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ARTS & CULTURE – TEACHER'S INFOPACK 2024

Enduring Understanding(s): *What will students understand as a result of this unit?*

Definition & characteristics of the arts
EU1: Fundamentally, art is an expression of human creativity, and one of its greatest values lies in the intangible socio-psychological benefits it provides to the individual – both artist and audience.

EU2: Our artistic tendencies are expressed through various branches of creative activity – termed "the arts" – including visual (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture), performing (e.g. theatre, dance, music) and literary arts (e.g. poetry, prose, drama).

EU3: There are often parameters placed upon the arts by entities (e.g. the state, religious authorities) due to perceptions that they pose a threat to establishment values and ideologies. Conversely, they may be used by these same entities to entrench established values and ideologies.

EU4: The creation of art and the perception of "meaning" in art works can be influenced by globalisation, modernisation, and even advancements in technology and communications. This may result in tensions between traditional/"conservative" and more contemporary/"radical" perceptions of the roles and "value" of art.

EU5: The sustenance and development of the arts require funding, with investment in them possibly reaping economic and other benefits. This funding, however, may be limited or inconsistent due to perceptions that the arts are a frivolity and an extravagance.

Defining characteristics of culture and how culture is related to the arts
EU6: Culture comprises both observable and unobservable elements like identity, customs, beliefs, ideas, and history of a particular people or society, which in turn shape how we perceive ourselves, society, and the world.
8
EU7: Culture is learned and shared, but can also alter over time in response to changes in the material and nonmaterial environment.

EU8: Aspects of culture can be expressed through the arts (as well as other markers such as architecture, language, food) that a people or society regard as distinctive and important markers of the group/s they belong to.

EU9: In embodying aspects of culture, the arts play a key role in shaping culture and identity, be it in recollecting the past, showcasing the current societal mood and psyche, expressing future hopes or building connections.

EU10: Cultural conditioning, biases and circumstances can therefore make what is considered art highly subjective. Nevertheless, arts practitioners sometimes seek to provoke thought by pushing socio-cultural boundaries and may, in the process, gain prominence and/or suffer the consequences of this.

Essential Questions (EQs)
1. What is art? What purposes does it serve?
2. Are some forms of art superior to others?
3. What is the value of arts and culture to the ordinary person or society at large, especially in the light of societal or global changes?

4. How and why is culture affected by changes? Does it become diluted or does it adapt in its various forms?
5. Is there value in preserving culture in its various forms?
6. What threats are there to cultural preservation?
7. How and why do entities with power and influence seek to curtail – or use – the arts?
8. How, if at all, should governments support the arts and culture? Why so?

2024 RI Y6 "ARTS & CULTURE" INFOPACK
PAST-YEAR EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

(1a) ARTS – Cambridge

1. Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society. (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'Dramas on television or film are never as effective as a live performance.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2022)
3. Examine the claim that music without words lacks both meaning and appeal. (Cambridge 2022)
4. 'Films are concerned with escaping from the problems of everyday life, rather than addressing them.' Discuss (Cambridge 2021)
5. 'The arts are nothing more than a luxury.' How far is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2021)
6. 'An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
7. Does violence in the visual media portray reality or encourage the unacceptable? (Cambridge 2019)
8. Can fiction teach us anything meaningful about the real world? (Cambridge 2019)
9. 'Works of art which have been removed from their country of origin should be returned.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2018)
10. In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (Cambridge 2017)
11. Examine the role of music in establishing a national identity in your society. (Cambridge 2017)
12. 'Any adaptation of a novel for a film, television or the theatre is never as effective as the original.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2016)
13. To what extent should the arts in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? (Cambridge 2015)
14. 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2014)
15. Do films offer anything more than an escape from reality? (Cambridge 2014)
16. 'Unlike the Arts, such as writing or music, Mathematics lacks the capacity for creativity.' How far do you agree with this statement? (Cambridge 2013)
17. 'People in the Arts, living or dead, receive far more recognition than those in the Sciences, even though it is less deserved.' Consider this claim. (Cambridge 2012)
18. 'Only modern architecture and modern art have a place in today's world.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2011)
19. 'The book has no place in modern society.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2010)
20. Would it matter if all the performing arts venues in your society, such as concert halls and theatres, were closed down? (Cambridge 2010)

(1b) ARTS – RI

1. To what extent do the Arts contribute to the Singaporean identity? (RI 2023 Y6 Prelims)
2. 'There needs to be more emphasis on the arts in the school curriculum than the sciences.' How far do you agree? (RI 2023 Y6 Common Test)
3. 'Censorship of the arts is necessary to maintain social cohesion.' To what extent is this view still relevant in your society? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
4. Should efforts be made to preserve traditional art forms? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
5. To what extent should traditional art forms be preserved in a world driven by innovation? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelims)
6. Does your country do enough to develop the Arts? (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)

7. ‘A career in sports or the arts is still undesirable.’ How far is this true of your society? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
8. Consider the view that comics offer nothing more than entertainment. (RI 2022 Y5 Common Test)
9. To what extent are the arts valued in your society? (RI 2022 Y6 Timed Practice)
10. ‘The arts ask questions while science provides answers.’ How valid is this view? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
11. ‘Art is only worth what people will pay for it.’ Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
12. ‘Pop music has no value beyond being a source of entertainment.’ What is your view? (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
13. Should the Arts do anything more than entertain? (RI 2021 Y5 Common Essay Assignment)
14. How far do you agree with the view that the literary arts are about personal enjoyment rather than practical benefits? (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
15. ‘Support for the arts should come mainly from the government.’ Discuss. (RI 2020 Y6 Timed Practice)
16. 'The Arts have no place in a society that values practicality.’ What is your view? (RI 2020 Y5 Timed Practice)
17. Consider the value of creativity in society. (RI 2020 Y5 Timed Practice)
18. Consider the notion that the Arts are aesthetically pleasing but are of little real value. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelims)
19. ‘Fiction has no place in a pragmatic world.’ Discuss. (RI 2019 Y6 CT2)
20. ‘Now more than ever, the arts should be subject to government censorship.’ Comment. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
21. Examine the extent to which fashion can be considered art. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelims)
22. Examine the claim that artists should have complete freedom of expression. (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
23. In times of economic hardship, should a government be expected to provide financial support to the arts? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
24. To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
25. Should the Arts do anything more than entertain? (RI 2018 Y5 CT1)
26. ‘We should abolish state funding for the Arts.’ How far do you agree that this should be the case for your society? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelims)
27. Consider the consequences if all art museums and art galleries in your country were closed down. (RI 2017 Y6 CT1)
28. ‘An education in sports or arts is still seen to be undesirable in your society today.’ Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y5 Promo)
29. ‘Comic books have little to offer us except entertainment.’ Comment. (RI 2017 Y5 Promo)
30. ‘The progress of a society is sustained by the sciences rather than the arts.’ How far do you agree with this statement? (RI 2016 Y6 Prelims)
31. ‘The arts, such as music and literature, are of no real value to society.’ Is this a valid comment? (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
32. Examine the extent to which graffiti can be considered art. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
33. Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
34. Is an arts education becoming irrelevant in your society? (RI 2016 Y5 CT)
35. To what extent can Mathematics be considered a form of art? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelims)
36. ‘Young people today have no appreciation of art and no taste in music.’ Do you agree? (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
37. ‘The Arts are nothing but mere entertainment.’ Is this a fair assessment of the Arts in your society? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
38. Does music offer anything more than momentary pleasure? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
39. ‘Different for the sake of being different.’ Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
40. To what extent can the literary or performing arts be a vehicle for change? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelims)
41. ‘Real art is something that makes us uncomfortable.’ Do you agree? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)

