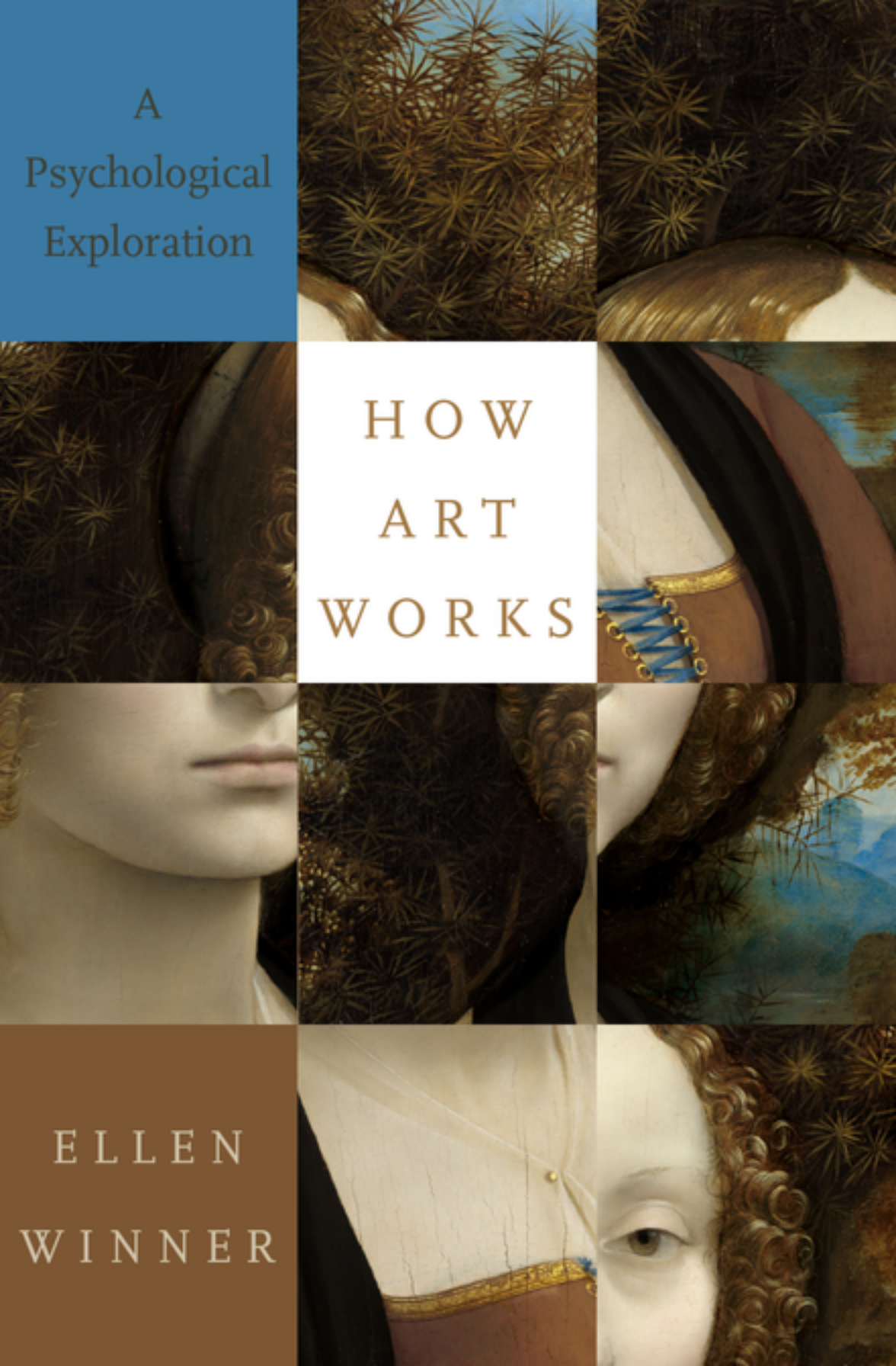
A Psychological Exploration



HOW ART WORKS

ELLEN WINNER

How Art Works

Other books by Ellen Winner

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The Point of Words: Children's Understanding of Metaphor and Irony (1988)

Gifted Children: Myths and Realities (1996)

Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education
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For my grandchildren, Oscar, Agnes, Olivia, and Faye

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PART I | Introduction

CHAPTER 1 | Perennial Questions

A painting is not a picture of an experience. It is an experience.[1]

—MARK ROTHKO

AT LUTHER LUCKETT CORRECTIONAL Center in LaGrange, Kentucky, prisoners convicted of violent crimes spent a year rehearsing and finally performing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Lady Gaga sold out three Madison Square Garden concerts in one hour and performs to adoring fans. It has been said that in 1841 people waited on the New York docks for the ship carrying the final chapter of Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop*, to find out whether the character Little Nell had died. Parents in the United States and many other countries make sure their children learn to play an instrument, and make sure they work hard at it. By the age of two, my granddaughter Olivia had made over 100 "abstract expressionist" paintings. In 2017, a painting by Jean-Michel Basquiat was auctioned at Sotheby's for $110.5 million.

