later on, we will examine some of the bounds and conditions that govern beauty, both in God's creations and in art, including such elements as ideal proportions, principles of color, texture, and organizational patterns that "please the eye and gladden the heart."

Another concept that is related to beauty, and that will be a significant part of our course, is truth. We live in an age where truth is seen as relative. Some modern philosophers argue that there is no absolute truth. What may be true to one person might not be true for another and vice versa. This might sound like a tolerant and open-minded viewpoint, but it is neither. It actually shows that people are not open-minded to the views of others and that they might be wrong (and thus intolerant). Christ said that He is the way, the truth, and the light. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we believe in absolute truths not only of the gospel, but also in all things. Brigham Young had a lot to say about this concept. For example,

*"Mormonism, embraces every principle pertaining to life and salvation, for time and eternity. No matter who has it. If the infidel has got the truth it belongs to "Mormonism." The truth and sound doctrine possessed by the sectarian world, and they have a great deal, all belong to this Church. As for their morality, many of them are, morally, just as good as we are. All that is good, lovely, and praiseworthy belongs to this Church and Kingdom. "Mormonism" includes all truth. There is no truth but what belongs to the Gospel. "It is life, eternal life; it is bliss; it is the fulness of all things in the gods and in the eternities of the gods" ([Discourses of Brigham Young, 1865](#)).*

Finding truth in the arts can be a bit more of a daunting task. In a talk given at the BYU Wheatley Institute in 2017, Sir Roger Scruton, an English philosopher, stated, "In religion, we recognize that there's no redemption through falsehood, and the same seems to be true of art ... Art has its own way of presenting the spiritual truth of things, and if it falsifies, then it doesn't produce the kind of redemptive consolation that we're looking for through a work of art."

The final major theme we will focus on this semester is "The Good." The Old Testament manual of study stated that, "Adam and Eve were the crowning point of the Creation, but pause for a moment to think of the Creation itself. It was the Father directing the creation of a home for His children. When it was finished, the record states with beautiful simplicity, "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." ([Genesis 1:31](#)). For the years since the creation, the earth has been "a place of beauty and abundance ... of self-renewal and constant re-creation" (Old Testament Manual of Study).

The creation was complete, and it was good. In art, it may be more difficult to ascertain the qualities of what is good. Travis Anderson once said,

"Well, perhaps the first step in answering those questions would be to recognize that art is important. And it is not always entertaining; more often than not art educates in a decidedly demanding, unentertaining fashion. And good art, whether by entertaining or by educating, always enriches life in ways no other human enterprise can do. Hence, it should be taken seriously, with maturity, and, at times, with a certain degree of tolerance ([Seeking After the Good in Art, Drama, Film, and Literature](#))."

The creation is a conscious act and creation stories provide us an understanding of what culture deems important and worthy of consideration. As part of an analysis of creation, it is important to look at how different cultures have

approached this drama. You will find some things familiar to you in these stories and other parts that are completely foreign. By examining them, we can develop an empathy for others as we attempt to understand what they thought was important. We will look at two of the earliest examples of creation as told by both the ancient Egyptians and Babylonians. You will then examine a creation story from your heritage or current culture.

## Summary

Keep the universal principles of beauty and creativity in mind that apply equally to the creation of the earth and to the arts. These principles, which we have learned this week, will guide our approach to the arts:

- Nothing comes into existence spontaneously.
- Each creation is the result of a conscious and purposeful act by a creator.
- Creation is the process of creating order out of chaos. Orderliness is godliness.
- There is no creation *ex nihilo*. Everything is created out of something.
- Beauty is a divine quality and beautiful things can bring us closer to God.
- Beauty is what brings joy to life, pleases the eye, gladdens the heart, and enlivens the soul.
- There are natural laws and principles associated with both beauty and creativity.



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## Adam and Eve

*Even within our own biblical tradition, what tempted Adam and Eve? Yes, the serpent, but it was also the promised necessity of the fall. After partaking of the fruit the scripture states, “And the eyes of them both were opened” (Moses 4:13, emphasis added)*

Even within our own biblical tradition, what tempted Adam and Eve? Yes, the serpent, but it was also the promised necessity of the fall. The serpent said unto the woman: “Ye shall not surely die; For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” ([Moses 4:10–11](#), emphasis added). After partaking of the fruit the scripture states, “And the eyes of them both were opened” ([Moses 4:13](#), emphasis added). After learning there would be a redemption possible, Adam said, “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” and Eve said, “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” ([Moses 5:10–11](#), emphasis added).

In our living state, the scriptures tell us that we need to have an “eye single to the glory of God” ([D&C 4](#)) and to have an “eye of faith” ([Ether 12](#)). When we get in trouble spiritually it is when “ye have closed your eyes, and ye have rejected the prophets ...” ([2 Nephi 27](#)).



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## The Creation Stories from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

*Ancient Egypt had three major creation stories that related to each other. The Mesopotamian creation story may be considered a stranger to its comparison to the Egyptian creation story. In This Chapter You Will Study: Ancient Egypt Vision The Mesopotamian Creation Story. The Creation Stories from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia.*

### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [Ancient Egypt](#)
- [Vision](#)
- [The Mesopotamian Creation Story](#)
- [Summary](#)

## The Creation Stories from Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia

### Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt had three major creation stories that related to each other. They were born out of three different areas or cities including Memphis (Old Kingdom capital of Egypt), Heliopolis (the city of the sun god Re/Ra) and Hermopolis. This summary focuses on the initial creation of Atum-Re, the birth of the gods representing elements of the earth, and the installation of the first Pharaoh Osiris and his son Horus's battle with Set(h).

In the beginning of the Heliopolitan creation story, there was only darkness and the waters of chaos. Then, a mound emerged from the water, similar to the receding Nile in Egypt after flooding season, on top of which was the first created god, Atum-Re. He then spat forth Shu (god of air and supporter of the sky) and vomited up Tefnut (goddess of moisture, dew and rain). From the union of Shu and Tefnut, Geb (god of the earth) and Nut (goddess of the sky) were born. Geb and Nut then gave birth to Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, and Seth. A decision had to be made about who the pharaoh, or king, on Earth would be. Geb decided it would go to his oldest son, Osiris. Seth was unhappy because he wanted to be king, so he trapped Osiris, cut him into pieces, and threw him in the Nile river. Isis was greatly upset at the loss of her husband, so with the help of Anubis (god of the dead), they gathered the pieces of Osiris and resurrected him.

### The Family of Osiris



Osiris on a lapis lazuli pillar in the middle, flanked by Horus on the left and Isis on the right  
(22nd dynasty, Louvre, Paris).

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

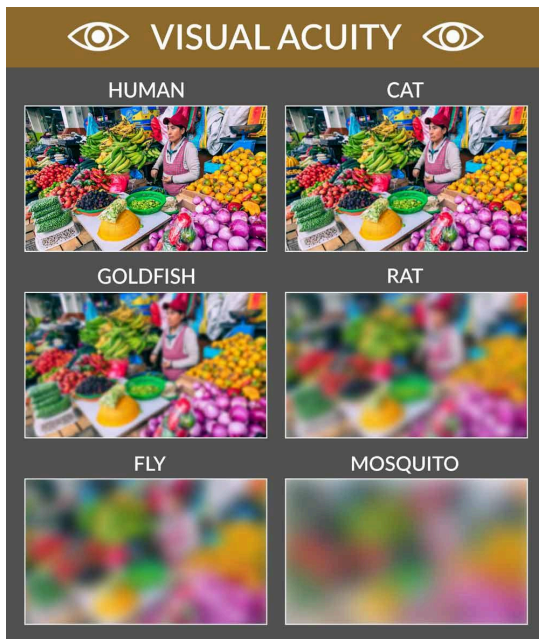
The son of Osiris and Isis was Horus, the falcon-headed god who would be the god over kingship and the pharaoh. Horus had the gods proclaim him as the next king, then attacked his uncle Seth. Although during the battle Seth tears out Horus' eye, Horus eventually defeats Seth. (If you have seen the Disney movie *The Lion King*, you may recognize the similarities between the two stories). What is both particularly interesting and one of the main points in telling this story beyond the creation interests, is that Horus doesn't put his eye back in, but rather gives it to his father Osiris—now in the underworld, the land of the dead—in order to help Osiris become alive again in the next world and become a spiritual person, or soul.

## Vision

This story is fascinating in a number of ways. One way is just the story itself and the battle between the forces of good and evil. More importantly for our purposes, it teaches the importance of vision for the leader, the pharaoh in Egypt, which was one of the longest lasting civilizations in the history of the world.

The importance of vision in the animal world can not be overestimated. In a 2018 study published in [Trends in Ecology & Evolution](#), a team of researchers state that "humans have higher visual acuity than most members of the animal kingdom, who "see the world with much less detail than we do."





This research highlights an important connection with the unique role played by Egyptian pharaohs. First, the pharaoh embodies Horus, and if you know anything about birds of prey (falcons, eagles, and so on), their remarkable vision gives them the uncommon ability to fly high above the earth's landscape and see things in the grand picture of things. These birds of prey are also the only creatures that can see better than humans. For example, if average human vision is 20/20, birds of prey are 20/5. Thus, we get a term like "eagle eye."

👁️ VISION: BIRDS OF PREY 👁️

If humans had the same vision as an eagle,  
we could see an ant on the ground  
from the roof of a 10-story building.  
We would also have brilliant color vision, UV vision,  
and an almost 360° range of view.

What a Human Sees



Bird of Prey: Eagle



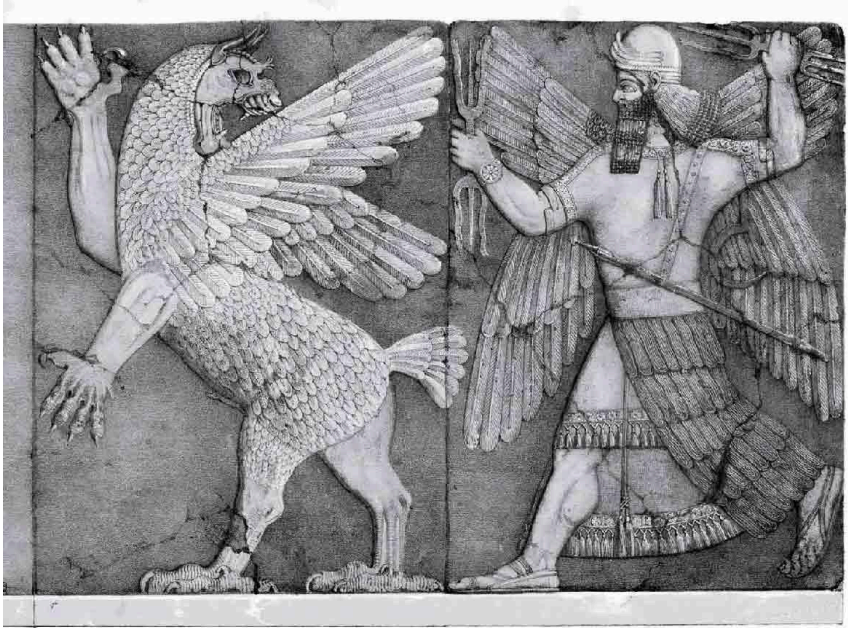
What an Eagle Sees



Second, the responsibilities of the pharaoh, king, or leader included the necessity of maintaining a vision not only of the present (in the bird of prey way), but also of the past. Horus, by giving his eye to the previous king, Osiris, had a deep understanding of the past. Thus, to move forward as a strong leader requires a vision of both the past and present, which then fosters a vision for the future. In a similar way, the artist, composer, playwright, author, CEO, and so on must likewise have a dual vision (knowledge) of what has come before and what is currently happening so they can provide their vision for the future.