42. 'Science requires more thinking than the Arts.' Is this true? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)
43. Is there any value in horror films and books? (RI 2014 Y6 CT1)
44. To what extent do you think that creativity can be cultivated? (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)
45. To what extent is cooking an art form? (RI 2013 Y6 CT2)
46. Consider the significance of theatre in modern society. (RI 2013 Y6 Prelims)
47. 'The teaching of literary classics should be made compulsory in schools.' Discuss. (RI 2013 Y6 CT1)
48. 'Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.' Do you agree? (2013 Y5 CT)
49. To what extent has technology revolutionised the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelims)
50. 'Literature, drama and art all amount to making something out of nothing.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 CT1)
51. 'Above all, the Arts teach us to be human.' Do you agree? (RI 2012 Y5 Promo)
52. 'There is too little artistic freedom in Singapore today.' Comment. (RI 2012 Y5 CT)
53. 'Copyright benefits the arts.' Do you agree? (RI 2011 Y6 CT2)
54. 'The arts disturb while the sciences reassure.' How true is this? (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)
55. To what extent are the arts important in your society? (RI 2011 Y5 CT)
56. Is creativity all about breaking rules? (RI 2010 Y6 Prelims)
57. Do the arts have a future in Singapore? (RI 2010 Y6 CT1)
58. 'Art has little practical value in today's society.' What is your view? (RI 2010 Y5 Promo)
59. Should the arts ever be censored? (RI 2010 Y5 CT)
60. 'Literature is useless in a pragmatic world.' Do you agree with this view? (RI 2010 Y5 CT)

(2a) CULTURE – Cambridge

1. To what extent are festivals and national holidays effective in promoting unity in your society? (Cambridge 2023)
2. Assess the view that accurate translation between languages is always necessary. (Cambridge 2023)
3. 'We shape our buildings, but then our buildings shape us.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
4. Assess the importance of food within Singaporean culture. (Cambridge 2019)
5. Do handicrafts still have value when machine-produced goods are so readily available? (Cambridge 2018)
6. Assess the view that traditional buildings have no future in your society. (Cambridge 2016)
7. Consider the view that spoken language is more important than the written form. (Cambridge 2013)
8. Is there any value in preserving minority languages in the world? (Cambridge 2012)
9. How important is it for people in your society to retain a sense of tradition? (Cambridge 2010)

(2b) CULTURE – RI

1. 'Traditional beliefs have little value in the modern world.' Discuss. (RI 2023 Y6 Prelims)
2. 'The world would be a better place if everyone spoke the same language.' Do you agree? (RI 2023 Y6 Prelims)
3. 'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
4. How far do you agree that traditional clothing is outdated and impractical in today's world? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
5. 'The way that people tend to argue online makes things worse.' How true is this of your society today? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelims)
6. 'Obedience is a virtue.' Is this an accurate reflection of your society? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelims)
7. Discuss the view that risk-taking should be embraced in your society. (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)

8. Consider the importance of physical appearance in today's world. (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)
9. Consider the view that the globalisation of culture is to be embraced and not feared. (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
10. How far do you agree that celebrities have too much influence today? (RI 2022 Y5 Common Test)
11. Consider the value of travelling for leisure in the world today. (RI 2022 Y6 Timed Practice)
12. 'Fashion is more than just looking good.' What is your view? (RI 2022 Y6 Timed Practice)
13. Is there still a point in preserving national identity in your society? (RI 2022 Y6 Timed Practice)
14. 'Handicrafts no longer have any practical benefits in modern society.' Comment. (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
15. 'The belief in the supernatural serves little purpose in modern society.' Discuss. (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
16. 'Memories help us remember the past but do little for our future.' How far do you agree? (RI 2019 Y6 Prelims)
17. How far do you agree that popular music serves no real purpose? (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
18. Discuss the significance of fashion in today's world. (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
19. Do you agree that fashion serves no real value? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
20. Is there any value in preserving minority languages in the world today? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)
21. 'Traditions are increasingly irrelevant in today's world.' Do you agree? (RI 2016 Y6 Prelim)
22. Should countries spend resources on preserving historical monuments when they are struggling to meet the basic needs of their own people? (RI 2016 Y6 CT2)
23. Consider the value of fashion. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
24. Consider the importance of preserving memories today. (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
25. To what extent does travel broaden the mind? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
26. 'Tradition does more harm than good.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)
27. 'Fashion is as much a good thing as a bad thing.' To what extent do you agree? (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
28. To what extent can travel broaden a person's perspectives? (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
29. Examine the value of beauty in today's society. (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
30. Consider the importance of traditional festivals in today's society. (RI 2015 Y5 CT)
31. 'We have placed too much importance on historical preservation.' Discuss this with reference to your society. (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)
32. To what extent has popular culture destroyed traditional art forms? (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)
33. How important are memories? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)
34. Is it foolish to believe in the supernatural today? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)
35. Should entry to museums be free? (RI 2013 Y6 CT2)
36. Assess the impact of foreign films or foreign TV programmes on the culture of your society. (RI 2013 Y6 CT1)
37. Consider the view that popular culture thrives on the trivial. (RI 2011 Y5 Promo)
38. To what extent has Singapore evolved a distinct culture? (RI 2011 Y5 Promo)
39. Consider the view that globalisation destroys culture. (RI 2011 Y5 CT)
40. 'Pop culture is all about appearance.' Is this a fair comment? (RI 2010 Y5 Promo)

SECTION A: FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

Reading 1: What is art? **EUs 1 & 2**

Since the arts have traditionally claimed a right to our thoughtful attention, we need to spend some time exploring their nature and value. Hence the question "What is art?" In thinking about this question, the real focus of our interest is on what distinguishes worthwhile art from junk. At a practical level, this is an important question because we have limited amounts of time and money and we have to decide what to spend them on. We don't want to waste our time on junk and we don't want governments to waste our tax dollars buying junk for the national gallery, or supporting its production.

Most people would agree that for something to be a work of art, it must be man-made. A sunset may be beautiful and the Grand Canyon awe-inspiring, but neither would be called a work of art. Beyond this, opinions differ about what makes something art. We will explore three possible criteria

- The intentions of the artist
- The quality of the work
- The response of spectators

1a) Intentions of the Artist

According to the intention criterion, something is a work of art if it is made by someone with the intention of evoking an aesthetic response in the audience. (**Aesthetics** is a branch of philosophy which studies beauty and the arts.) We naturally think of an artist as wanting to communicate something to us, and communication is a deliberate, intentional activity. A sunset may evoke various emotions in us, but it is not a work of art because it does not intend to have any effect on us. Similarly, if some ants crawling around on a patch of sand happen to trace out what looks like a portrait of Tony Blair, we would not say they had produced a work of art. This is because the portrait is the result of random activity rather than conscious design.

If something is to count as a work of art, then it should not be made with a practical end in mind, but simply with the intention of pleasing or provoking people. You would not describe a manufacturer of pots and pans as an artist because his intention is to produce kitchen utensils rather than works of art. Admittedly, many functional objects also have an aesthetic element built into them, and I prefer attractive and elegant pots and pans to ugly and awkward ones. Nevertheless, there exists a special class of objects that are made with a specifically aesthetic intention, and these are the ones that we properly call works of art.