These strange behaviors we call art are as old as humans. As early as *Homo sapiens*, and long before there was science, there was art. Archeologists have found ochre clay incised with decoration from 99,000 years ago,[2] musical instruments from over 35,000 years ago,[3] and masterful figurative paintings on the Chauvet cave walls from 30,000 years ago.[4] There has never been a culture without one or more forms of art—though not all cultures have had a word for art. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss[5] placed art above science, describing the work of the painter, poet, and composer as well as the myths and symbols of primitive humans as

> if not as a superior form of knowledge, at any rate as the most fundamental form of knowledge, and the only one that we all have in common; knowledge in the scientific sense is merely the sharpened edge of this other knowledge.

In modern, literate societies, there is no end to wondering about "art" and "the arts." What makes something art? Do two-year-old Olivia's paintings count? If I say that *Harry Potter* is a greater novel than *War and Peace*, is this just a subjective opinion, or could I be proven wrong? Are the primitive looking paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat that sell for millions something any child could have made? If a revered painting turns out to be a forgery, does it become less good? Does the sorrow we feel when we read about the death of Little Nell have the same quality as the sorrow we feel when someone we know dies? Did reading about little Nell make us better, more empathetic people? Do we make our children smarter by enrolling them in music lessons? Is Lady Gaga's musical talent something she was born with, or due to hundreds of hours of practice?

Many of these kinds of questions were first posed (and answered) by philosophers. But even those who have never read philosophy may wonder about these questions—for whether or not we realize it, ordinary conversation often encroaches on philosophical questions. Psychologists who study the arts have often taken philosophical questions as their starting point but have tried to answer these questions not as philosophers but by using the methods of social science—interviews, experimentation, data collection, and statistical analysis. What psychologists want to unpack is what art does to us—how we experience art. As the painter Mark Rothko states in the epigraph to this chapter, art is not about an experience, it *is* an experience. This profound statement holds for all of the arts.

In the pages that follow, I take you to the labs of the growing number of psychologists carrying out studies of "experimental aesthetics," including my own lab at Boston College—the Arts and Mind Lab—where I have worked for over three decades with my graduate students, lab managers, and many undergraduate psychology majors eager to learn about how psychologists do their work. I start out in the next chapter by raising a vexed question: What is this thing we call art that has existed since the earliest humans, that no other animals do, and that no culture has ever been without? Do the things we call art have any necessary and sufficient features that unite them and distinguish them from things we don't call art? Over the centuries, philosophers have tried (and failed) to define art. Psychologists (perhaps wisely) ask a somewhat different question: not "what is it," but rather what do people think it is. And this is an empirical question.

The questions raised in these pages are not easy to answer. My goal is to bring to life the observational studies and experiments that psychologists have designed to answer these questions. There is much work to be done, of course. But preliminary answers have emerged, and some of them may surprise you.

CHAPTER 2 | Can This Be Art?

ART IS ONE OF the most complicated of human endeavors. This claim will become apparent to anyone who tries to define what art is and what it is not to a visitor from another planet, and who tries to defend this definition from one counterexample after the next. Attempts to define art have a vexed philosophical history. (These definitional attempts have focused primarily on the visual arts; hence the arguments and examples in this chapter are primarily visual.) British aesthetician Clive Bell[1] remarked, "Everyone in his heart believes that there is a real distinction between works of art and all other objects." Invariably, however, carefully crafted definitions leave out many things we want to call art, just as they typically include many things we don't want to call art. Yet all (or most) of us think we know art when we see it.

Sara Goldschmied and Eleonora Chiari's installation *Where Shall We Go Dancing Tonight* consisted of empty champagne bottles, cigarette butts, and confetti spread around on the floor of a room in the Museion Bozen-Bolzano in Northern Italy. The museum's website discussed this piece as an exhibition about consumerism and hedonism in Italy in the 1980s. But when the cleaning staff was asked to clean up the room after a book party had been held there, they not surprisingly mistook the installation for after-party trash and dumped it all into recycling bins. When this blunder was discovered, the museum retrieved the trash from the bins and reconstructed the work.

What happened to the Goldschmied-Chari installation is a clear-cut case of someone implicitly classifying a work displayed in a museum as "not art." It is similar to the case of French conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp's porcelain urinal, a "ready-made" found object that he titled *Fountain* and submitted to the Society of Independent Artist's 1917 exhibit. The submission was rejected. But today, museums and art historians treat his ready-mades as

art. Duchamp's original work was lost, but Duchamp made a replica, which was auctioned off at Sotheby's in 1999 for $1,600,000. His snow shovel that he titled *En prévision du bras cassé* [In advance of the broken arm] hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as does the third version of his *Bicycle Wheel*, mounted on a painted wooden stool, shown in Figure 2.1 (the original from 1913 was lost). Duchamp believed that any ordinary object could be elevated to the status of an artwork just by an artist choosing that object. The artwork is thus not the actual object but the idea behind it. Duchamp wanted to move art away from something to look at (he called that "retinal art") to art that makes us think—and to ask the question, "Why is that art?"