## The Mesopotamian Creation Story

In comparison to the Egyptian creation story presented above, the Mesopotamian creation story may be considered even stranger on its surface. There was a husband and wife team to begin with: Absu (god of freshwater) and Tiamat (goddess of salt water). They had a bunch of kids who were known as the “younger gods.” These kids began acting immature, making a lot of noise, so Absu decided to kill them off. Tiamat, with her protective motherly instincts, learned what he was going to do and tells Ea, head of younger gods, about Absu’s plan. Ea then takes matters into his own hands and kills Absu. This brings out the more vengeful Tiamat, and she creates a demon army with Kingu as her main champion. Some of the younger gods try their might against this army but are ultimately unsuccessful. Finally, there is a new god born named Marduk. He is special because he has eyes around his head, as well as the ability to speak magical words. Marduk agrees to fight Tiamat and to become the hero of the younger gods if they promise to make him their future king if successful. In addition, he would be given the Tablets of Destiny. The younger gods conceded to Marduk’s demand since they were not having any luck of their own.



Chaos Monster and Sun God.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#) Public Domain

After Marduk goes to battle with Tiamat, defeating her and her army, he is then made king and given the Tablets of Destiny. This restored order to the chaos being created by the forces of darkness and the dragon Tiamat. If you think about what makes a good leader or a good CEO or a good artist, what do they need? They have to have the ability to speak in magical ways and have a directed vision like Marduk. Could the same be said about Captain Moroni or Elon Musk or Michaelangelo? An example from our day from the Management Study Guide states, “True leaders have a vision, that is, **they have a potential to view the present as it is and to invent a future culminating out of the present.** A leader with a vision can foresee the future and can remain in the present” ([ManagementStudyGuide.com](#)).

## Summary

I hope you find it interesting and quite amazing that over 4000 years ago, when these stories were developed and recorded, the Egyptians and Mesopotamians had figured out what was truly important for a leader. Horus and Marduk, the great heroes of the earliest creation stories, both had vision.



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## Chapter 3: Visual Arts

*Navigate this chapter through the topics below.*

Introduction to the Visual Arts
The Artist's Personal and Artistic Process and Vision
Visual Art Examples



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## Introduction to the Visual Arts

### Introduction to the Visual Arts

*Seeking After Truth and Beauty in the Arts: Art and Truth. Examples of Artistic Truth: Painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, architecture. In This Section You Will Study: Seeking After truth and beauty in the arts. What is the truth in our age? Where do we discover Truth? The importance of accessing and discerning truth in the art world.*

#### In This Section You Will Study:

- [Seeking After Truth and Beauty](#)
- [Art and Truth](#)
- [Examples of Artistic Truth](#)
- [Roger Scruton's Interpretation](#)
- [Beauty in the Arts](#)

### Seeking After Truth and Beauty

As we turn our attention to discovering and discerning works connected to the vast world of the visual arts (i.e. painting, sculpture, ceramics, photography, architecture), we will do so specifically through the lenses of Truth, Beauty, and The Good.

What is the truth in our age? Where do we discover Truth? What is the importance of accessing and discerning truth in the arts? An example of how to approach such questions was taught by President Uchtdorf in a [2013 BYU Devotional](#):

*The great miracle of the Restoration was not just that it corrected false ideas and corrupt doctrines—though it certainly did that—but that it flung open the curtains of heaven and initiated a steady downpour of new light and knowledge that has continued to this day.*

*So we continually seek truth from all good books and other wholesome sources. “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.” ([Article of Faith 13](#)) In this manner we can resist the deceit of the evil one. In this manner we learn the truth “precept upon precept; line upon line.” ([2 Nephi 28:30](#); [D&C 98:12](#); [Isaiah 28:13](#)) And we will learn that intelligence cleaves unto intelligence, and wisdom receives wisdom, and truth embraces truth ([D&C 88:4](#)).*

*My young friends, as you accept the responsibility to seek after truth with an open mind and a humble heart, you will become more tolerant of others, more open to listen, more prepared to understand, more inclined to build up instead of tearing down, and more willing to go where the Lord wants you to go.”*

With this focus on the purposes and effects of truth, let's dive into truth. A recent AI generator of definitions and essays described truth as "a concept that refers to the state or quality of being in accord with fact or reality. It is often used to refer to correspondence between statements or beliefs and actual facts. In other words, something is true if it corresponds to reality."

There are lots of fun and interesting quotes on truth that are worth thinking about. Here are a few:

- Buddha: Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.
- Mark Twain: If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.
- Confucius: The object of the superior man is truth.
- John Calvin: A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent.
- African proverb: The bitter truth is better than a sweet lie.
- Mahatma Gandhi: Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth.
- Unknown author: In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

Our current age is filled with fallacies, corrupt ideologies, anti-truths, and some even argue that we live in a post-truth era. It is a scary period of time to deal with this confusion in the world where even the definition of what a man and woman are is being questioned. In an article entitled "[What is Truth?](#)" Jeremy Wyatt makes this statement,

*We've all come across popular expressions such as "speaking your truth" or "alternative facts." Those who use these expressions seriously seem to think that whatever someone believes is "their truth," and that this is basically all that we need to say about the nature of truth. This view about truth is a version of simple-minded relativism, which says that there is no such thing as truth—only "your truth," "my truth," "my culture's truth," "my race's truth," "my gender's truth," or something of this ilk.*

*You can read any of the great books, for example, and most of them are not factually true. However, the books speak of universal truths. For example, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo follows the life of Valjean, who was in prison for 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread in France at the end of the 18th century. This person of Valjean is not "real," but it teaches of universal truths like death and resurrection, brotherhood, redemption, and others.*

Folktales also share universal truths. Folktales have existed for thousands of years in virtually all cultures. In fact, the same story is told over and over. The story of Cinderella is told in many cultures around the world, whether she's Yeh-Shen in China or Nyasha in Africa. In all versions, she shows goodness and kindness, and she is triumphant. Stories like this teach that good overcomes evil and that human beings can triumph over difficult challenges. Think of your favorite fairy tale or story. What truth does it teach?

One today must do all they can to seek, adopt, follow, and become a lover of truth. It is necessary to start with the closest source of truth—the Prophet and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President Russell M. Nelson. He recognizes this earthly problem regarding truth because in general conferences, he has spoken directly about this issue. Watch or read the following talks by President Nelson so you are grounded in some of his proclamations on the topic of truth (both under six minutes).

- "[Pure Truth, Pure Doctrine, and Pure Revelation](#)" (October 2021) President Nelson
- "[What is True?](#)" (October 2022) President Nelson

## Art and Truth

Sir Roger Scruton was an English philosopher and writer who specialized in aesthetics. He said this about seeking Truth in the Arts:

*But, this brings us back to the parallel between art and religion. Religion provides us with truth, but it's not just straightforward, literal truth about the way the world is. There are all sorts of things that we believe, but there's a much more important dimension to it. A spiritual truth tells us how things really are for us and what our position really is in the world of human relations and human emotions. In religion, we recognize that there's no redemption through falsehood, and the same seems to be true of art. Art has its own way of presenting the spiritual truth of things, and if it falsifies, then it doesn't produce the kind of redemptive consolation that we're looking for. This might explain sadness in the works of art. It might explain tragedy. In tragedy, you go to the depths, but you find a kind of rescue there. Only if you go to those depths,*



*however, will you be rescued ... So, art is certainly not going to be any help to us if it loses sight of what we are and what we need.*

*So, if art has these kinds of limitations, what does it teach us about art? Do we learn from art, a kind of truth—a truth that we, perhaps, couldn't learn from any other human activity? Well, for a start, art is not one kind of thing. There is abstract art and representational art. Abstract art is like music or like abstract painting, abstract sculpture. It doesn't actually have a subject matter. That's the whole point of it. You're supposed to appreciate it for what it is in itself, for the harmony of lines and figures, for the ways in which things balance against each other.*

*It's supposed to attract attention purely for its own sake and not for the subject matter that it represents. Already, that makes it rather difficult to say exactly what it is that we learn from art. One thought, then, is that we don't actually go to art for information. The information content is not the primary thing; rather, the experience is. But, of course, not all truth is information. We have lots of different ideas of truth. Christ said, famously, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" ([John 14:6](#)). He didn't mean "truth"; in the sense that scientists use that word—that He is somehow a true representation of the world—He meant something deeper. He meant that you can trust in Him; and by trusting in Him, you come to know something about yourself: how far you can go in whatever direction and with what kind of hope. Perhaps that version of the idea of truth, which brings in a notion of trust, is more important for considering art, because we find support in the person we trust. (Roger Scruton Lecture, Wheatley Institute, [The True, the Good and the Beautiful](#))*

Consider the following ideas related to searching for Truth in the Visual Arts.

*We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies." [Pablo Picasso in *Theories of Modern Art: A Sourcebook by Artists and Critics*. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1968), 264.]*

According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, a philosophy professor at the University of Cambridge from 1929–1947, "People nowadays think scientists are there to instruct them, while poets and musicians entertain them. That the latter have something to teach them; that never occurs to them." 18th and early 19th-century art-lovers would have taken a very different view.

Dr. Samuel Johnson, an 18th-century English writer, assumed that the poets had truths to impart, while Georg Hegel (the German philosopher) insisted, "In art we have to do, not with any agreeable or useful child's play, but with an unfolding of the truth. ... High art aims at truth, in something like the way that beliefs are said to aim at truth, that is, it asserts an internal connection with truth. Each art form aims at truth in its own way or ways. This relatively modest claim contrasts high art with art with a small 'a' that aims merely to please, such as sentimental or sensationalist art. On this conception, the most valuable art leaves open to the audience how it should be interpreted."