We can say, then, that works of art differ from natural objects in that they are made with an intention, and they differ from everyday objects in that they are made with the specific intention to please or provoke rather than for some practical end.

1b) Criticism of the Intention Criterion

Despite the appeal of the intention criterion, some critics have doubted that simply intending something to be art is enough to magically transform it into art. For example, if I take my desk with papers and a half-drunk cup of coffee on it, put it in an art gallery with a glass case around it, and call it Teacher's Work Desk – VIII, is it magically transformed into a work of art simply because I intend it to be so ?

The artist Tracey Emin did something not so different with a work called ***My Bed***, which was exhibited at the Turner Prize exhibition in London in 1999, and which consists of an unmade bed with packets of condoms and a bottle of vodka next to it. (When Emin's work was first exhibited, two art students

caused a stir by staging a semi-naked pillow fight on it with the intention, they said, of making it 'more interesting'. They claimed that what they did was itself a work of art, which they called ***Two Naked Men Jump Into Tracey's Bed.*** Some years ago, a canny Scotsman called Fife Robertson came up with a name for this kind of thing: he called it PHony ART, or 'phart' for short. Emin's work was eventually bought by the collector Charles Saatchi for 150,000 pounds.)

In his book ***The Culture of Complaint,*** the art critic Robert Hughes gives the following amusing example of what happens when art is judged merely by the intentions of the creator with no regard to its quality:

In Holland...the government set up a fund to buy work by artists almost irrespective of how good it was. All that mattered was that they should be alive and Dutch. About 8000 Dutch artists are represented in that collection. None of it is shown and as everyone in Holland except the artists involved now admits, about 98 per cent of it is rubbish. The artists think it's all junk except their own work. The storage, air-conditioning and maintenance expenses are now so high that they have to get rid of the stuff. But they can't. Nobody wants it. You can't give it away. They tried giving it to public institutions, like lunatic asylums and hospitals. But even the lunatic asylums insisted on standards – they wanted to pick and choose. So there it all sits, democratic, non-hierarchical, non-elitist, non-sexist, unsalable and, to the great regret of the Dutch government, only partially bio-degradable.

Taken together, our two criticisms of the intentions criterion suggest that the intentions of the creator are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be a work of art. They are not necessary because something that was not originally intended as art may now be treated as such; and they are not sufficient because something that is intended as art might simply be junk.

2a) Quality of the Work

The second criterion for distinguishing art from non-art is the intrinsic quality of the work. This criterion is closed connected with the idea of skill. We generally expect an artist to have a high level of technical competence, and feel that an artist should be able to make a good likeness, a musician a pleasing melody, and a poet a well-crafted rhyme. In short, we feel that a work of art should not be something that a person with no talent or training in the arts could have made.

The belief that a work of art should have some kind of intrinsic quality has often been associated with the idea of beauty. Traditionally, it was believed that beautiful art is produced by painting beautiful objects, or by revealing the beauty in everyday objects. But, since we can speak of beauty with respect to the form of a work of art as well as its content, perhaps we should say that a great work of art is a perfect marriage of form and content.

- The content of a work of art is what it depicts – such as a face, a landscape, or a bowl of fruit
- The form of a work of art concerns the way it is put together, and such things as unity, order, rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony and symmetry are relevant to it.

In fact, a great deal of modern art seems less concerned to produce beautiful things which please the senses than to shock or challenge the viewer. However, you might still feel that if a work of art is to be worthy of our interest it should have some kind of quality which reflects the skill of its creator.

2b) Criticisms of the Quality Criterion

Despite the appeal of the quality criterion, it is open to criticism. A work of art may, for example, have a great deal of technical competence but lack originality. There are plenty of competent but unoriginal artists churning out impressionist pictures for calendars and greeting cards. Such art is known as **kitsch** – from the German *verkitschen etwas* meaning to 'knock something off'. Kitsch is basically any form of clinched art. The USA's 'most popular painting – is an example of kitsch, as is the music you hear in shopping malls, or the soap operas you see on TV.

The problem of forgeries is also relevant here. Perhaps the most famous forger of paintings was the Dutch artist Han Van Meegeren (1889-1947) who painted some fake Vermeers in the 1930s that fooled the art world and were widely accepted as genuine. (Vermeer was a seventeenth-century Dutch painter). Even after Van Meegeren's hoax was exposed, some art critics continued to insist that the paintings were genuine! The best-known of Van Meegeren's 'Vermeers', called ***The Disciples at Emmaus.***

The other side of the above point is that a work of art can sometimes show originality, and yet require little technical skill. Consider the bull's head by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). The head is made of an old bicycle saddle and a rusty pair of handlebars, and a small child probably could have put it together. Yet for Picasso to see beyond the everyday function of these objects was an astonishing insight and is, in a way, similar to a great writer making a strikingly original metaphor.

To summarize, we can say that quality and skill seem to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something to be a work of art. It is not necessary because works such as Picasso's Bull's Head are original but do not require much skill; and it is not sufficient because kitsch and forgeries may require skill but are hardly interesting works of art.

3) Response of Spectators

The third criterion for distinguishing between art and non-art is the response of spectators. It might be said that, just as a joke requires someone to laugh at it, so a work of art requires an appreciative spectator in order to complete it. Writers want to be read, painters want exhibitions, and choirs crave an audience.

One of the key questions in thinking about this criterion is which spectators we should appeal to. Since 'the general public' usually prefer the familiar to the strange and content to form, they have often been hostile to new artistic movements, and many artists have had little time for their opinions. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) once observed that 'Time reverses the judgement of the foolish crowd', and there seems to be some truth in this. The 1913 world premiere of Stravinsky's ***Rite of Spring*** in Paris was booed off stage by the audience, and Picasso's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon (1907) met with shock and outrage from his contemporaries. Both works are now considered to be part of the canon of great works of art.

At the same time, we must keep in mind that some artists may have a vested interest in dismissing the opinions of the 'uniformed' public – for the public have the annoying habit of pointing out the absurdities of the more extreme fringes of modern art. An artist may comfort himself with the thought that many new works of art now accepted as great art were originally dismissed as 'rubbish' by the public; but perhaps some of the things the public dismiss as rubbish really are rubbish.

At this point, we might appeal to expert opinion to help us to decide which works of art are genuinely worthwhile. Some people think it makes no sense to speak about 'expert opinion' in the arts on the grounds that you cannot argue about matters of taste. But good critics can help you to decide which of the millions of art works available are worth your time and attention; and they can also help you to see things in a work of art that you might otherwise have overlooked. Indeed, just as a psychoanalyst may reveal things about a person that they are not consciously aware of, so a good critic may understand the meaning of a work of art better than the artist who made the work. Admittedly, experts sometimes disagree in their judgements, but their arguments are usually much more sophisticated than the 'I like it' / 'I don't like it' disagreements of those who do not have any background knowledge.

OTHER IDEAS ABOUT THE NATURE OF ART

Given the difficulties with the above criteria, a simple answer to the question 'what is art?' might be 'art is what is found in an art gallery or treated by experts as a work of art'.

Is everything art?

In the early twentieth century, the French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) began exhibiting what he called 'readymades'. As the name suggests, these were simply objects taken out of their everyday context, renamed, and put in an art gallery. Perhaps the most famous of Duchamps's readymades was his work called ***The Fountain,*** which was a white porcelain urinal with the pseudonym 'R Mutt' daubed on it.