But to the uninitiated, like the cleaning staff in the Italian museum, these objects provoke a negative reaction. Why would anyone think these are art?

FIGURE 2.1 Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). *Bicycle Wheel*. New York, 1951 (third version, after lost original of 1913). Metal wheel mounted on painted wood stool, 51 × 25 × 16 1/2" (129.5 × 63.5 × 41.9 cm).

The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. The Museum of Modern Art. © Association Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2018. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA I Art Resource, New York.

One could ask the same question about avant-garde composer John Cage's work *4'33",* which requires the performers to remain completely silent on stage for the amount of time given in the title so that the audience members can listen to naturally occurring sounds and consider these as music. Why would anyone think of silence on stage, and coughs and creaking chairs and raindrops heard in the concert hall as music?[2]

We not only feel entitled to declare something presented as art as "not art"; we also willingly and freely denounce certain works of art as no good—recall the nineteenth century salon critics rejecting works by impressionists, or the near-riot that ensued in 1913 when Igor Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* was performed. However, claiming that something is not art is not the same as claiming that something is bad art. I consider how we evaluate what is good and bad in art in Chapter 8. For now, are there any rules on which we can agree that tell us whether or not a pile of bottles in a corner of museum gallery is or is not a work of art?

Philosophers Define Art

Centuries of thinkers have tried to define art in terms of one or more necessary and sufficient features. I offer you here a brief and incomplete laundry list of definitions offered by philosophers (and one Russian novelist). Plato (in *The Republic*) made representation, or mimesis, the defining feature of art. He believed that all works of art were imitations of ordinary objects (and, therefore, inferior to them, just as ordinary physical objects were inferior to the ideal non-physical forms of these objects). Immanuel Kant[3] defined art as a kind of representation that has no external purpose, that exists only for itself, though it has the power to communicate and stimulate our minds. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy[4] defined art in terms of its function: to express emotion. Clive Bell[5] defined a work of art as something that has "significant form"—nonrepresentational combinations of lines, colors, shapes that lead to aesthetic emotion—because only significant form can provoke an aesthetic emotion, an emotion different from all other kinds of human emotions, one that transports us out of ordinary human concerns into an exalted state. George Dickie[6] proposed the institutional definition of art: a work of art is an artifact that has been offered up as a candidate for appreciation by the art world. Monroe Beardsley[7] offered a functional definition: a work of art is something that affords, or is intended to afford, an aesthetic experience—that is, it causes us to consider the aesthetic value of the object. Jerrold Levinson[8] proposed an intentional-historical definition: a work

of art is anything intended to be understood like previous artworks were understood.

The problem with some of these definitions is that they are non-inclusive. Defining art as a form of representation leaves out non-representational forms of art, such as most music or abstract art, just as it includes representations that we would not call art, such as diagrams and mathematical equations. Defining art as something that expresses emotion leaves out art that is not highly expressive—conceptual art, decorative art, minimalist art. Defining art as something presented to the art world as art leaves out "outsider art" never shown in a museum. Some theories are circular: if something is art because it provokes an aesthetic experience (Beardsley) or an aesthetic emotion (Bell), and an aesthetic experience or an aesthetic emotion is what is provoked by art, we have a circular, non-testable proposition.

Some theories confuse or conflate the distinction *art–not art* with the distinction *good art–bad art*. For example, paintings that Clive Bell dislikes are said to lack significant form and thus are not art. Sir Luke Fildes' painting *The Doctor,* which hangs in the Tate Museum in London, was deemed not a work of art by Bell because he found it sentimental and descriptive and unable to provoke aesthetic ecstasy. Bell did realize that not everyone is moved by the same works of art, and he dealt with this problem by saying that "I have no right to consider anything a work of art to which I cannot react emotionally."[9] Thus, apparently, a work can have significant form for you but not for me; and thus it is art for you but not art for me.

In 2009, Denis Dutton, a philosopher of aesthetics in New Zealand, published a scholarly but also highly entertaining book called *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* in which he analyzed our need for the arts by invoking arguments from evolution, considering this need as an "instinct."[10] In my view, one of his most important contributions was to take on the problem of defining art. He argued that we should not begin by pondering how to include atypical cases in the category of art—cases such as a museum gallery floor strewn with bottles and confetti. Instead, he insisted we should begin with indisputable cases of art so that we can understand "the center of art and its values."[11] He offers us not a set of necessary and sufficient features meant to apply to all works of art but instead an extensive list of features that he believes characterize *typical* works of art.