## Examples of Artistic Truth

A comparison of the art produced by the late 19th-century Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh — who may have sold only one painting in his entire life — with that of American painter Thomas Kinkade (1958-2012) is instructive. A major difference between Van Gogh and Kinkade is that Van Gogh's art tends to convey more truth to us as the viewer of artworks. Why?

Van Gogh's art is known for its emotional intensity and the deep feelings of sorrow and longing it expresses. He used bold colors and thick brushstrokes to convey his inner turmoil, which was often the result of his mental health struggles. Some people believe that Van Gogh's art is a true reflection of his soul and that it reveals deep truths about human experience.

Regarding one of his last paintings, *Wheatfield with Crows*, the Van Gogh Museum writes that "the menacing sky, the crows and dead-end path are said to refer to the end of his life approaching. But that is just a persistent myth. In fact, he made several other works after this one. The artist did, however, want his wheatfields under stormy skies to express 'sadness, extreme loneliness,' but at the same time he wanted to show what he considered 'healthy and fortifying' about the countryside."



Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890): Wheatfield with Crows (1890). Photo Credits: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheatfield_with_Crows). Public Domain

In contrast, Kinkadee's paintings are known for their pastoral, idyllic presentation of quaint rural cottages and lighthouses by the sea, all of which are typically illuminated with his characteristic golden light. As a painter, he is also "notable for achieving success during his lifetime with the mass marketing of his work as printed reproductions and other licensed products." (Wikipedia)

## Roger Scruton's Interpretation

*Through works of the imagination, we bring distant things into close relation with each other. That's what we do in figures of speech, in poetry. We're bringing things into relation with each other. The brush strokes in the painting bring a human action into relation with a landscape. These imaginary worlds that we create can strike us as true, or as false, as we see in **Van Gogh** as opposed to that by **Thomas Kinkadee**. Some Americans have a Kinkadee above their mantelpiece because it's a soothing thing. For some people, this is a vision of what painting should be. It's much truer to the appearance of things than Van Gogh, but there's a question about it. What is that question? Many people would say there's a falsification behind this painting. I don't want to cast judgment on it, but just say a few things about it. Why does this strike so many people as false? In one sense, it's truer than the Van Gogh. It's closer to the way things actually look. But the falsification, if it exists, is the falsification of the observer rather than of the observed. It shows a world presented through a veil of self-congratulatory sentiment. That's at least what the critic would say. It tells you that you're a good person and no further efforts need to be made. Van Gogh is not telling you that at all. He's telling you that life is rough, and you need to make efforts even to see this. It tells you that further efforts need to be made, and that meaning lies in the forms and colors. There are pastel shades smeared over the landscape like a disease. Well, is that right? I'll leave it to you to think." (Roger Scruton Lecture, Wheatley Institute, *The True, the Good and the Beautiful*)*

In many ways, artists will focus much attention on the first point above, while including elements of the others when necessary. If you think about a pond or small lake in your neighborhood, what qualities does it have? How would you describe it? What elements of life and nature does it include? How would you draw or paint it to express some form of truth? If we look at one of the earliest painted ponds in history from the Tomb of Nebamun in Ancient Egypt New Kingdom (c. 1400 BC), what do you recognize about the image below that says "pond?"



Pond in a garden. Fragment from the Tomb of Nebamun.  
Photo Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

You may say there is truthfulness in the depictions of the animal life, and trees, but in an overall examination it lacks an accuracy of how you might perceive it in real life. So, how can this representation be truer than, say, a photograph of a pond?

One might criticize the Egyptian painting because it is an aerial shot of a pond but the fish and birds are in profile and the trees look like they are lying on the ground. That said, most people could recognize the subject matter as well as the types of trees it portrays. In addition, this image was created for a tomb. The ancient Egyptian tomb was not just a place of burial and pretty images of and for the tomb owner but also a place where order must be manifest in all things. Egyptians believed that chaos was one of the most dangerous elements in the world and nature as seen in its natural form is chaotic, so the artists were mindful of the necessity of the truth in ordering the natural world above any naturalistic view.

Another example can be found in the landscape paintings of Claude Monet, a 19th century French Impressionist Painter. He loved painting nature, painting directly outdoors looking at it. You might think that this would make his images much more realistic in portrayal, but they instead are imbued with his energy and life and beauty and a love for nature. In 2019, the Denver Art Museum presented an exhibition of works by Monet entitled "Claude Monet: The Truth of Nature."



Gallery view of "Claude Monet: The Truth of Nature."

[Photo by James Florio](#)

If you look at a specific painting from that exhibit shown below, *The Japanese Footbridge* (1899), which of Hegel's art-related truths might be most relevant? Would you say that it leans more toward 1) an expression, presentation, or consideration of truth(s), or 2) a truthful representation (in this case of a water lily pond and Japanese bridge set within a lush garden)? Or another? Monet, himself, recognized the difficulty of knowing whether or not he had successfully arrived at the truth in his landscape paintings: "You have to know how to seize just the right moment in a landscape instantaneously, because that particular moment will never come again, and you're always wondering if the impression you got was truthful" (Denver "The Truth of Nature" exhibit).

It may be somewhat counterintuitive to one's thinking, but for Monet, greater truth was found or captured more in the instantaneous impression of a given moment or scene and less in depicting a subject in all its minute detail. Finally, in our pursuit of artistic truth, Monet gives us further encouragement: "It's on the strength of observation and reflection that one finds a way. So we must dig and delve unceasingly." <https://news.coloradoacademy.org/learning-through-observation/>



The Japanese Footbridge.

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia](#). Public Domain

20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch artist, Piet Mondrian, also sought for truth, exemplified in his how his style developed from nature and depictions of trees to his very abstract forms of lines and color, such as his *Tableau I* shown below.



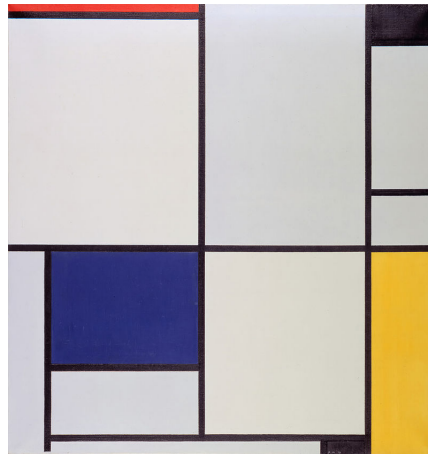


Tableau I oil.

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain.

Mondrian stated, "Impressed by the vastness of nature, I was trying to express its expansion, rest, and unity. At the same time, I was fully aware that the visible expansion of nature is at the same time its limitation; vertical and horizontal lines are the expression of two opposing forces; these exist everywhere and dominate everything; their reciprocal action constitutes 'life.'" (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/598962>)

Truth could be represented in a system of verticals and horizontals. It is the viewer's responsibility to see that—or not. In a world filled with confusion, it is often more difficult to recognize (or discern) and adopt the truth the world offers. Sometimes even in the scientific world where you would expect to find a greater adherence to truth, there is disagreement on even fundamental issues such as climate change and its possible effects as well as the definition of a woman. You may believe in one side of the argument or the other, but that doesn't make what you believe true. At this point in our society, it should be noted as opinion, but you watch people portray it as fact and truth. If there is any political component to a "truth" for example, recognize that it probably isn't truth but opinion.

## Beauty is Truth in the Arts

How do you calculate whether something is beautiful, as opposed to just average or even ugly? Is there a magic formula? Are there certain patterns of notes or chord progressions that will automatically make a song beautiful? Or proportions and colors that are necessary to have a beautiful painting? Or do you just know it when you sense it? Turns out that going by your intuition is actually not a strong indicator of whether something is beautiful or not. Researchers have conducted studies where they analyze the faces of people who many consider "beautiful people." It turns out that if you take thirty female faces at random and then morph those faces into one face, the resulting face will look very much like your favorite celebrity. In other words, what many consider to be the most beautiful faces are, in fact, the most average (pause for a moment to let that sink in). Why would we consider something that is average to be beautiful? Derek Thompson, the author of *Hit Makers: The Science of Popularity in an Age of Distraction*, shows that our familiarity with many faces makes us feel very comfortable and pleased with the average of all those faces. The resulting face is familiar and we have seen that face and other faces like it, many times before. It is the reason why on any given day, 90% of the music we listen to is music we have already heard before. We then conflate beauty with things that are familiar to us, easy to digest, and average.

So, we must turn away from our own intuitions to principles. In his book, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction*, philosopher Roger Scruton offers the characteristics and attributes of artistic works that are beautiful. Instead of trying to figure out a formula for beauty or polling a bunch of people, Scruton asks instead what beautiful things *do*. His answer is five-fold. Beautiful things do the following:

1. Invite contemplation.
2. Have fittingness (fit into their surroundings; pieces fit together well).
3. Help us better understand the human condition.
4. Express our aspirations.
5. Tap into our imaginations (but do not indulge us by gratuitously playing out our fantasies).

With Scruton's short list of characteristics and attributes in mind, you can already think about music, art, literature and cinema in terms of what is beautiful and what is not.

Scruton sees two forces that are competing to push beauty out of our lives. On the one hand, popular culture often celebrates that which is sordid and ugly because it is "funny" or "witty" or "edgy" or "bad." Audiences are fed quick fixes: explicit lyrics in songs, explosions and nudity in movies and shows, a quick laugh in a social media post in word or image.

The ugly stands in stark contrast to that which is beautiful. On the other hand, utility often rules our lives. A great example is in architecture. Many people live, work, exercise, and relax in buildings, which are glorified boxes. The buildings are there simply to shelter people from the elements.

Decorative details, architectural design, durable, and attractive materials all add to a sense of well-being both in our bodies and in our souls. Utility can also be an enemy to beauty. If you build for the sake of utility, then what you build will soon pass away. But if you build with beauty in mind, first and foremost, then what you build will be useful forever. There will always be someone who wants to live in a beautiful home or who wants to run their business out of a beautiful building.

As an individual, how do you go about discerning between what is beautiful and what is not? The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume asked a similar question. In his essay, "Of the Standard of Taste," Hume points out what you can do to refine your tastes. His conclusion is that "true judges" of art, collectively, can agree upon that which is beautiful in the arts. The idea of collective agreement amongst "true judges" is not time bound. Groups of "true judges" over time would agree with each other (if they could meet together across time and space).

This means that beautiful works are timeless and are not culture bound.