By suggesting that everyday objects might have aesthetic value, Duchamp can be seen as raising the question of where art ends and non-art begins. Taking our cue from Duchamp, we might be tempted to say that if we just opened our eyes we would see that everything is art. But if we say that everything is art, then the word 'art' is in danger of losing its meaning because it no longer distinguishes some things from other things. Just as 'high' only means something relative to 'not-high', so 'art' only means something relative to 'non-art'.

Instead of saying that everything is art we could perhaps rescue the above idea by saying that everything can be looked at from an aesthetic point of view. When something is put in an art gallery, that is precisely the way we are invited to look at it. Thus, while an unmade bed in a hotel room is unlikely to engage your aesthetic interest, if you put a glass case round it and put it in an art gallery, you will stop looking at it as a purely functional object, and this might set in motion the wheels of thought and feeling... But then again it might not! After all, just because something is in an art gallery does not necessarily mean that it is worthy of our interest.

Inexhaustibility

Perhaps the distinguishing feature of a great work of art is that it is inexhaustible in the sense that every time you come back to it you discover new things in it. A related idea is that great works of art stand the test of time and speak across generations and cultures. There is, for example, something extraordinary about the fact that Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* can move us with the same power and intensity that it moved Athenian audiences two and a half thousand years ago. Indeed, it could be argued that the winnowing effects of time act as a kind of ideal spectator helping us to distinguish enduring art from art which is merely fashionable.

Reflection questions and related Cambridge/RI essay questions are found at the end of Reading 2.

Reading 2: Ways of defining art **EUs 1 & 2**

Lisa Marder | ThoughtCo.com |16 August 2017 [adapted]

There is no one universal definition of art but there is general consensus that art is the conscious creation of something beautiful or meaningful using skill and imagination. But art is subjective, and the definition of art has changed throughout history and in different cultures. The Jean Basquiat painting that sold for $110.5 million at Sotheby's auction in May 2017, would no doubt have had trouble finding an audience in Renaissance Italy, for example.

Extreme examples aside, every time a new movement in art has developed, the definition of what is art, or what is acceptable as art, has been challenged. This is true in any of the different forms of art, including literature, music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts. For the sake of clarity, this article pertains primarily to the visual arts.

Etymology

"Art" is related to the Latin word *ars* meaning, art, skill, or craft. The first known use of the word *art* comes from 13th century manuscripts. However, the word *art* and its many variants (*artem*, *eart*, etc) have probably existed since the founding of Rome.

Philosophy of art

The question of what is art has been debated for centuries among philosophers." What is art?" is the most basic question in the philosophy of aesthetics, which really means, "how do we determine what is defined as art?" This implies two subtexts: the essential nature of art, and its social importance (or lack of it).

The definition of art has generally fallen into three categories: representation, expression, and form. Plato first developed the idea of art as "mimesis," which, in Greek, means copying or imitation, thus making representation or replication of something that is beautiful or meaningful the primary definition of art.

This lasted until roughly the end of the eighteenth century and helped to assign value to a work of art. Art that was more successful in replicating its subject was a stronger piece of art. As Gordon Graham writes, "It leads people to place a high value on very lifelike portraits such as those by the great masters – Michelangelo, Rubens, Velásquez and so on – and to raise questions about the value of 'modern' art – the cubist distortions of Picasso, the surrealist figures of Jan Miro, the abstracts of Kandinsky or the 'action' paintings of Jackson Pollock." While representational art still exists today, it is no longer the only measure of what is art.

Expression became important during the Romantic movement with artwork expressing a definite feeling, as in the sublime or dramatic. Audience response was important, for the artwork was intended to evoke an emotional response. This definition holds true today, as artists look to connect with and evoke responses from their viewers.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was one of the most influential of the early theorists toward the end of the 18th century. He was considered a formalist in terms of his philosophy, which meant that he believed that art should not have a concept but should be judged alone on its formal qualities, that the content of a work of art is not of aesthetic interest.

Formal qualities became particularly important when art became more abstract in the 20th century, and the principles of art and design – terms such as balance, rhythm, harmony, unity – were used to define and assess art.

Today, all three modes of definition come into play in determining what is art, and its value, depending on the artwork being assessed.

History of how art is defined

According to H.W Janson, author of the classic art textbook, the *History of Art,* "It would seem…that we cannot escape viewing works of art in the context of time and circumstance, whether past or present. How indeed could it be otherwise, so long as art is still being created all around us, opening our eyes almost daily to new experiences and thus forcing us to adjust our sights?"

Throughout the centuries in Western culture from the 11th century on through the end of the 17th century, the definition of art was anything done with skill as the result of knowledge and practice.

This meant that artists honed their craft, learning to replicate their subjects skilfully. The epitome of this occurred during the Dutch Golden Age when artists were free to paint in all sorts of different genres and made a living off their art in the robust economic and cultural climate of 17th century Netherlands.

During the Romantic period of the 18th century, as a reaction to the Enlightenment and its emphasis on science, empirical evidence, and rational thought, art began to be described as not just being something done with skill, but something that was also created in the pursuit of beauty and to express the artist's emotions. Nature was glorified, and spirituality and free expression were celebrated. Artists, themselves, achieved a level of notoriety and were often guests of the aristocracy.

The Avant-garde art movement began in the 1850s with the realism of Gustave Courbet. It was followed by other modern art movements such as cubism, futurism, and surrealism, in which the artist pushed the boundaries of ideas and creativity. These represented innovative approaches to art-making and the definition of what is art expanded to include the idea of originality of vision.

The idea of originality in art persists, leading to ever more genres and manifestations of art, such as digital art, performance art, conceptual art, environmental art, electronic art, etc.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Reading 1: Which of the three criteria do you think is most important & why? Duchamp's Readymades and Maurizio Cattelan's Comedian are two examples of art that seem to straddle the line between art and non-art. Would you consider these works to be art? Why / why not? How do you think perceptions of what constitute art have changed over time and why? In what way(s) might future trends shape perceptions of what is considered art? Conversely, do you think there is/are any perception(s) that may always be considered important regardless of time?
- Reading 1: The article identifies the Response of Spectators as a criterion. Do you think spectator response in terms of what kind of art is considered beautiful or artistic is likely to be consistent or to vary significantly across individuals and communities? Why?
- Reading 1: The author asserts that "good critics can help you to decide which of the millions of art works available are worth your time and attention; and they can also help you to see things in a work of art that you might otherwise have overlooked" (lines 121-123) – to what extent do you agree with this and why?
- Reading 2: Of the three yardsticks for assessing the quality of art – "representation, expression, and form" (line 19) – which to you seems most dominant today? Support your view with research and examples. Why do you think aesthetic appeal is not offered as a possible yardstick for assessing quality of art?
- Reading 2: The author makes a brief but undeveloped reference to the "social importance" (line 17) of art. To what extent does this apply to art today? Support your view with research and examples.