Here are the characteristic (but not necessary) features that prototypical works of art possess, according to Dutton:

Skill and virtuosity
Novelty and creativity

Representation
Expressive individuality
Emotional saturation
Direct pleasure
Intellectual challenge
Imaginative experience
Culture of criticism
Style
Special focus
Existing within art traditions and institutions

Though none of these are meant to be necessary features, that does not mean that anything goes because "even if . . . there is 'no one way' to be a work of art, it does not follow that the converse 'many ways' are so hopelessly numerous as to be unspecifiable."[12]

I think it is useful to divide Dutton's features into three broad categories: what we perceive in works of art, how we respond to works of art, and contextual aspects of art. In the next sections I explain what he means by each one. See what you think. I'm sure you will think of counterexamples, art that does not possess a particular feature, underscoring that this feature need not be present for something to still be considered art.

What We Perceive in a Work of Art, per Dutton

Skill and Virtuosity

An art object is made with skill. This connects to pleasure: we admire skill, and recognizing great skill is deeply pleasurable. Necessary? Duchamp's ready-mades did not require technical skill because they were found, not made. Nor did Cage's *4'33"*. Exclusive to art? No, just think of sporting events, chess matches, great speeches. All of these take skill. Indeed, Dutton never argues that any one of his features are either necessary or sufficient.

Novelty and Creativity

An art object is novel and original. This also connects to pleasure. We like to be surprised, we admire novelty, and recognizing it is pleasurable. Necessary? What about art in the school of a great master? Not so novel. Novelty is also not exclusive to art. Just think of the taxi driver who finds a creative way around traffic, or a scientist who makes a new discovery.

Representation

Much art involves representation. And, harking back to the first criterion listed, Dutton notes that we take pleasure in representation for the skill behind it, and because we may find the depicted objects pleasing in themselves. Necessary? Not for music and abstract art. And not exclusive to art since maps, equations, and codes are also representational.

Expressive Individuality

Artworks express something about the artist who made them, and we enjoy thinking about the mind behind the works. Necessary? Perhaps, in my view. When in the presence of a work of art, we cannot help but wonder about the mind and personality of the maker. But certainly individual expression is not exclusive to art, for this can also be said of any activity that is not totally rule governed and that allows for creativity—whether cooking, hair-styling, or advertising.

Emotional Saturation

Artworks are emotional, as is the experience of perceiving these works. The representational content of a work provokes emotions in us (such as sorrow at a sad scene in a painting), and the tone or expression of a work is also perceived and felt. Necessary? No. Minimalist paintings are not saturated with feeling. And emotion is not exclusive to art because funerals and weddings and many other of life's experiences are saturated with emotion.

How We Respond to a Work of Art, per Dutton

Direct Pleasure

Art causes immediate pleasure for its own sake, with no utilitarian value. Necessary? No, a work that does not please us at all is still art, even if we do not like it. And pleasure is not exclusive to art, since lots of things give us pleasure for their own sake: a game of tennis, a sunrise, ice cream, sex.

Intellectual Challenge

Artworks challenge us intellectually (and this, too, is pleasurable). The philosopher Alva Noë[13] echoes this view when he writes that art aims to disclose us to ourselves, and expose to us what we did not know about ourselves. He calls art a "strange tool" because unlike most artifacts, art is a tool that has no

ordinary utilitarian function. Because it has no practical function, Noë writes, art forces us to ask what is this thing that I see in front of me. If we ask this, we extend our minds and have experiences we would not otherwise have. Necessary? Not for those artworks that are hackneyed. Not for a pop romance novel. But likely necessary for art we classify as great. Is this characteristic exclusive to art? Perhaps not, because many non-art activities also challenge us when we try to make sense of them—like listening to a lecture on string theory, or working out a mathematical puzzle. And yet these do not "expose us to ourselves." Perhaps immersing ourselves in art is more like going to a psychiatrist: both experiences challenge us and force us to introspect.

Imaginative Experience

Artworks create imaginative experience for both the maker and the perceiver, and Dutton thinks this is maybe the most important of his 12 features. So do I. Artworks are experienced in a pretend world. We know that fictional characters are not real, yet they make us frightened, sad, relieved, and happy. We listen to music and experience emotions even though no events are causing us to feel sorrow, joy, or excitement. The imaginative experience caused by art is decoupled from any practical concern—in Immanuel Kant's eighteenth-century words,[14] art is for disinterested contemplation.

Dutton offers the example of a football game, asking why this is not a work of art even though it gives pleasure, elicits emotion, requires skill, is associated with criticism, and is given special focus. It's not art, because watching the game is not an imaginative experience. This is not the virtual reality of art, it is actual reality. And we care who wins.

A similar point was made by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset[15]:

> [T]he artistic object is artistic only to the extent that it is not real. In order to enjoy Titian's equestrian portrait of Charles V, it is a necessary condition that we do not see the authentic, living Charles V but only a portrait of him, that is, an unreal image. The man portrayed and his portrait are two completely distinct objects: either we are interested in the one or in the other. In the former case, we 'associate' with Charles V; in the latter, we 'contemplate' the artistic object as such.