- This is why the music of many classical composers was beautiful 200 years ago, 100 years ago, and is still beautiful to this day.
- This is why Botticelli's *Madonna of the Magnificat* remains in a prime position in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy. (This image is visible below.)
- This is why Kente cloth was worn by Ghanaian royalty thousands of years ago and is still considered beautiful by Ghanaians today.



Madonna of the Magnificat. Framed Work.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

The beauty of these works is timeless. What can you do to refine your taste so that you seek the most beautiful works humans have created? Hume writes about five attributes of “true judges” that can be used to work on this in your own life. The attributes are as follows:

1. Strong sense
2. Delicate sentiment
3. Improved by practice
4. Perfected by comparison
5. Unprejudiced

Let’s break these down. **“Strong sense”** is pretty straightforward. Of your five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch), you need a strong sense in whatever the artform demands. Of course, we have come up with aids to help us out: eyeglasses, hearing aids and so forth.



Kente Cloth.

Photo Credit: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kente\\_Cloth.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kente_Cloth.jpg) CC BY-SA-4.0

**“Delicate sentiment”** is more nuanced. To some people, when they listen to classical music, they just hear one thing: one sound coming out of their speakers. To this type of listener, one piece of symphonic music sounds the same as another. Such a listener does not have delicate sentiment yet. If you had delicate sentiment as a listener, you would be able to hear not only the melody of the violin, but also the harmonies in the cellos and clarinets, the counterpoint of the violas and oboes, and the steady line of the double bass. If you had delicate sentiment for paintings, you would sense subtle changes in brush strokes, small details in the background, or symbols hidden in the landscape. “Delicate sentiment” is the ability to sense even the smallest details while still seeing the larger picture, hearing the entire choir, or following the grand story.

**“Improved by practice”** and **“perfected by comparison”** go hand in hand. As a patron of the arts, you will have a lifetime available to you to seek out that which is “virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy” in the arts. You could let popular culture decide your intake of the arts for you: whatever is a popular hit, happens to be showing in a movie theater, pops up on an internet search. You could be passive and let the world decide beauty for you.

But if you are intentional about what you take in, you will begin to be “improved by practice.” If you were to get a degree in music or art or theater or film, there would be a requirement for you to learn the history of the art. Why? Why would someone who aspires to film the next Marvel movie need to go back and watch a bunch of black-and-white films from the 1930s–1950s? Or why would someone who aspires to record modern music need to know the music of past composers?

Beautiful works are the standards. “Improved by practice” means you know the standards. You are familiar with the most beautiful works that humans have created. You have standards by which you can judge other works. Along the way, as you take in ever more history in an artform, you will naturally begin to compare how some works stack up against others.

"Perfected by comparison" also means that you will be able to express to others what they might experience. The great movie critic Roger Ebert wrote reviews for over ten thousand movies. He was really good at what he did, especially near the end of his career. In his reviews, he naturally compared elements of movies with other movies. Even if he didn't say much about the plot of a movie, you would still have a good idea of the quality of a movie from his reviews. Here are a few comparisons he made in his four-star review of the Pixar film *Up*. Concerning the characters he wrote, "They have tempers, problems and obsessions. They are cute and goofy, but they aren't cute in the treacly way of little cartoon animals. They're cute in the human way of the animation master Hayao Miyazaki. Two of the three central characters are cranky old men, which is a wonder in this youth-obsessed era." If you have seen a Miyazaki movie, then you know about characterization in *Up*. Ebert then writes that one of the qualities of *Up* is its beautiful color palette. "*Up*, like *Finding Nemo*, *Shrek* and *The Lion King* uses colors in a way particularly suited to its content." If you have seen any of the films in his short list, then you might know what to expect from the colors. In his concluding paragraph, Ebert compares *Up* to four other movies: "The adventures on the jungle plateau [in *Up*] are satisfying in a *Mummy/Tomb Raider/Indiana Jones* sort of way. But they aren't the whole point of the film. This isn't a movie like *Monsters vs. Aliens* which is mostly just frenetic action. There are stakes here, and personalities involved, and two old men battling for meaning in their lives. And a kid who, for once, isn't smarter than all the adults." Through comparison, Roger Ebert lets us know how beautiful the movie *Up* is.

The final attribute of a true judge is being "**unprejudiced.**" This might be the most difficult attribute to master. It means that you are open to what an artist might offer you regardless of their past offerings. You may have read a book from an author that wasn't great, but if you were unprejudiced, you might give the author a second chance and see if their next book is beautiful. Or you may have seen a painting that exhibited little craftsmanship or clarity of purpose and did not strike you as beautiful. Hence, you might mentally dismiss that particular artist. But if you were unprejudiced, you would give the artist another chance with their next work.



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## The Artist's Personal and Artistic Process and Vision

*Creativity at its highest levels involves both sides of the brain in a personal process that requires vision, inspiration, knowledge, and just plain hard work. Howard Gardner's extensive description of creativity represents one of the most comprehensive definitions of the creative person. Creative individuals seem to have unusual capacities to become totally immersed in one task for long periods of time.*

### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [Introduction](#)
- [What Does it Mean to Create?](#)
- [The Creative Person](#)
- [Creativity Stew](#)
- [Creativity Gets Involved When People Are Motivated by the Enjoyment of What They Are Doing](#)
- [The Impressionist and the Cubist](#)
- [Creation of an Art Style](#)
- [Creation of Artwork](#)

### Introduction

Evidence of our instinctive urge to create abounds in every era, from prehistoric times to the present. Shards of primitive pottery invariably contain fanciful designs, revealing the human need to grace an otherwise mundane object with beauty. A human hand outlined on a prehistoric cave wall in France (or Santa Cruz, Argentina, for example,) proves humans have always possessed a creative urge: the need to leave evidence of some personal contribution behind for posterity.



Hands at the Cuevas de las Manos upon Río Pinturas, near the town of Perito Moreno in Santa Cruz Province, Argentina.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

We can see how certain individuals have left their mark on humankind, sometimes anonymously, like the builders of the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe, and sometimes with great pomp and ceremony, like Ramses II of Egypt. We remember great civilizations by their artistic remains, whether those are architecture, music, dance, painting, or poetry.

## What Does it Mean to Create?

Creation involves the shaping of materials, like words, sounds, stones, movements, or colors, until they form a unity with some felt meaning. In successful art, this new whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Virtually every civilization has a creation myth describing how the world, emerging out of chaos or nothingness, became ordered and beautiful (as discussed in our previous material). As discussed earlier in this chapter, in this view, the act of creation endows human beings with divine status.

Creation also endows a whole age with great significance by virtue of its artistic achievements. In his book **Civilisation**, Kenneth Clark comments on the ways in which whole cultures attempt to preserve a part of themselves for posterity. Quoting John Ruskin, Clark writes, "Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their word and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last."

## The Creative Person



An artist working on a watercolor using a round brush.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

Creativity at its highest levels involves both sides of the brain in a personal process that requires vision, inspiration, knowledge, and just plain hard work. Howard Gardner's extensive description of creativity in his recent book, *Creating Minds*, represents one of the most comprehensive definitions of the creative person. According to Gardner, the truly creative person exhibits most, if not all, of the following traits: "The creative individual is a person who regularly solves problems, fashions products, or defines new questions in a domain in a way that is initially considered novel but that ultimately becomes accepted in a particular cultural setting (p 60)."

While acknowledging the fact that creative people exhibit "a greater incidence of such personality traits as independence, self confidence, unconventionality, alertness, ready access to unconscious processes, ambition, and commitment to work (p 50)," Gardner cautions that "it is not clear whether people who already exhibit these characteristics become creative (p 50)," or whether creative experiences endow them with these traits. Creative individuals seem to have unusual capacities to become totally immersed in one task for long periods of time, and continue to work despite serious setbacks. In fact, "many of them continue to raise the ante, posing ever greater challenges for themselves, even at the risk of sacrificing the customary rewards (Gardner, p. 314)." These creative individuals, whether artists or inventors, who impose order on the chaos around them, often do so at a high personal cost. In summary, creatives do not see things like everyone else and, therefore, are often rejected by the majority as being eccentric, even peculiar.

## Creativity Stew

Daily life is a major arena for innovation and problem-solving—the largest but least honored realm of the creative spirit.

"Two hallmarks of a healthy life are the abilities to love and to work. Each requires imagination.

~Sigmund Freud

"Being creative is kind of like making a stew (Goleman et.al, p. 29)," says Teresa Amabile. She explains, "There are three basic ingredients to creativity, just as there are three basic kinds of things a stew needs to be really good."

The first essential ingredient, something like the vegetables or the meat in a stew, is expertise in a specific area: domain skills. These skills represent your basic mastery of a field. To possess these skills means that you know how to write musical notation, how to skillfully use a computer graphics program, or how to do scientific experiments – as examples.

"No one is going to do anything creative in nuclear physics unless that person knows something—and probably a great deal—about nuclear physics (p. 29)," Amabile observes. "In the same way an artist isn't going to be creative unless that person has the technical skills required for say, making etchings or mixing colors. The ingredients of creativity start with skill in the domain—with the expertise ... But without training in the skills of a domain, even the most promising talent will languish. And with proper skill development, even an average talent can become the basis for creativity."

The second ingredient in the stew is what Amabile calls "creative thinking skills," or ways of approaching the world that allow you to find a novel possibility and see through to full execution. "These are like the spices and herbs you use to bring out the flavor of the basic ingredients in a stew," Amabile says (p. 30). "They make the flavors unique, help the basic ingredients to blend and bring out something different."

These creative thinking skills include being able to imagine a diverse range of possibilities, being persistent in tackling a problem, and having high standards for work. "They also include the ability to turn things over in your mind, like trying to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (p. 30)," Amabile adds. "Many of these skills have to do with being an independent person: being willing to take risks and having the courage to try something you've never done before."

Another category of these skills has to do with sensing how to nurture the creative process itself, such as knowing when to let go of a problem and allow it to incubate for a while. If a person has only technical skills in a field (the first ingredient), but no creative thinking skills, the stew will turn out flat and flavorless.

Finally, the element that really cooks the creative stew is passion. The psychological term for passion is **intrinsic motivation**: the urge to do something for the sheer pleasure of doing it rather than for any prize or compensation. The opposite kind of motivation —**extrinsic motivation**—makes a person do something not because they want to, but because you ought to. The person does it for a reward, to please someone, to get a good grade, or to get a good evaluation.

## Creativity Gets Involved When People Are Motivated by the Enjoyment of What They Are Doing

A Nobel Prize-winning physicist, as Amabile recalls, was asked what he thought made the difference between creative and uncreative scientists. He said it was whether or not their work was "a labor of love" (Renner, p. 14).