Related essay questions:

1. Examine the claim that music without words lacks both meaning and appeal. (Cambridge 2022)
2. In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (Cambridge 2017)

3. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
4. Consider the notion that the Arts are aesthetically pleasing but are of little real value. (RI 2019 Y6 Prelims)
5. Examine the extent to which fashion can be considered art. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelims)
6. Examine the extent to which graffiti can be considered art. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
7. To what extent can Mathematics be considered a form of art? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelims)
8. 'Literature, drama and art all amount to making something out of nothing.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 CT1)

Reading 3: Why We Need Arts in Times of Crisis **EU1**

Artwork Archive | Anonymous | 9 June 2020

Ryan Katz created Everything Will Be Okay in partnership with The Lytle House Art Initiative and Jason Kofke. Designed by: Jason Kofke | Muralist: Ryan Tova Katz. Image permission, Ryan Katz

Art allows us to examine what it means to be human, to voice and express, and to bring people and ideas together. As we rise to the challenge of our new normal of life in a global pandemic, we are seeing more clearly what needs to change in our pre-COVID-19 society.

We are still experiencing a global pandemic. We are engaging with racial injustice made more visible with George Floyd's death and the recent protests across the globe. In times of crisis, we need humanity, expression, and the community that the arts create. In the United States and around the world, COVID-19 has shed light on our economic, social, and political systems. We are seeing how systemic racial inequality is putting people of color at a higher risk during the pandemic. We are realizing the economic implications of relying on minimum wage "essential" jobs. We are seeing disease become politicized. And, we are seeing a growing mental health crisis as a response to COVID-19.

What we put our energy and efforts into now will affect what our future looks like. In campaigning for arts support, the Colorado Business Committee for the Arts stated, "The values we support today will determine what we have when this is over."

This is a time to value the arts. Whether big or small, sidewalk chalk art or community murals, art makes a difference in how we live our lives. The arts create wellness in our day-to-day lives by helping us process our lives individually and allowing us to come together collectively. Art allows us to communicate from afar, generating positivity, appreciation and hope during COVID-19. In times of social injustice and unrest, art amplifies important voices and messages. In a tumultuous world, art matters. Here's why.

Art is an expression of what it means to be human

Art-making and viewing art allows us to process our experiences. Art helps us to express and to understand the world around us. We are unique in our human drive to create and engage with the arts. Historically, humans have been visually expressive beings. The cave of the hands, *Cueva de las Manos*, in Argentina is an example of early visual expression. The artwork in the cave carbon-dates to an estimated 7300 BC. These cave walls host a hybrid of hunting scenes and relief handprints, probably made by blowing paint materials through hollowed-out bones, or reeds. This sea of overlapping hands and illustration provides a lens into a past life and builds a present-day connection with our stone-age ancestors.

Ancient humans not only recorded their lives through art, but they also used art to express themselves. We do this today, too—the arts create community by depicting shared events and to express our individual perspectives. We define our human experience by the cultures we create and participate in. Culture, made up of customs, social interactions, and activities, is fueled by the arts. Be it music, food, or visual arts, culture and the arts are inseparable.

We are seeing an increased turn to the arts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, we have turned to art engagement as a source of comfort and strength. Participating in and viewing art makes us connect to a more universal human experience. Be it art-making at home, public murals, watching and listening to plays and music, or new-found interests in culinary arts, art is an expression of what it means to be human.

Art fosters understanding between communities

As we globally grapple with inequalities that have always existed but are more visible and striking in the past weeks, we are seeing art being used as a tool to create stronger communities. Art can allow us to not just understand ourselves, but to understand each other on a deeper level.

We can engage with online arts in a way to connect more deeply with current issues and events. There are a multitude of ways to experience the arts virtually during COVID-19. Museums are moving exhibits online. Virtual galleries are hosting online show openings and artist talks.

Museums today are also working to be more community-informed, but they are working within the heavy frameworks of their past. Historically, museums have reinforced inequality in their structure and tradition of exclusivity, in objectifying other cultures, and with unjustly collected artworks. However, there are many museums that are working to overcome this past. Many institutions are working to repatriate, create self-aware programming, and to re-interpret and re-contextualize their collections. With the internet at our fingertips, gaining access to art made by historically unrepresented voices and thoughtful museums is easier and more important than ever. Here are just a few examples:

The Smithsonian created a National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Visitors to the NMAAHC travel through time to understand the Black American. The NMAAHC has a digital resource guide and access to online exhibits and video archives.

The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute **i**s an interpretive museum and research center in Birmingham, Alabama exploring the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The institute is actively exploring the effects of COVID-19 on Black communities. The BCRI has an online oral history archive.

The Whitney Plantation is the only plantation museum in Louisiana that exclusively focuses on the lives of enslaved people. While visitors learn through guided tours, online viewers can connect through a virtual book club and by reading about and viewing photos and videos on the site.

The Equal Justice Initiative created The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in Montgomery, Alabama. Web visitors are able to learn about slavery in America through videos, photos, and online resources.

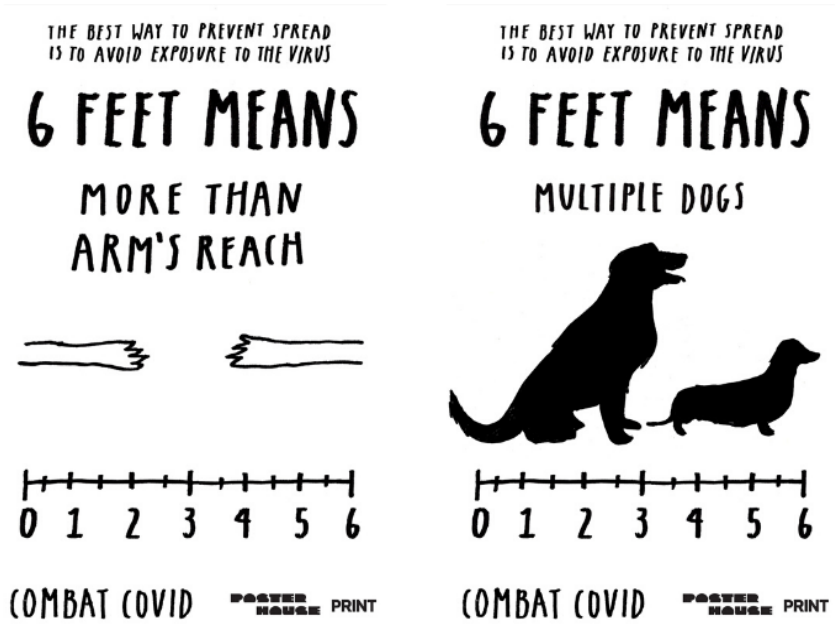
The Studio Museum in Harlem focuses on exhibiting works by both emerging and established artists of African descent and has a residency program that continues to have artists establish themselves in high powered careers. Thelma Golden, an art-world celebrity and current director, is an outspoken art-world leader changing the way curators think about art and presentation with her commitment to opening minds and highlighting new voices.

Art is good for our health

While you are enjoying art viewing and engaging with different perspectives from home, revel in the knowledge that you are being healthy! Art is a proven tool for stress reduction and well being. There are countless studies into the physical and mental benefits of making art, and the benefits of even looking at an artwork. Making and looking at art has long-term effects like boosting our brain function and our immune systems as well as contributing positively to our mental and emotional health. Art helps us process trauma, express difficult feelings, and work through experiences.

Art has promoted health within our homes during COVID-19 as families have been getting creative at home. As we are spending more time with ourselves and during this pandemic, art and craft-making have rocketed.

Public art allows us to see ourselves and our identities within a larger society and to feel comfortable in our surroundings. It's no surprise that statues of oppressive historical figures are being removed as a part of the current social justice movement. When our environments represent and reflect our experiences and communities, we are healthier and happier.