In my view, imaginative experience may well be a necessary feature of a work of art. All forms of art—whether visual art, music, literature, or dance—invite us to enter into an imaginary space, taking us away from "non-art reality." But this cannot be a sufficient feature: other domains also invite us to

enter into an imaginary world—games, pretend play, and perhaps mathematics (though some mathematicians may disagree!).

Criticism

A critical language accompanies artworks: critics talk about art, as do audiences. Necessary? If no critic ever wrote about a work of art, we would still call it art, wouldn't we? Exclusive to art? No, for any human activity that is complex is accompanied by criticism, whether science, politics, or athletics. We have critical discourse about diving competitions where form is important and somewhat subjective to judge, but not much about speed swimming, where all that counts is the fastest time.

Contextual Aspects of Art, per Dutton

Style

Artworks are made in particular styles, and hence abide at least loosely by sets of rules, just like most human activities—language use, norms of politeness, nonverbal communication, cooking. Researcher Shigeru Watanabe[16] showed that even mice and pigeons can distinguish paintings by style, discriminating Monets from Picassos, Kandinskys from Mondrians. Infants[17] and young children[18] can do this as well. We also group together different artists working in the same style. Computers, too, have been trained to classify by styles, distinguishing impressionism, surrealism, and abstract expressionism at 91 percent accuracy.[19]

Special Focus

Artworks are typically set apart from ordinary life, whether by a stage, a frame, a concert hall, or a museum. This sounds like what the philosopher Schopenhauer[20] meant when he wrote that art "plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world's course, and holds it isolated before it." This is what another theorist of art, Ellen Dissanayake,[21] meant when she said that art is set apart, made special. A curator at a major museum once mentioned how artists toss around their works in their studios but as soon as they are brought into the museum, the curators treat these same works with exquisite care, as sacrosanct.

When artworks are not formally set apart and thus "made special," we sometimes do not recognize their value. An amusing illustration of this happened when the acclaimed cellist Joshua Bell agreed to participate in an

experiment. After recent sell-out crowds at Boston Symphony Hall, he sat in the Washington, D.C. subway in the morning with a hat laid out to collect coins as he played Bach. Most passersby barely noticed him and gave no indication of recognizing that they were in the presence of an accomplished artist.

Art Traditions and Institutions

Artworks exist within a historical tradition, as do all organized social activities of humans. But of course this is not true of outsider art—by prisoners, mental patients, children, and animals.

How to Evaluate Dutton's Approach

It is difficult to disagree with anything on this list when it comes to prototypical works of art. But how far does this get us in pinning art down? Can we use this list as a tool to test whether something is or is not a work of art? Not if none of these features are necessary, as Dutton thinks. And not even if some of these features are necessary. And that is because none of these features are jointly sufficient to make something a work of art. Every one of these features can be found outside of art. Dutton tells us that if all of his features are present, we know we are looking at a prototypical work of art. But he also says all need not be present! Dutton's list (as he would readily admit) tells us what we know about prototypical art but not art on the fringes.

In some cases, Dutton confuses the art–non-art distinction with the good art–bad art distinction. That's because some of his features apply only to great art. Novelty and expressive individuality are necessary only for great art: lesser works of art are often derivative—but they are still art (think of works by someone "in the school of Leonardo," where the artist strives to paint in Leonardo's style rather than develop an individual style). Intellectual challenge is a feature of the experience of great works, but what about romance novels we buy at the airport? Maybe these are not great, but if they are not instances of literature, which is a kind of art, what are they?

Why Is Art So Hard to Pin Down?

Is defining art a more difficult task than defining other kinds of things? Yes, because it is not a "natural kind." Natural kinds can be defined by a set of necessary and sufficient features. Water is a natural kind, and we can readily define it as a certain combination of hydrogen and oxygen, H_2O. Anything with this combination is water, and anything lacking this combination is

not water. The make-up of water does not change over historical periods or across cultures. Water is a real thing that is mind-independent. It exists whether or not humans are aware of it. The same goes for gold, or elephants. And we can verify objectively whether or not something is water, gold, or an elephant. Art is something very different.

Art is a socially constructed concept created by culture. Because it is socially constructed, it is not mind-independent. It is our minds that pull together into one category the things we call art. Moreover, art is a socially constructed concept with very blurry boundaries, unlike the clearer boundaries of money, another socially constructed concept. And what counts as art can change over time and over culture.

We can liken the concept of art to the concept of game, another kind of mind-dependent category. Here is what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein[22] said about games. There are many kinds of games—chess, bridge, solitaire, board games, Olympic races, ring around the rosie, pretend play—and there is no one feature or set of features shared by all games. Instead, games are connected to one another by family resemblances; one game resembles another in some features (like eye color in families), but no one feature runs throughout all games (or all members of a family). Some games are physical, some cerebral; some are serious, some fun; some are competitive, some not, and so on. And there is no "best" example of a game. Wittgenstein used the metaphor of a rope made up of twisted fibers with no one fiber running throughout the whole length of the rope.