The most successful, groundbreaking scientists are not always the most gifted, but the ones who are impelled by a driving curiosity. To some degree, a strong passion can make up for a lack of raw talent. Passion "is like the fire underneath the soup pot (Goleman, p. 31)," Amabile says. "It really heats everything up, blends the flavors, and makes those spices mix with the basic ingredients to produce something that tastes wonderful."

## The Impressionist and the Cubist

Two preeminent artists of their ages, Renoir as an Impressionist in the late 19th century in France and Picasso as a Cubist in the early to mid-20th century from Spain have discussed their own works of art and creative process.

### Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841–1919)

Commenting on his artistic process, the French Impressionist artist Renoir observed, "I arrange my subject as I want it, then I go ahead and paint it, like a child. I want a red to be sonorous, to sound like a bell; if it doesn't turn out that way, I add more reds and other colors until I get it. I am no cleverer than that. I have no rules and no methods; anyone can look at my materials or watch how I paint—he will see that I have no secrets ... . Shall I tell you what I think are the two qualities of art? It must be indescribable and it must be inimitable ... . The work of art must seize upon you, wrap you up in itself, carry you away. It is the means by which the artist conveys his passions ..." (Renoir, "My Way of Painting," in Eric Protter, ed. *Painters on Painting*, p. 145).



Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#). Public Domain

#### **Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)**

Arguably the 20th century's leading avant garde artist, Picasso, articulated his artistic process and vision: "A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished, it still goes on changing, according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture [work of art] lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day. This is natural enough, as the picture lives only through the [person] who is looking at it ... . When you begin a picture, you often make some pretty discoveries. You must be on your guard against these. Destroy the thing, do it over several times. In each destroying of a beautiful discovery, the artist does not really suppress it, but rather transforms it, condenses it, makes it more substantial. What comes out in the end is the result of discarded finds ... ."

He continued, describing why it is imperative for artists to push beyond the then accepted artistic boundaries: "With the exception of a few painters who are opening new horizons to painting, young painters today don't know which way to go. Instead of taking up our researches in order to react clearly against us, they are absorbed with bringing the past back to life—when truly the whole world is open before us, everything waiting to be done, not just redone. Why cling desperately to everything that has already been fulfilled? There are miles of painting 'in the manner of;' but it is rare to find a young man working in his own way." (Picasso, "About Painting," in Eric Protter, ed. *Painters on Painting*, pp. 202–203)



Photo of Pablo Picasso Working on *Guernica*, 1937.

## Creation of an Art Style

One of the major things that artists need to do is develop their own personal vision and style. Yes, they work within the current cultural and regional styles, but they create their own vision.

### Piet Mondrian

One prominent artist whose artistic evolution has been documented is the 20th century Dutch painter named Piet Mondrian. As you view this short video, consider how his artistic style progresses and evolves. While every artist will not undertake this exact process, many will follow a similar path.

It has been stated that Mondrian is “[c]onsidered a pioneer of 20th century abstract art ... best known for his paintings featuring basic forms and colors. The artist limited his paintings to the three primary colors (red, blue, and yellow) and the two primary directions (horizontal and vertical), thus creating colorful and geometric compositions. He hoped that these simplified subjects could transcend cultures and become a new common language. Mondrian's impact on modern art is visible in the work of other artists and subsequent artistic movements, as well as in contemporary art and design ([Dwell](#), 2019).”

Mondrian was focused on his development of style. He had a vision that was constantly evolving until he arrived at his desired expression. That style of black lines and blocks of primary colors became an iconic style beyond the artistic, showing up in clothing and architecture.

### Yves Saint Laurent

In 1965, Saint Laurent was recognized as a talented young couturier, but he was not yet famous. His 106-piece Autumn/Winter collection was almost finished. It was consistent with the times. There were traditional pieces like evening dresses and belted waist dresses as well as shorter hemlines (Mary Quant had invented the mini skirt in 1962). Then, he had an idea. It had to do with a book he had got from his mother at Christmas about Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), the Dutch painter whose neoplastic style used primary colors. The [Mondrian Dress](#) was created.

Neoplasticism was a movement born in the Netherlands in 1917, founded by Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg. It was at its height from 1917-1937. This style is known for clean lines, right angles, and primary colors. It was popular in architecture but moved to fashion in 1965 by Yves Saint Laurent, known as the Mondrian Dress.

In a 2010 retrospective of the designer, fashion historians Florence Müller and Farid Cheroune quote him, saying, “I realized [sic] that we had to stop conceiving of a garment as sculpture and that, on the contrary, we had to view it as mobile. I realized that fashion had been rigid up till then, and that we now have to make it move” ([Florence Müller and Farid Cheroune, Yves Saint Laurent, Paris 2010](#)).”

While most artists may never attain the influence of someone like Mondrian, artists around the world continue creating works that inspire and influence in many different ways.

## Creation of Artwork

The last major creative impulse that the artist must go through is the creation of a specific artwork. The early 19th century French artist Théodore Géricault took his inspiration from a contemporary political-maritime scandal in July 1816. His highly controversial large-scale painting, completed in 1819 and measuring 16 feet by 24 feet, was called the Raft of the Medusa. Watch the following video to learn more about his creative process.

(Warning: This video contains nudity.)

## Summary

Human creativity spans history, evident in art from ancient pottery to modern masterpieces. The desire to leave a personal mark through creative expression has been intrinsic to humanity. Notable figures, anonymous or celebrated, like cathedral builders or pharaohs, have left their artistic imprints, defining civilizations through architecture, music, dance, painting, and poetry.

Creation involves melding materials, like words, sounds, colors, or movements, into a coherent whole with intrinsic meaning. This process, often mythologized in the creation myths of cultures, bestows a divine essence upon human beings and ages, preserving their essence for posterity.

Creativity isn't confined to a single trait but involves a holistic blend of vision, inspiration, knowledge, and diligent effort. Howard Gardner's comprehensive depiction of creativity underscores its problem-solving, innovative, and culturally accepted nature.

Creativity isn't just for big things; it happens in everyday life too. It comes from knowing about something, thinking in different ways, and really wanting to do it. Teresa Amabile compared creativity to cooking a stew—having the right skills, thinking in new ways, and staying motivated. Knowing when to give ideas time to develop is important too.

Intrinsic motivation, or passion, ignites creative fires. Nobel laureates attest that passion is pivotal; curiosity propels groundbreaking discoveries, often eclipsing raw talent. Intrinsic motivation is fueled by passion and interest. This type of motivation comes about when people do something for the challenge and enjoyment; while also believing that their work matters. The work itself is motivating and the results are far more creative than one might have originally imagined. Conversely, extrinsic motivation comes about from external sources and while it can be motivating and be creative, the results lack something and the motivation cannot be sustained over time.

In essence, human creativity endures, driven by passion, expertise, and innovative thought, imprinting cultures and generations with indelible marks. While concepts like entropy and syntropy—representing disorder and order, respectively—play roles in creative processes, it's the driving force of human ingenuity that shapes and defines our artistic journey.



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### 3.3

## Visual Art Examples

### Visual Art Examples

*Tracy Emin's My Bed is an art installation that features an unmade bed with various pieces of garbage (empty bottles, cigarette butts, clothes) strewn about the base of it. If you happened to see The Little Dancer of Fourteen Years by Edgar Degas in a dumpster, you would stop to look at it.*

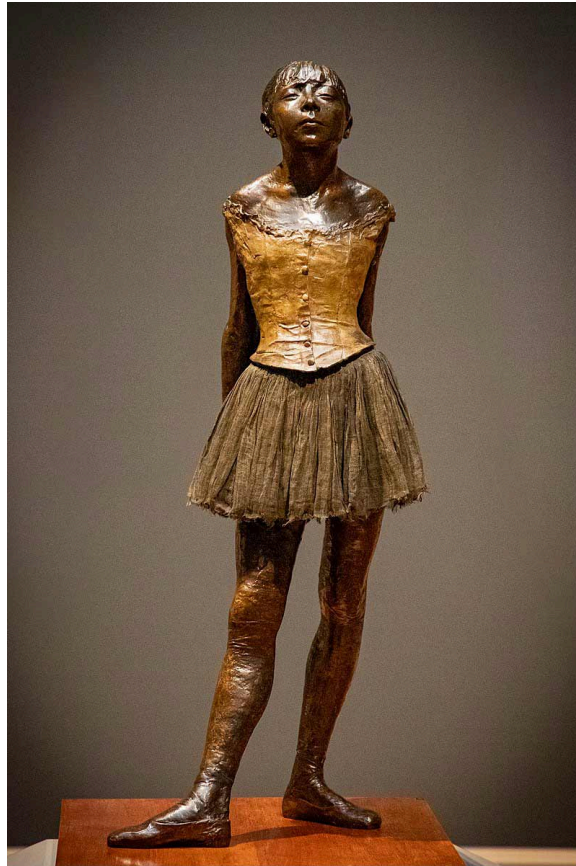
There is a test to discern between what is beautiful and what is not. Imagine you are walking past a full dumpster and can see a discarded work of art near the top of the dumpster. Now imagine the work of art is [Tracy Emin's My Bed](#), an art installation that features an unmade bed with various pieces of garbage (empty bottles, cigarette butts, clothes) strewn about the base of it.



Tracy Emin's My Bed.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Educational Fair Use

If this was the painting you saw in a dumpster, you would likely walk past it without giving it a second thought. But if you happened to see The Little Dancer of Fourteen Years by Edgar Degas in a dumpster, you would stop to look at it. You might even try to retrieve it.



Impressionist sculpture of “The Little Dancer of Fourteen Years” by Edgar Degas on display at the St. Louis Art Museum.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Degas#/media/File:The_Little_Dancer_of_Fourteen_Years_-_Degas.jpg). CC BY-SA 4.0

Beauty has an effect on us that regular, everyday objects do not. It is hard to describe exactly what the effect is, but it is not hard to feel it. You desire more excellence in your life when you behold something that is beautiful. This brings us to consider what has been deemed beautiful and of value by cultures across time.

Beauty in the visual arts is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been explored, celebrated, and debated throughout history by cultures around the world. At its core, beauty in the arts is often viewed as a reflection of the artist's perception of their world, and the way in which they choose to express their ideas and emotions. Remember that discerning beauty in the arts at times tends to be a more subjective endeavor than the process of discerning truth in the arts (which we tackled last week).

Let us explore various cultures from around the world to learn more about how each viewed this concept of beauty. A generally well-known example of ancient Egyptian artwork that reflects their beliefs about beauty is the striking Nefertiti Bust, a painted limestone sculpture created in 1345 BC (see below). Depicting the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten, the work is characterized by its detailed and realistic depiction of the human form with particular emphasis on the elegant features of the queen's face. The work likewise reflects the ancient Egyptians' appreciation for symmetry and balance, as well as their belief that beauty was a reflection of the divine.