PSA by Joe Hollier part of the Times Square Art's Messages for a City Project. Courtesy of Poster House and Times Square Arts

Art can be a public health tool during COVID-19

Art helps to quickly communicate ideas through memorable visuals.

Public art can be used as a directive tool in a crisis to benefit our general wellbeing. When artists create public art featuring masks to reflect our current experiences, they send a powerful message to the public.

Art guides and signals how people should interact and behave within a space. Visual cues help us understand how we fit into space and make statements about what a community values. People are taking artistic interventions into their own hands and placing masks on statues all over the world to spread messages of public safety and social distancing. Masked statues are a friendly reminder to wear masks and forge an environment of solidarity. Now that we are wearing masks to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 globally, masks are getting more innovative. A range of creative masks are allowing us to continue to express ourselves and encourage us to wear masks in the first place. Mask designs, whether fun or functional, may increase usage and promote public health.

Not only does art help us to stay healthy through our viewership and participation, but some arts organizations are also actively fundraising to provide healthcare support during COVID-19. NOAH, the National Organization for Arts in Health, started an Arts for Resilience in Clinicians campaign. This campaign is raising money to help health care workers avoid burnout and to address anxiety through the COVID-19 pandemic.

A winged health care worker and construction worker don boxing gloves and masks in Austin Zucchini-Fowler's Front Line Fighter and Construction Hero in Denver, Colorado. Image Credit, Austin Zucchini-Fowler.

Art helps us express gratitude during difficult times

While we are not able to congregate with friends and families as we usually would as we live through this pandemic, art allows us to create a message of gratitude from a distance.

In the past few weeks, artists of all types and from all over the world have been creating artworks that thank essential workers and healthcare workers.

For example, New York City is releasing digital artistically rendered public service announcements and messages of hope and solidarity through a city-wide art campaign. Artists are creating works to replace advertisements across the city.

In Denver, artist Austin Zucchini-Fowler started a series of murals that depict healthcare professionals as angels— masked, with wings, and donning boxing gloves. Zucchini-Fowler has expanded the series to include other professionals— a teacher with wings appeared during Teacher Appreciation Week in early May and a winged chef recently emerged on a downtown wall.

Artwork Archive user, Osian Gwent painted a 17.5ft x 8ft public mural in the Welsh town of Llanidloes. He's calling the work *The Big Thank You Mural*. The work features well-known landmarks and various individuals local to the Llanidloes area, paying tribute to essential workers within the community.

Art makes close-to-home spaces more meaningful

As more people are taking walks around their neighborhoods as a way to get out of their homes while still following social distancing guidelines, art helps us tune in to the spaces and people around us. In neighborhoods across the US, families are creating chalk art murals and messages. “Chalking the walk” allows creators and walkers to experience places in a more personal way.

Similarly, people are decorating their windows and laws with signs and Christmas lights to create visual cheer. Hearts made of Christmas lights are popping up across the United States as a way to spread positivity and create a visual connection with neighbors.

Messages of community and support during the COVID-19.

Artists are rising to the occasion with art projects centered on themes of coronavirus and quarantine. Banksy playfully interpreted his stay at home life with a topsy turvy work-from-home scene in his bathroom. Banksy typically creates large scale public artworks. His work-from-home scene shows rats wreaking havoc in his real-life apartment complete with his mirror askew and rats treadmilling on toilet paper rolls and swinging from hand towel rings.

In her Everything Will Be Okay Mural, Ryan Katz shares a message of comfort with her community in partnership with The Lytle House Art Initiative. Katz is starting a new arts initiative to donate murals around the city to promote positivity and beauty during COVID-19. Her first mural as part of the initiative will be a four-story-high mural to help celebrate the graduating 2020 class of Northwestern University.

Art Allows us to Document & Process Events

World events are often remembered through what comes to be iconic artwork. My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love is one of the best-known artworks on the Berlin Wall. Dmitri Vrubel’s painted scene in 1990 of Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker embracing in a socialist brotherly kiss stands today still as a way people understand the period before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Nearby to Vrubel's painting on the Berlin Wall is a new work that is quickly becoming iconic in representing the early weeks and stressors of COVID-19. Artist Eme Freethinker's toilet paper hoarding Gollum from Lord of the Rings is now a hallmark in the Mauerpark public park in Berlin. Gollum is depicted with wild eyes and his frog-like body holding a single roll of toilet paper and saying, “Mien Shatz.” My precious.

Gollum and Ice Age's Scrat covet toilet paper in ***Eme Freethinker's*** *Gollum and Scrat, Berlin, Germany 2020 image courtesy of EME Street Art.*

the corner of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue South, on the wall of Cup Foods—with the blessing from the store owner—where George Floyd was arrested and killed.

Muralists Thomas "Detour" Evans, Richard Brasil, and Giovannie "JUST" Dixon aka Justin Spire are creating murals in memory of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The three artists are pairing their large-scale portraits of victims of racial violence with the call for memorializing and remembering with the sentiment #spraytheirname.

More and more, art is appearing around the United States and the world to document COVID-19 and experiences of racial injustice. Art helps to make social justice visible and documents movements— it is able to rally support and create a sense of community in times of crisis.

We need the arts in difficult times.

Art gives us immeasurable personal and social benefits. We rely on the arts to help us through difficult times. Art reminds us that we are not alone and that we share a universal human experience. Through art, we feel deep emotions together and are able to process experiences, find connections, and create impact.

Art helps us to record and process more than just individual experiences. Marking art documents the world around us and allows us to work through how we are a part of it. Art making is half of it—we also need to photograph, share, and record these creations so that they will live on throughout history. Documenting your artwork is easier than ever with online inventorying and management platforms like Artwork Archive. Together, we can expand the art world "archive" with more representative voices and experiences and contribute to our historical narrative through the arts.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Which of the purposes outlined resonates most with you, and why?
- Which of these purposes do you consider particularly relevant to your society, in light of how the pandemic has affected us?
- Conversely, might there be certain preconditions that are necessary for the arts to fulfil such purposes, which you believe might not be present in your society?
- Do you believe that for any of these purposes to be fulfilled, society may have to make certain sacrifices or suffer adverse consequences?

Related essay questions:

1. Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society. (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'Films are concerned with escaping from the problems of everyday life, rather than addressing them.' Discuss (Cambridge 2021)
3. 'The arts are nothing more than a luxury.' How far is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2021)
4. 'An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
5. To what extent do the Arts contribute to the Singaporean identity? (RI 2023 Y6 Prelims)
6. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
7. 'The arts ask questions while science provides answers.' How valid is this view? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
8. How far do you agree with the view that the literary arts are about personal enjoyment rather than practical benefits? (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
9. 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2014)

Reading 4: The many meanings of culture **EUs 6, 7, 8, 9**

Jason Rothman | The New Yorker | 26 December 2014

There's something innately funny about Merriam-Webster's announcement, earlier this month, that "culture" is their 2014 Word of the Year. "Culture" is the "Scary Movie" of words of the year, which, ordinarily, are supposed to reflect culture ("vape," "selfie") without actually being "culture." Merriam-Webster's editors are at pains to clarify that they weren't trying to be meta (which, incidentally, would've made a great word of the year back in 2000). The word "culture," they explain, was simply the word that saw the biggest spike in look-ups on their Web site. Confusion about culture was just part of the culture this year. People were desperate to know what "culture" meant.