Nor is there any way to verify whether something is a game. If people consider something a game—say, trying to beat the traffic lights, trying not to step on a sidewalk crack, or eating bugs on the "game" TV show *Fear Factor*,—then it is a game for them, though others might disagree. The concept of game, like art, is functional, defined by its use. Such concepts are open ones: things we never dreamed of as games may become games for the next generation because new kinds of games with different kinds of properties can be invented. The philosopher Morris Weitz[23] argues that art is also an open concept. Its boundaries are infinitely expandable because it must encompass previously undreamed of forms. We cannot list the defining features of art because this would close the concept.

Replacing "What is art?" with "When is art?"

To ask whether the Goldschmied-Chiari installation *Where Shall We Go Dancing Tonight* is a work of art is to ask a question that cannot be empirically

answered. For how could we ever put this question to an objective test? That installation is art if we treat it as art. Whether or not we like it or deem it good is an entirely different question.

The philosopher Nelson Goodman[24] (also the founder of Harvard Project Zero, the research group where long ago I began my investigations into the psychology of the arts) argued that we should replace the question "*What* is art?" with the question "*When* is art?" The same object can function as a work of art or not, depending on how the object is viewed. When an object functions as art, it exhibits certain "symptoms" of the aesthetic. For example, an object functioning as art is relatively *replete* (full), meaning that more of its physical properties are part of its meaning and should be attended to than when that same object is not functioning as a work of art. Goodman asks us to consider a zigzag line, such as the one shown in Figure 2.2. Told that the line is a stock market graph, all we attend to are the peaks and dips. We could get the same information from a set of numbers. But if this same line is part of a drawing (say, the outline of a mountain), all of the line's physical properties are suddenly important and part of what the artist wants us to attend to—its color, texture, edges, thickness, among other things. And we cannot translate this experience into a set of numbers.

I take Goodman's concept of repleteness to be a psychological claim—about the attitude we shift into when we categorize something as a work of art. This is a claim that psychologists could actually test. The importance of repleteness reminds me of Bell's significant form. When something is functioning as a work of art, we do not only look through it to what it represents. We also attend to its formal, surface properties. Ortega y Gasset makes the same point as Goodman. When we look at a painting of a garden, we can see right through the surface properties of paint and focus just on the garden. But if we do this we are not adopting an aesthetic attitude. He

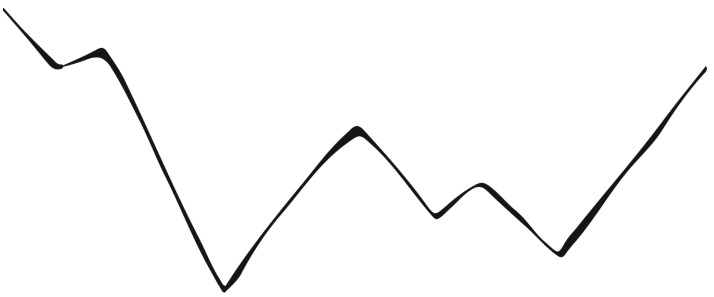

FIGURE 2.2 Zigzag line that could be from a stock market graph or a line drawing of mountains.
Drawing by Nat Rabb.

makes an analogy to looking at a garden through a window. We can focus our eyes on the garden, or we can make an effort and refocus our eyes on the windowpane.

> Then the garden disappears from our eyes, and all we see of it are some confused masses of colour which seem to adhere to the glass. Thus to see the garden and to see the window-pane are two incompatible operations: the one excludes the other and they each require a different focus.[25]

This refocusing requires the capacity to reflect on the character, rather than the content, of visual experience—and this focusing on the nature of our visual experience may well be at the heart of an aesthetic experience.

The philosopher Roger Scruton[26] makes a similar psychological point in his description of a carpenter who chooses the way to frame a door just on the basis of what looks right. This is a purely aesthetic judgment, not an instrumental one, and Scruton[27] defines such an attitude as

> a desire to go on hearing, looking at, or in some other way having experience of X, where there is no reason for this desire in terms of any other desire or appetite that the experience of X may fulfill, and where the desire arises out of, and is accompanied by, the thought of X.

We care about the way things look when we set a table for guests, when we arrange our living room furniture, when we pick our clothes. This aesthetics of everyday life, Scruton argues, is a state of mind that is fundamental to human nature, and lacking in other animals. Birds may sing, but there is nothing in their behavior that allows us to say that the birds are contemplating how the song sounds. Thus works of art are things that function in certain ways: they are "objects to be enjoyed for their appearance and whose appearance is to be interpreted purely for what it means and without reference to some (further) practical function."[28] This seems to me to be close to the idea of repleteness. And also close to Kant's[29] belief that the aesthetic attitude is one of disinterested pleasure, divorced from practical constraints, divorced from any desire for the object causing the pleasure.