Nefertiti bust.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

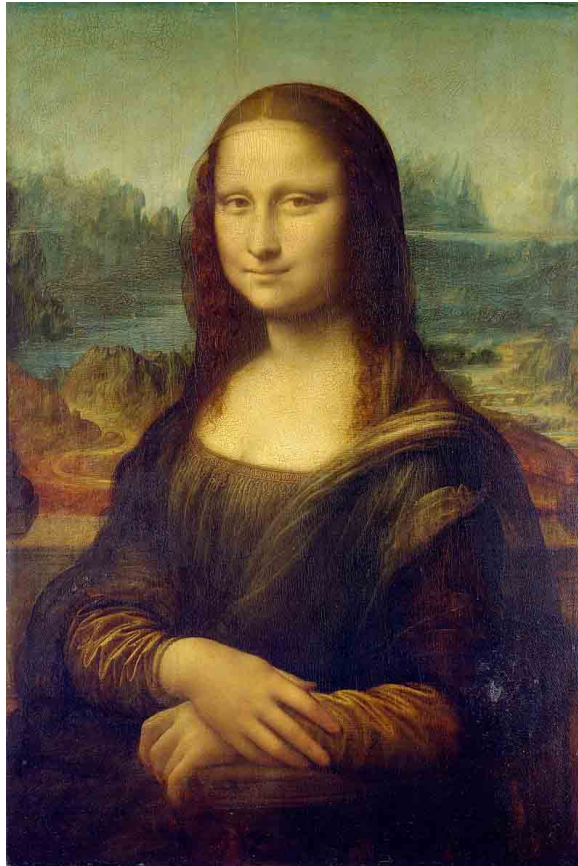
One specific example of ancient Greek architecture that reflects their attitude toward beauty is the Parthenon. Built in the 5th century BC, the temple is situated on the Acropolis of Athens, and is dedicated to the goddess Athena. Long considered as one of the most iconic examples of Classical Greek architecture, it is known for its use of harmony, proportion, and simplicity. Similar to the Egyptians, the temple's design likewise reflects the ancient Greeks' belief that beauty was a reflection of mathematical harmony and order (both of which are characteristic elements prominently featured throughout the monument). For example, the Parthenon's fluted marble columns lean slightly inward, but when viewed from a distance, they present the illusion of perfectly straight columns, therefore contributing to the structure's overall harmonious and balanced look.



Parthenon, 447–432, Pentelic marble, Athens, Greece.

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia](#). CC BY 2.0

In the Renaissance period, c. 1350–1600 AD, artistic beauty was heavily influenced by the ideals of humanism and the rediscovery of ancient Classical art (specifically Greek and Roman). The art of this era was particularly known for its renewed interest in realism in terms of depicting the human figure, and artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo were celebrated for their ability to depict the human form in a lifelike manner. For example, Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, completed around 1503–1506 and portraying a seated woman with an enigmatic expression, is considered one of the most iconic and recognizable works of art in the world. Leonardo's realistic approach, including his masterful use of atmospheric perspective in the background and his ability to capture delicate details—namely in her face, hands, hair, and clothing—again reflects the Renaissance ideals of harmony, proportion, and overall beauty of the human form. The painting is also an example of the Renaissance artists' interest in capturing the individuality and humanity of their subjects, which was a general departure from the more idealized forms of their Egyptian and Greek counterparts.

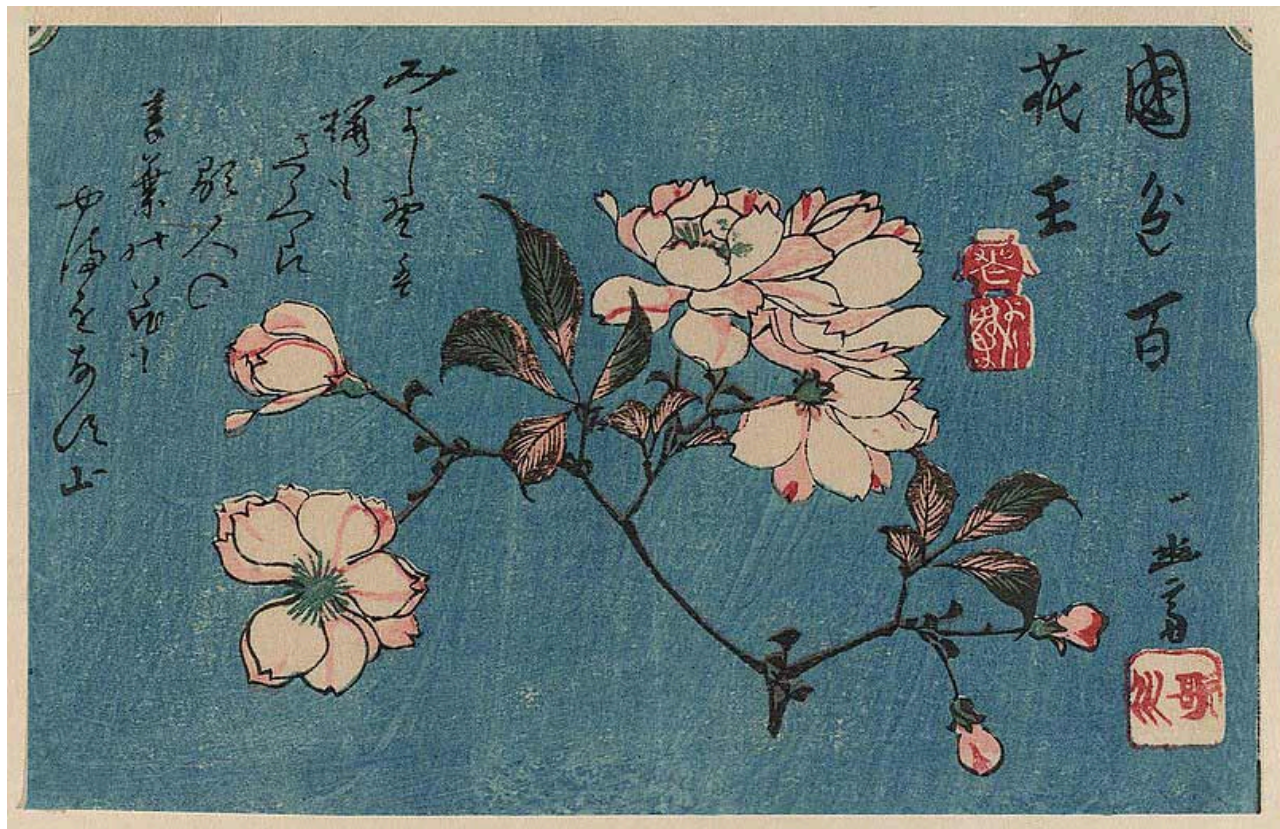


Mona Lisa, by Leonardo da Vinci.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#). Public Domain

Artistic beauty of Asian cultures is often found in the simplicity and elegance of their paintings and sculptures. Generally speaking, Chinese and Japanese art is characterized by the use of minimalistic compositions and the inclusion of natural elements such as landscapes, animals, and plants. The artwork produced by these cultures often reflects their spiritual and philosophical beliefs. One specific example of Japanese artwork indicative of Japanese attitudes toward beauty is Utagawa Hiroshige's Cherry Blossoms (see below). Created around 1857 at the end of the artist's lifetime, the woodblock print depicts a group of cherry blossoms (and only a branch, rather than an entire tree) in full bloom. The print typifies the culture's penchant for representing the transient beauty found in nature, complete with its use of delicate lines and soft pastel colors, all of which serve to evoke a sense of serenity and peace. Interestingly, Hiroshige's artwork is also an example of the Japanese aesthetic concept of "mono no aware," which is an awareness and sensibility to the beauty of the impermanent and fleeting nature of worldly things.

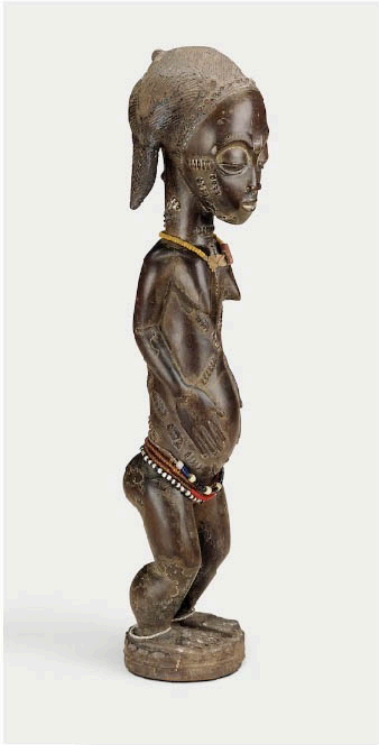




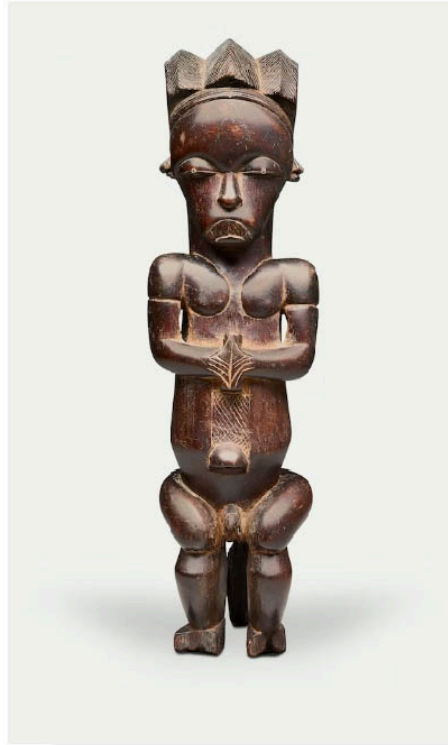
Cherry Blossoms, Woodblock print.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sakura.jpg). Public Domain

In African art, beauty is often found in the use of bold colors and striking patterns. It is also many times characterized by its emphasis on the power of the human spirit. For example, “many sub-Saharan cultures share similar criteria for beauty: symmetry and balance, moderation, clarity, and youthfulness. Such determinations, however, go beyond the visual and overlap with an object’s meaning and function. Furthermore, beauty in African art is often tied to goodness and ugliness to immorality. These connections are especially apparent in sculptural representations of the human form, particularly idealized images of powerful men—usually equestrians or warriors—and caring women, typically shown as mother-and-child figures. Beautiful art often plays a role in interactions between the material world of humans and the immaterial world of spirits. Individuals facing illness and other adversity, for example, may attempt to honor or entice the spirits with sculpted human figures featuring elaborate hairstyles or body modifications that are the result of human intervention.”