It goes without saying that "culture" is a confusing word, this year or any year. Merriam-Webster offers six definitions for it (including the biological one, as in "bacterial culture"). The problem is that "culture" is more than the sum of its definitions. If anything, its value as a word depends on the tension between them. The critic Raymond Williams, in his souped-up dictionary, "Keywords," writes that **"culture" has three divergent meanings: there's culture as a process of individual enrichment, as when we say that someone is "cultured"** (in 1605, Francis Bacon wrote about "the culture and manurance[1] of minds"); **culture as a group's "particular way of life,"** as when we talk about French culture, company culture, or multiculturalism; and **culture as an activity**, pursued by means of the museums, concerts, books, and movies that might be encouraged by a Ministry of Culture (or covered on a blog like this one). These three senses of culture are actually quite different, and, Williams writes, they compete with one another. Each time we use the word "culture," we incline toward one or another of its aspects: toward the "culture" that's imbibed through osmosis or the "culture" that's

[1] Manurance is an obsolete word that refers to the cultivation or training of the mind.

learned at museums, toward the "culture" that makes you a better a person or the "culture" that just inducts you into a group.

There's a historical sense, too, in which "culture" is a polemical word. In the nineteenth century, Williams explains, "culture" was often opposed to "civilization." Civilization, the thinking went, was a homogenizing system of efficient, rational rules, designed to encourage discipline and "progress." Culture was the opposite: an unpredictable expression of human potential for its own sake. (It's for this reason that a term like "the culture industry" has an oxymoronic ring.) Today, we don't often use the word "civilization"— we prefer to talk, more democratically, in terms of culture—but we're still conflicted. We can't help but notice how "civilized" life seems both to facilitate culture and to deaden it. Museums make it easy to see art, but they also weigh it down. Rock and roll sounds better in a club than in a concert hall.

These are solid, perennial reasons to look up "culture" in the dictionary. But why did more people than usual look it up this year? The editors at Merriam-Webster decline to speculate. They note, merely, that "the term conveys a kind of academic attention to systematic behavior." Here's my theory: more people looked up "culture" this year because it's become an unsettling word. "Culture" used to be a good thing. Now it's not. That isn't to say that American culture has gotten worse. (It has gotten worse in some ways, and better in others.) It's to say that the word "culture" has taken on a negative cast. The most positive aspect of "culture"—the idea of personal, humane enrichment—now seems especially remote. In its place, the idea of culture as unconscious groupthink is ascendent.

In the postwar decades, "culture" was associated with the quest for personal growth: even if you rejected "establishment" culture, you could turn to "the counterculture." In the eighties, nineties, and aughts[2], it was a source of pride: the multiculturalist ethos had us identitying with our cultures. But today, "culture" has a furtive, shady, ridiculous aspect. **Often, when we attach the word "culture" to something, it's to suggest that it has a pervasive, pernicious influence** (as in "celebrity culture"). At other times, "culture" is used in an aspirational way that's obviously counterfactual: institutions that drone on about their "culture of transparency" or "culture of accountability" often have neither. On all sides, "culture" is used in a trivializing way: there's no real culture in "coffee culture" (although the coffee at Culture, a coffee shop near my office, is excellent). But, at the same time, it's hard to imagine applying the word "culture" to even the most bona-fide "cultural institutions." We don't say that *MOMA* fosters "art culture," because to describe art as a "culture" is, subtly, to denigrate it. In 1954, when the magazine *Film Culture* was founded, its name made movie lovers sound glamorous. Today, it sounds vaguely condescending.

An Antiwar Activist Couple Who Shaped History

This year, there was the rise of the powerful term "rape culture." (It was coined a long time ago, in a 1975 documentary film called "Rape Culture" that focussed, in part, on an organization called Prisoners Against Rape; Ariel Levy, in a recent piece for this magazine, defines it as "a value system in which women are currency, and sex is something that men get—or take—from them.") The spread of the idea of "rape culture" hasn't just changed how we think about rape; it's changed how we think about culture. Among other things, "rape culture" uses the word "culture" in a way that doesn't involve, on any level, the idea of personal enrichment. Instead, the term's weight is placed, fully and specifically, on Williams's other two aspects of culture: on the subterranean, group-defining norms (misogyny, privilege) that encourage violence against women, and on the cultural institutions (movies, fraternities) that propagate those norms. The term works, in part, because of its dissonance. You can't see the word "culture" next to the word "rape" without revising your ideas about what "culture" means.

No comparable "culture" term has been invoked in relation to the deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and the other African-Americans killed, recently, in encounters with the police. But those

[2] This refers to the 2000s

events have also pushed us to think about "culture" as an inhumane, malevolent force. And I suspect that many of us have also been keeping our own inner ledgers, where we track the ways in which "culture" has seemed, more and more, like the kind of thing you'd want "civilization" to overrule.

That's not to say, necessarily, that music culture or art culture or book culture has gotten worse—or that our collective way of life has gone downhill. It's our sense of the *word* "culture" that has grown darker, sharper, more skeptical. But, if words are tools for thinking, then this year "culture" has been used to think about the parts of our society that function poorly. That may even be a sign, in a way, of an improvement in our culture. If our increasingly analytical, sociological way of thinking about "culture" is helping us to improve the culture, that's a positive development. Confusion over its evolving meaning is a good reason to look up "culture" in the dictionary, but so is an interest in understanding the world and making it better.

All this might make you wonder: Does it even make sense to have a single word, "culture," with such divergent uses? Maybe not; many people, Williams writes, have called "culture" a "loose or confused" term. It's possible to imagine a more rational system, in which one word describes the activities of artistic and intellectual life, another our group identity, and a third our implicit norms and ways of living. Those terms, whatever they might be, would be narrower and simpler—but they'd also be less accurate. They would obscure the overlap between life, art, and politics.

And they'd be less meaningful, too. "Culture" may be pulling itself apart from the inside, but it represents, in its way, a wish. The wish is that a group of people might discover, together, a good way of life; that their good way of life might express itself in their habits, institutions, and activities; and that those, in turn, might help individuals flourish in their own ways. The best culture would be one in which the three meanings of "culture" weren't at odds with one another. That's not the culture we have at the moment; our culture is fractured, and so our sense of the word "culture" is, too. But it's possible to imagine a world in which our collective attitudes and institutions further everyone's individual growth. Maybe, in such a world, the meaning of "culture" would be more obvious; we wouldn't have to look it up.

Reflection questions and related Cambridge/RI essay questions are found at the end of Reading 5.

Reading 5: The significance of material and non-material culture **EUs 6, 7, 8**

Nicki Lisa Cole | Thoughtco.com | 2 August 2019

Culture is a term that refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life. According to sociologists, culture consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. Culture also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society. Culture is distinct from social structure and economic aspects of society, but it is connected to them—both continuously informing them and being informed by them.

How Sociologists Define Culture

Culture is one of the most important concepts within sociology because sociologists recognize that it plays a crucial role in our social lives. It is important for shaping social relationships, maintaining and challenging social order, determining how we make sense of the world and our place in it, and in shaping our everyday actions and experiences in society. It is composed of both non-material and material things.

In brief, sociologists define the non-material aspects of culture as the values and beliefs, language, communication, and practices that are shared in common by a group of people. Expanding on these categories, culture is made up of our knowledge, common sense, assumptions, and expectations. It is also the rules, norms, laws, and morals that govern society; the words we use as well as how we speak

and write them (what sociologists call "discourse"); and the symbols we use to express meaning, ideas, and concepts (like traffic signs and emojis, for example). Culture is also what we do and how we behave and perform (for example, theater and dance). It informs and is encapsulated in how we walk, sit, carry our bodies, and interact with others; how we behave depending on the place, time, and "audience;" and how we express identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others. Culture also includes the collective practices we participate in, such as religious ceremonies, the celebration of secular holidays, and attending sporting events.