Consider a second Goodman symptom of the aesthetic, *metaphorical exemplification*, which I prefer to refer to with the more transparent term, *expression*. When an object is functioning as a work of art, it has the peculiar property of evoking without representing. It can express properties that it does not literally possess, such as a mood. A painting can express sadness or joy, but is not literally sad or happy. A painting can express loudness, but is

not literally loud. A symphony can express color, but is not literally colorful. One would not describe a scientific graph as expressing emotion or loudness or sharpness. So that same zigzag line can express properties it does not literally possess when a perceiver attends to its visual properties (and thus treats it as a work of art in Goodman's functional sense) as opposed to its informational content (and thus treats it as a graph). Of course, we can still respond to a scientific graph in terms of how ugly or beautiful it is, but we do not impute non-literal properties to graphs.

Dutch cognitive psychologist Rolf Zwaan carried out a study in 1991 that I believe provides direct support for Goodman's claim that the same object can function as art or not-art.[30] He presented people with six texts, some of which were originally from newspapers, others from works of literature. Both could pass as either news stories or literature. Half of the people were told they were reading an excerpt from a newspaper account of events; the other half were told they were reading an excerpt from literature. The hypothesis was that texts read as literature would be read more slowly because literature is to be savored rather than skimmed. As the linguist Roman Jakobson[31] noted, in literature the poetic function of language is primary—and we focus on the structure of the message rather than looking through the message to the meaning. It follows, then, that *how* the meanings are conveyed (the precise wording) should be recalled better in a text read as literature rather than as news. Following is one of the texts used in this study, originally a news article, about a former Romanian political prisoner:

> His first confrontation with the police dates from winter 1983. He studied to be a stage director at night-school, and worked in a studio during the daytime. The energy shortage, a consequence of megalomaniac investments in the petrochemical industry, was dire. Two measures became simultaneously operative: the energy prize was multiplied and the supply of energy was severely reduced. A propaganda campaign accompanied the cold under the slogan: 50 percent materials, 100 percent performance. Sorin drew a man cut in two, wrote the slogan under it, and sneaked at night to a factory gate. He pinned up the drawing, believing himself unseen. The next day, he was picked up from his work. At first, he was treated in a friendly manner at the police station. He was offered some coffee. During the interrogation, the central question was by whose order Sorin had pinned up that drawing. Sorin remained silent. They hit him. He refused to talk. They threatened to cut his wrists. He denied having anything to do with the drawing. They showed him the door. 'Just go'. As he walked down the corridor, an officer grabbed hold of him and knocked him unconscious. When he came round, he lay in the comer of a cell, his hands and face covered in blood. Two fingers of his right hand were

paralyzed; they had cut the tendons. He was then allowed to go. In the bus people wondered at his blood-covered face and hands.

When people believed they were reading literature, they read more slowly. Consistent with this finding, verbatim memory for the surface features of the text was higher when people thought they were reading literature. This was measured by presenting people with sentences from the texts with one word in capital letters. Some of the time, this word was a synonym of the original word read. The task was to decide whether this was the word used in the text or not.

In Goodman's terms, the text became replete when it was approached as literature. In contrast, when the participants thought they were reading a news account, they looked through the words to their meaning and hence confused synonyms with what they had originally read. For Goodman, it makes no sense to ask if a text is literature. We can only ask whether it is functioning as literature. And the same goes for any kind of art.

Goodman's approach differs from Dutton's in his insistence that what makes something art is how it is perceived. A pattern made from accidentally spilled paint can function as a work of art if I attend to its repleteness and its expression. The Goldschmied-Chari installation was functioning as a work of art to viewers who attended to the patterns created by the way the bottles were laid out (whether they were carefully laid out or just tossed there) and who noticed that this work expressed corruption and decadence. But this same installation was not functioning as a work of art for the cleaning staff, who presumably noticed none of these things.

But in another way, Goodman's approach is similar to Dutton's: both give us a probabilistic way to determine whether something is a work of art, or is functioning as one. Like Dutton, Goodman believes his symptoms are neither necessary nor sufficient, but if all or most are present, the object is likely functioning as a work of art. Thus neither Weitz, Goodman, nor Dutton give us a set of rules against which we can definitively test an object's art–non-art status.

Replacing "What is art?" with "What do people think is art?"

Philosophers worry about what art *is*. Psychologists do not. Instead, they want to find out what people *think* art is. These are quite different questions. The philosopher's question presumes a right answer if we can think clearly

enough. A philosopher's methods entail reflection as well as thought experiments—for example, testing an imagined example of art against a proposed theory to see if it is encompassed by that theory. The philosopher's right answer could be a logical definition, as Bell offered, a probabilistic definition as per Dutton and Goodman, or an acceptance that there is no definition because art is an ever-open concept, as per Weitz. In principle, philosophers could come up with a definition they propose is true that would differ from the answer that ordinary people would give. That would not trouble the philosopher, and would likely have no influence on the ordinary person.