Female Figure, 19th century  
Baule, Côte d'Ivoire. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, museum purchase, 85-15-2



Male Reliquary Guardian Figure (Iyema Byeri), 19th-early 20th century  
Fang: Mvaï, Gabon. Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc., 2000.1.McD. Image courtesy of Dallas Museum of Art

Photo Credit: [arctic.edu](http://arctic.edu) CC0

"Conversely, some art and objects require deliberate ugliness in order to mediate between physical and spiritual worlds. For instance, Komo masks of the Bamana in Mali are covered with layers of crusty offerings and often feature sharp, pointed additions, all meant to express an aggressive and frightening character. Still other works, like the power figures (see below) of the Kongo and Songye in the southern Democratic Republic of Congo, combine beauty and ugliness in a way that renders them at once irresistibly attractive and profoundly repelling."



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## Chapter 4: Seeking After the Good

### Seeking After the Good

*Navigate this chapter through the topics below.*

See Life Whole
Art & The Good



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## See Life Whole

### The Arts as a Lens to “See Life Whole”

*The Arts as a Lens to “See Life Whole”* Dangers of Applying a Negative Standard Seeking Virtue in the Arts Learning to Recognize and Value Good Art Seeing Life Whole is published by Brigham Young University at a cost of \$16.99. To order your copy of the book, call the BYU bookstore on 08457 909090.

#### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [The Arts as a Lens to “See Life Whole”](#)
- [Dangers of Applying a Negative Standard](#)
- [Seeking Virtue in the Arts](#)
- [Learning to Recognize and Value Good Art](#)
- [Seeing Life Whole](#)

### The Arts as a Lens to “See Life Whole”

By Travis Anderson

Years ago, while serving as director of BYU International Cinema, I noticed that when people in our culture reference “good, wholesome entertainment,” they generally use the word “wholesome” in a strange way. They typically don’t mean that the movie, TV show, music, or book they have in mind is actually salutary or edifying—which is how we define the word, of course. They simply mean it is without objectionable content. I also observed that when people speak in this way, they almost always pair the word “wholesome” with “entertainment” rather than with “education” or “art.”

Granted, there is a certain logic to this pairing. After all, most education is edifying by its very nature, so it might seem redundant to say “wholesome education.” And while entertainment by definition is amusing, relaxing, and thereby rejuvenating, it is rarely edifying or nourishing in any substantial sense. By contrast, while art has the capacity to entertain, it is quite frequently a source of genuine edification. So, wouldn’t it seem much more reasonable for “wholesome art” to be a common catchphrase than “wholesome entertainment”?

Aristotle conceded almost 2,500 years ago that there is nothing wrong with entertainment. But perhaps because entertainment is its own reward, he also thought there is nothing inherently praiseworthy about it either. Predictably, he spoke very highly of activities that educate, noting that they cultivate a virtuous character, improve the mind, and occasion what he called “intellectual enjoyment.” But most people—today as in Aristotle’s age—generally prefer

entertainment to education and art. Why? Aristotle's answer, in part, was that entertainment appeals primarily to the body, while education and the more demanding forms of art (like dramatic tragedies in Aristotle's day, and artistic films, music, and literature in ours) mostly engage the mind. In fact, the sensual pleasures derived from entertainment often explicitly free us from our mental cares. By contrast, art and education require attentiveness and effort. So, as Aristotle also pointed out, learning from the arts often involves some degree of mental or physical discomfort rather than physical enjoyment. These differences readily explain why people will opt to watch a pedestrian Hollywood movie instead of a cinematic milestone, or curl up with a cheap paperback novel instead of a literary masterpiece. ***People prefer entertainment over art and education because both art and education require work to harvest their manifold endowments, while most amusements demand no more effort than reaching for a remote or pulling up a phone app . .***

## Dangers of Applying a Negative Standard

Because entertainment is not necessarily edifying even when it is free from morally objectionable content, mere entertainment is the moral and educational equivalent of diet soda—no unwanted calories, perhaps, but nothing very good for you either. In consequence, when we judge the worth of art solely by its entertainment value and lack of objectionable content, the results are bound to be problematic. The reason is twofold. First, as we have already established, the tendency of amusements to divert us from serious concerns and to please us without edifying us, makes mere entertainment as likely to be harmful as beneficial. Second, value judgments made primarily with reference to a negative standard implicitly require an eye focused precisely on the bad rather than on the good. It is this negative focus I wish to discuss further, for its effects can be particularly pernicious.

One unfortunate consequence of a negative focus when evaluating art is not only an inclination to throw out the baby with the bathwater, but an incapacity to see the baby at all. Conversations with people who have been offended by a book, film, or other work of art often reveal they can remember little or nothing good about the work in question, even when they acknowledge the offending material was trivial. Their well-intended but immoderate focus on the bad apparently dulls their capacity to perceive the good, even within works that others have found both artistically praiseworthy and spiritually uplifting. Then again, as anyone with moral sensitivity is likely to ask, in today's high-risk world of deceptive and subversive media, wouldn't it be irresponsible not to exercise at least some degree of active surveillance against evil? Well, yes...and no. On the one hand, evil indeed demands vigilance against its insidious strategies and forms. On the other hand, we must differentiate vigilance from surveillance. The latter denotes the kind of obsessive attention to evil that is precisely the problem. We don't vanquish evil or even avoid it by watching, monitoring, and studying it with singular focus. Life certainly demands a moral sensibility or standard with at least a few explicitly formulated "don'ts." But any moral standard composed entirely or even predominantly of things to avoid—in other words, any moral outlook obsessively focused on the myriad textures and hues of evil's chameleon skin—is destined to be detrimental.

I remember once hearing of a visit Spencer W. Kimball made to BYU while he was President of the Church. According to the story, as he walked across campus one of his hosts noticed some young people who were perhaps inappropriately dressed. The host remarked, in a disapproving tone, "Will you just look at those students?" assuming, as the story goes, that President Kimball would endorse his implied criticism. Instead, President Kimball responded, "Yes, aren't they beautiful?" Now, I can't verify this account, and since it has something of an apocryphal tone it may not have actually happened. But regardless of the story's veracity, its moral illustrates my point: ***Where there is good to be found, even where there might also be something bad, we should be able to acknowledge and benefit from the good. We should not refuse an occasion to praise simply because there may also be some reason to condemn, as if something is worthy of appreciation or capable of edification only when it cannot cause any offense. Keeping our gaze obsessively directed toward the bad virtually guarantees we will overlook the good.***

Blinding us to goodness is not the only problem with a negative standard, however. Another is the simple fact that any attempt to avoid the bad by making it the center of our focus is an enterprise doomed to failure. When I was first

learning to ride a motorcycle, a more experienced rider taught me a life-saving lesson: If you see something dangerous in your path—road debris or patch of loose gravel, for instance—don't try to avoid it by staring at it; instead, look in the direction you want to go and your gaze will naturally direct you away from whatever you want to avoid. In other words, don't look where you don't want to go. However much we intend otherwise, we will inevitably go exactly where we look. The moral parallel is obvious. The only safe and reliable way to avoid the bad is to look constantly for the good. Focusing on the bad, however laudable one's intentions, will always lead toward that very point of focus. I believe this is why Christ teaches in the New Testament that the way toward a sinless life is not to study sins and their endless variants, as did the Pharisees, but to pattern our life after Him who lived without sin. I also think this is why wise spiritual leaders teach us to vanquish temptation by engaging our mind in some charitable or wholesome activity. Doing so will naturally incline us away from evil by directing our attention toward righteousness. And since we can't be moving in two directions at once, any move toward the good is simultaneously a move away from the bad.

## Seeking Virtue in the Arts

In view of these inherent problems with a negative standard of judgment, why are we so easily and frequently seduced into thinking we can become good solely by not being bad? What has happened to our notion of virtue that we think we can achieve it simply by avoiding vice? . . . After all, we do not identify something as "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy" on the basis of what it is not, but on the basis of what it is. Consider in this regard the Thirteenth Article of Faith:

*We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.*

As Joseph Smith intimated, this article of faith paraphrases an admonition of Paul found in his epistle to the Philippians: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). It is worth noting that Joseph's paraphrase of Paul mentions both chastity and virtue, which implies the one is not reducible to the other. Moreover, only one adjective is emphasized by being repeated twice. It is the word "virtuous."

As many are aware, the word "virtue" has an interesting pedigree in Western civilization. It is a word commonly used to translate the Greek *arete*—which is the word originally spoken by Paul in the passage above. . . . [I]n every case for the Greeks, virtue meant goodness or excellence of some kind—excellence of character or behavior, excellence in the performance of some function or task, or excellence of aspirations and accomplishments. In sum, virtue referred not just to a lack of bad qualities, but to an abundance of good ones. . . .

We cannot develop such traits only by evaluating our choices against a negative list of "don'ts." We must also actively seek the good—not just in order to do good, but to become good. And it helps to recognize that when we are seeking what is virtuous in human art and learning, **they rarely come with everything objectionable completely refined out of them**. Even the writings of Shakespeare, lovingly carried across the plains by our pioneer ancestors and so often quoted in LDS books and general conferences, contain their fair share of potentially objectionable material. But we read Shakespeare despite that fact because **there is so much to praise among what little there is to condemn**.

## Learning to Recognize and Value Good Art

How, then, do we seek after excellence when it is sometimes entangled with mediocrity and perhaps evil, when both personal maturity and cultural sensitivities play such a determinative role, and when individual perceptions of good and bad often vary widely?

On the one hand, we must indeed be selective. Brigham Young once advised, “I cannot say that I would recommend the reading of all books, for it is not all books which are good. Read good books, and extract from them wisdom and understanding as much as you possibly can, aided by the Spirit of God.” Then too, as Brigham Young also advised, we must be open-minded and appreciative of all genuine truth and beauty—regardless of its source: “Seek after knowledge, all knowledge, and especially that which is from above” and “Let us not narrow ourselves up; for the world, with all its variety of useful information and its rich hoard of hidden treasure, is before us.” . . .