Both questions have merit. But they require very different ways of going about answering them, one by reasoning and introspection, one by empirical study. Some philosophers have become interested enough in psychologists' questions to engage in what has come to be called "experimental philosophy."[32] They take philosophical issues and study how ordinary people think about them. Richard Kamber[33] is a philosopher who carried out a psychological study on the question of what non-philosophers—art professionals as well as ordinary people—think is and is not art. He believes that this kind of study can actually illuminate a philosophical problem: how to define art. Other philosophers might disagree. Nonetheless, what a psychologist (and Kamber) want to find out about is what the category "art" looks like in the mind of the non-philosopher.

Kamber used the simplest method available to psychologists—a self-report survey. He posted two online questionnaires designed to test people's intuitions about whether various objects qualified as art. Unlike Dutton, he used only potentially controversial, non-prototypical cases of art—with the goal of discovering where people draw the line. He gave people examples of things we might or might not classify as art, and for each, participants had say whether it was art or not art, or whether they were unsure. One hundred and fifty-one participants, most of whom were university or college faculty members, completed the surveys. Of the respondents, 52% were "art professionals" (which included artists, art historians, employees of art organizations, and philosophers of art), 39% were "art buffs" (people who had taken three or more courses in the history, theory or philosophy of any of the fine or performing arts, and had visited museums at least twice a year, as well as had attended concerts or plays also at least twice a year); and 9% were neither of these and were considered "ordinary folk."

Each example Kamber presented to his participants was selected to test a particular hypothesis. To see whether people would be willing to allow "bad art" to be art, he offered a painting of Elvis Presley on velvet. The majority

answer was yes, art. To see whether plain old ordinary objects could be art, he gave them white envelopes. The majority answer was no, not art. To see whether art is something that has to be human-made, he showed them a painting by an elephant given a brush to hold in its trunk. The answer was no, not art. To see whether nature qualifies, he proposed a dead tree. Again, not art.

Kamber's informal survey tells us that educated people who know a lot about art (the majority of his participants) are able to agree on average on where they draw the line between art and not art. And yet . . . even when most people agreed that an object was not art, responses were *never* unanimous. Take the example of the dead tree: 84% said a dead tree was not art, and 16% said it was art. Over half of those who said it was a work of art were art professionals. Kamber imagines a group of biologists asked to decide whether a plastic Christmas tree is a plant. Not one would say yes. Unlike the boundaries of the biological category plant, the boundaries of the socially constructed category art are porous. And that is why people disagree.

Kamber designed his study very informally, testing a grab bag of theories, using only one or two examples to test each one. Psychologists are more likely to design a study to zero in on one or two criteria that might be used to distinguish art from non-art. One such study was carried out by cognitive psychologist Jean-Luc Jucker and his colleagues.[34] The potential criterion he addressed was perceived intentionality: are people more likely to judge something as art if they believe it was intentionally crafted rather than being the product of an accident? Jucker and his colleagues presented non-art experts with images and asked them to decide, using a seven-point scale, how strongly they considered these images to be works of art. This is a more sensitive measure than the yes-or-no, all-or-nothing, response that Kamber asked of his participants because it can tell us about degrees of "artness."

The clever manipulation was that participants saw the images accompanied by artist statements either making it clear that the image was intentionally crafted to look the way it did, or making it clear that the image was the by-product of some other action and thus was accidental. For example, the out-of-focus photograph shown in Figure 2.3 was presented in the high-intentional condition accompanied by an artist statement that the defocussing was an attempt to make the colors more vibrant. In the low-intentional condition this same image was presented along with the artist statement that he had forgotten to focus his camera. There was also a control condition in which the images were presented with no statements at all.

FIGURE 2.3 Out-of-focus photograph used in Jucker, Barrett, and Wlodarski's (2014) study.
Photograph by Jean-Luc Jucker. Reprinted with permission of SAGE Publications Inc. © SAGE Publications.

Here is another pair of artist statements that stress either intentionality or accident.

Accompanying a wooden board with a large trail of black paint, participants read one of the following two artist statements:

(1) Because of its simplicity and expressivity, this piece may look like a branch painted in Japanese style. In fact, it is just a wood board on which I had laid a chain that I needed to paint in black for another work.
(2) This piece is inspired by Japanese art, which I like for its simplicity and expressivity. In this instance, I have tried to represent a single branch using just black paint, which I applied on a wood board using a chain.

If you responded like the participants, you would have given higher artness ratings to the image you believed was created intentionally rather than as a byproduct of some other action. In a control condition where no artist statements accompanied the images, artness ratings were as high as those for images accompanied by high-intentionality statements. Thus people assumed that these images were intentionally produced and thus art.