Does this mean devotional art or art produced by and for Latter-day Saints is the only kind of art we should create, view, and allow others to view? No. Is art produced by the world worthless or evil? Of course not. If it were, then we could not praise a Greek tragedy or the Parthenon. Can we produce our own great artists by turning our back on what the Greeks, Romans, Renaissance Italians, French Impressionists, and other artists of the world can teach us? Again, the answer is no. **So, the real question is not, how do we completely avoid the world and its influence in producing, teaching, and appreciating art? It is, how do we teach and learn to seek after what is virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy in the world, and despite the world’s failings?**

**And how do we carry out that search without single-mindedly looking for vice or its absence?**

**Art is not always entertaining; sometimes art educates and edifies in a decidedly demanding, unentertaining fashion. And good art, whether by entertaining, educating, or inspiring us, always enriches life in ways no other human enterprise can do. Hence, it should be taken seriously, and at times, with a certain degree of tolerance.** As the Scottish philosopher David Hume once claimed, we should be capable of excusing religious and cultural differences in works of art because it would be ridiculous to expect the beliefs and tastes of every culture to resemble our own. More importantly, it would be wrong to assume that artworks that manifest such differences cannot otherwise ennoble and educate us.<sup>7</sup> In order for good art to accomplish that enrichment, however, we need to learn and teach the language, history, conventions, and mechanics of the various arts.

Education and inspiration constitute an important second step in seeking after virtue: acquainting ourselves with art that does not merely reflect our own views and preferences, but expands our appreciation for beauty, truth and goodness beyond the confines of our individual experience.

Lastly, all study and analysis of art requires substantial preparation and effort—which is partly why challenging art is often undervalued or criticized. Real art will always stretch our abilities in ways entertainment will not. And we must prepare for such challenges. But that is part of what makes art praiseworthy.

## Seeing Life Whole

Brigham Young organized the Deseret Dramatic Association just two years after entering the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. . . . In 1853, he wrote the following about theater—though I think we can extrapolate his remarks to any and all of the arts:

*Upon the stage of a theater can be represented in character, evil and its consequences, good and its happy results and rewards; the weakness and the follies of man, the magnanimity of virtue and the greatness of truth. The stage can be made to aid the pulpit in impressing upon the minds of a community an enlightened sense of a virtuous life, also a proper horror of the enormity of sin and a just dread of its consequences. The path of sin with its thorns and pitfalls, its traps and snares can be revealed, and how to shun it.*

Brigham Young suggests here that art has the capacity to nurture within us an understanding of what Aristotle in the Poetics called “universal truths.” This capacity is perhaps what BYU’s own Gerrit de Jong called “culture”—the ability to see life whole, a familiarity with “the best that has been thought and the best that has been done in the world.” Such wisdom is not developed by limiting our experiences to artistic portrayals of what Brigham Young called the “good and its happy results.” It also requires being able to learn from wise, truthful, and tasteful representations of “evil and its consequences.” It indeed requires an ability to see life whole.

In conclusion, I hope that, yes, we will be wise in deciding what art we embrace. But I also hope our decisions will be judicious and not judgmental, aimed at seeking the good, rather than just avoiding the bad. I especially hope we will redouble our commitment to kindle and rekindle in each other's hearts the passion for art, music, drama, philosophy, and literature that fired the flame of our own various searches after all that is virtuous and good. For only thereby can we realize the creativity and love of beauty and goodness that constitutes our true spiritual likeness to God.

- Travis T. Anderson, associate professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, regularly teaches film artistry and theory classes in addition to philosophy courses. He has mentored more than 20 film projects for his students in film classes for the Philosophy Department and the BYU Honors Program. He directed the BYU International Cinema Program from 2000 to 2007.
- This article was adapted from a devotional address given to Brigham Young University's College of Humanities on March 8, 2001.

Please visit <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/seeking-after-the-good-in-art-drama-film-and-literature/> to read the complete, unabridged version, "Seeking After the Good in Art, Film, and Drama, and Literature," first published in *BYU Studies* 46, No. 2 (2007), pp. 231–246.



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## Art & The Good

### Art & The Good

*"Good art" is a subjective term that can have different interpretations depending on the context and perspective of the individual. In general, "good art" is often considered to have the following qualities: Aesthetically pleasing, originality, emotional impact, technical skill, intellectual stimulation.*

#### In This Chapter You Will Study:

- [What does "good art" mean?](#)
- [Step 1](#)
- [Step 2](#)
- [Step 3](#)

### What does "good art" mean?

"Good art" is a subjective term that can have different interpretations depending on the context and perspective of the individual. In general, "good art" is often considered to have the following qualities:

- **Aesthetically pleasing:** Good art is visually appealing and captures the viewer's attention through its composition, use of color, form, and other elements.
- **Emotional impact:** Good art has the ability to evoke an emotional response in the viewer, whether it be happiness, sadness, awe, or any other feeling.
- **Intellectual stimulation:** Good art often prompts the viewer to think about important ideas or concepts, either through its subject matter or its form.
- **Originality:** Good art is often seen as innovative and unique, pushing the boundaries of conventional art forms or presenting new perspectives on familiar subjects.
- **Technical skill:** Good art is typically characterized by mastery of the medium and technical skill, as evidenced by the artist's ability to effectively convey their vision.

As you've just read and studied above in Travis Anderson's article about seeking after the good in the arts, the qualities listed here are quite similar to the three important steps Anderson challenges us to consider in our seeking after that

which is virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy. We will next consider each of Anderson's steps in turn, with discussion of exemplifying artistic works from around the world.

## **Step 1: Recognize that art is important, that it should be taken seriously, and at times, with a certain degree of tolerance.**

An example of a modern artwork that embodies the idea that art should be taken seriously and with a certain degree of tolerance is Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. This iconic painting, created in 1937, is widely considered one of the greatest masterpieces of 20th-century art, and is celebrated for its powerful political commentary, its striking composition, and its bold use of form, color (it's essentially monochromatic), and symbolism.

This large mural-like painting, measuring some 11' 6" x 25' 6", *Guernica* was created in response to the [bombing of the town of Guernica](#)—located in northern Spain's Basque Country—during the Spanish Civil War, and depicts the horror and suffering of war in a fragmented and abstract style that was considered revolutionary at the time. Despite its political content, the painting has been widely acclaimed for its timeless artistic merit, and its cultural significance as a work of art is undeniable.

This example demonstrates that even works of art that address difficult or controversial political issues can be important and valuable, and that we should be willing to engage with such works with a certain degree of tolerance and openness. In sum, [Picasso's \*Guernica\*](#) serves as a reminder that art should be taken seriously, and that it has the power to inspire, challenge, and transform us in profound ways, even when the subject matter is difficult to confront.

## **Step 2: Acquaint ourselves with art that does not merely reflect our own views and preferences, but expands our appreciation for beauty, truth and goodness beyond the confines of our individual experience.**

A non-Western example of art that appears to meet Anderson's above criteria are the rock-cut temples of Ajanta and Ellora in India. These temples, built between 2nd century BC–6th century AD, are considered masterpieces of Buddhist and Hindu religious art and are known for their intricate carvings, sculptures, and murals (see images below). The Ajanta and Ellora temples and caves are a living testament to the rich cultural heritage of India and offer a window into the beliefs, values, and artistic traditions of ancient Indian society.

The art in these temples is a departure from the more familiar Western artistic traditions, yet it still promotes qualities of beauty, truth, and goodness. The intricate carvings depict scenes from the life of the Buddha, as well as various Hindu and Jain myths and legends, providing a rich cultural and religious tapestry. The beauty of the art is not limited to its visual appeal, but also extends to its spiritual and philosophical depth.

Visiting the Ajanta and Ellora temples is an opportunity to broaden one's horizons and expand one's appreciation for beauty, truth, and goodness beyond the confines of one's own culture and experience. By encountering art from other parts of the world, one can gain a greater understanding of different perspectives and cultural traditions, and develop a more nuanced appreciation for the diversity of human creativity.





Kailash temple (Ellora cave no 15) at Verul.

Photo Credit: [Wikipedia](#) CC BY-SA 4.0



Ajanta Cave artwork, c. 2nd century BC, medium: dry fresco.

Photo Credit; [Wikimedia](#). Public Domain

### **Step 3: Substantial preparation and effort are required in the study and analysis of art—which is partly why challenging art is often undervalued or criticized.**

Finally, a specific artwork that exemplifies Anderson's final step in seeking after that which is good—and one that surely requires purposeful preparation and effort from the viewer in order to more fully appreciate its "goodness"—is the conceptual work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude known as *The Gates*. Created in 2005, the artwork consisted of 7,503 steel gates that were installed throughout Central Park in New York City, each gate topped with a swath of saffron-colored fabric. The gates spanned 23 miles of footpaths throughout the park, creating a striking and unexpected visual experience for visitors. (You may visit [Remembering the Gates](#) to see images.)

*The Gates* conceptual installation was the result of years of planning and preparation by Christo and Jeanne-Claude, who had to navigate a complex web of political, environmental, and logistical hurdles in order to bring their vision to life. The project required extensive research into the ecology of Central Park, as well as detailed negotiations with local officials, park administrators, and community groups.

In order to fully appreciate *The Gates*, a more than casual viewer interest is certainly required. This may include researching the history of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work, understanding the conceptual and aesthetic motivations behind the project, and considering its impact on the local community and the environment.

Without question, *The Gates* project remains one of the most memorable and beloved public artworks of the 21st century, offering a powerful example of the transformative power of art and the potential for large-scale public installations to create a sense of wonder and awe.

In conclusion, it is true that art is a vital aspect of human culture and should be taken seriously. Art has the power to evoke emotions, challenge beliefs, and provide insight into the human condition. It can be a means of communication, a form of self-expression, and a reflection of society. It is through the study and analysis of art that we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. However, it is also important to approach art with a certain degree of tolerance. Art is subjective and can often elicit strong emotions and opinions. It is essential to remember that everyone is entitled to their own perspectives and interpretations of art. This tolerance allows us to engage in meaningful discussions and debates about art without resorting to personal attacks or judgment.

Likewise, expanding our appreciation for art beyond our own views and preferences is an important ingredient in our pursuit of "good" art. It allows us to broaden our perspectives and understanding of different cultures, histories, and experiences. By exposing ourselves to art that challenges our beliefs and expands our horizons, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity of the world around us. This can lead to a greater understanding and appreciation of beauty, truth, and goodness, and help us to see beyond our individual experiences to the larger, more universal aspects of human existence. Whether it is through visiting museums, attending art exhibitions, or reading about different art movements, the effort put into exploring art that is outside of our comfort zone can be a rich and rewarding experience.

Finally, it goes without saying that studying and analyzing art require considerable preparation and effort on the part of the audience and viewer. To truly understand and appreciate the complexities of art, one must immerse themselves in the historical and cultural context in which it was created, as well as the techniques and materials used by the artist. This requires more than casual research, in addition to at least a basic understanding of art history, aesthetics, and critical theories. Additionally, the ability to effectively analyze a work of art requires the viewer to begin developing their visual literacy, together with an ability to articulate complex ideas and emotions through observation and interpretation. In sum, the effort put into studying and analyzing art can be both challenging and rewarding, as it allows individuals to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the art world and its significance in our lives.



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