Material culture is composed of the things that humans make and use. This aspect of culture includes a wide variety of things, from buildings, technological gadgets, and clothing, to film, music, literature, and art, among others. Aspects of material culture are more commonly referred to as cultural products.

Sociologists see the two sides of culture—the material and non-material—as intimately connected. Material culture emerges from and is shaped by the non-material aspects of culture. In other words, what we value, believe, and know (and what we do together in everyday life) influences the things that we make. But it is not a one-way relationship between material and non-material culture. Material culture can also influence the non-material aspects of culture. For example, a powerful documentary film (an aspect of material culture) might change people's attitudes and beliefs (i.e. non-material culture). This is why cultural products tend to follow patterns. What has come before in terms of music, film, television, and art, for example, influences the values, beliefs, and expectations of those who interact with them, which then, in turn, influence the creation of additional cultural products.

Why Culture Matters to Sociologists

Culture is important to sociologists because it plays a significant and important role in the production of social order. The social order refers to the stability of society based on the collective agreement to rules and norms that allow us to cooperate, function as a society, and live together (ideally) in peace and harmony. For sociologists, there are both good and bad aspects of social order.

Rooted in the theory of classical French sociologist Émile Durkheim, both material and non-material aspects of culture are valuable in that they hold society together. The values, beliefs, morals, communication, and practices that we share in common provide us with a shared sense of purpose and a valuable collective identity. Durkheim revealed through his research that when people come together to participate in rituals, they reaffirm the culture they hold in common, and in doing so, strengthen the social ties that bind them together. Today, sociologists see this important social phenomenon happening not only in religious rituals and celebrations like (some) weddings and the Indian festival of Holi but also in secular ones—such as high school dances and widely-attended, televised sporting events (for example, the Super Bowl and March Madness).

Famous Prussian social theorist and activist Karl Marx established the critical approach to culture in the social sciences. According to Marx, it is in the realm of non-material culture that a minority is able to maintain unjust power over the majority. He reasoned that subscribing to mainstream values, norms, and beliefs keep people invested in unequal social systems that do not work in their best interests, but rather, benefit the powerful minority. Sociologists today see Marx's theory in action in the way that most people in capitalist societies buy into the belief that success comes from hard work and dedication, and that anyone can live a good life if they do these things—despite the reality that a job which pays a living wage is increasingly hard to come by.

Both theorists were right about the role that culture plays in society, but neither was exclusively right. Culture can be a force for oppression and domination, but it can also be a force for creativity, resistance, and liberation. It is also a deeply important aspect of human social life and social organization. Without it, we would not have relationships or society.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In Reading 4, Rothman outlines three key meanings of 'culture' (lines 12-17). When considering the relationship between the arts and culture, which meanings do you find meaningful and why?
- Why does Rothman say that "the culture industry" is, to an extent, "oxymoronic" (line 26)?
- Rothman argues that increasingly, people consider culture a form of "unconscious groupthink" (line 38). Do you agree with such an assessment of culture? What are some examples that appear to support this, and examples that refute it?
- In line 39, Rothman asserts that "the quest for personal growth" is one way in which culture may lead to change. In what ways may a concern with different understandings of culture prompt change either on an individual or community level?
- In paragraph 6, Rothman argues that rape culture is based on two meanings of culture that reinforce each other – as a set of "group-defining norms" and of "cultural institutions that propagate [such] norms" (lines 59-61). Apart from rape culture, what other ostensibly pernicious 'cultural' phenomena can you think of that seems to be based on these two sets of forces working in tandem?
- From lines 66 – 68, how does Rothman use language to show that society tends to have a negative perception of culture?
- In what ways is the last sentence of the last paragraph an effective conclusion (lines 90-91)?
- Based on paragraph 1 of Reading 5, which of the three meanings of culture (given from lines 12-17 in Reading 4) is the author using and why?
- Cole suggests that there is a two-way relationship between non-material culture (say, the values, beliefs, and practices shared by a group) and material culture or cultural products (like film, music, literature and art); not only does material culture often arise out of non-material culture, the cultural products thus created can in turn, shape aspects of non-material culture. In the modern era that we live in, which effect is more likely to prevail, and why?
- Conversely, how is cultural change more likely to take place in the modern world? Is it more likely for shifts in non-material culture to drive changes in material culture, or vice versa?
- Cole highlights that culture plays a role in reinforcing "good and bad aspects of social order" (line 39). Give a real-world example each of culture playing a positive and negative role respectively in terms of the production of social order. Explain thoroughly the key role(s) specific aspects of non-material and/or material culture play in each case. Are you more inclined to be optimistic or pessimistic when it comes to the relationship between culture and social order, and why?
- Additionally, what do you think determines culture's ability to reinforce social order?

Related essay questions:

1. To what extent are festivals and national holidays effective in promoting unity in your society? (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'We shape our buildings, but then our buildings shape us.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
3. Assess the importance of food within Singaporean culture. (Cambridge 2019)
4. 'Young people today have little interest in traditional marriage.' How true is this of your society? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
5. 'Handicrafts no longer have any practical benefits in modern society.' Comment. (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
6. 'The belief in the supernatural serves little purpose in modern society.' Discuss. (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
7. 'Tradition does more harm than good.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? (RI 2015 Y6 Prelim)

SECTION B: INVESTING IN THE ARTS

Reading 6: The role of the arts in making a nation home **EUs 3 & 5**

Paul Tan | The Straits Times | 4 June 2017

This reading will help you:

- Examine how the arts can have a transformative effect on a nation, not only economically, but socially and politically.
- Understand that, despite being a relatively young nation, Singapore's multi-ethnic heritage has led to diversity in art-making and its reception.
- Consider how such diversity may lead to the arts challenging boundaries or posing awkward questions that are part and parcel of a maturing nation.

One of the most abiding memories in my leisure travels is visiting the small islands in the Seto Inland Sea of Japan. This is a clutch of islands in a rural part of Japan in between the city of Okayama and the large island of Shikoku. Previously an under-the-radar destination among art aficionados, these isles have in recent years become popular with general tourists looking for a unique experience focused on art and culture, coupled with the assurance of quality Japanese hospitality and cuisine.

What struck me on my brief visit to that region was how art has been integrated into these islands and how this process has been instrumental in revitalising local communities. These were islands which faced a raft of problems – depopulation, the loss of a farming economy and even environmental degradation.

Today, there are small museums, public art installations and art trails found everywhere – particularly on the islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Shodoshima – and old buildings and industrial sites have been repurposed to house fascinating and visually arresting artwork. Anyone who has visited the islands would have interacted with elderly island residents acting as docents in arts spaces, or serving in cafes and bed-and-breakfast establishments.

When one reflects on the local history of these islands, it is nothing short of amazing how art has activated all typologies of spaces and brought back life to the region, generating economic activity and bringing a sense of purpose and optimism to the local communities.

Given the charge that contemporary art is an elite enterprise which alienates the average man on the street, there is something refreshing in hearing an elderly local – possibly a farmer in an earlier part of his life – explain how one could interact with an artwork.

Advertising

The islands also play host to a well-regarded contemporary arts festival, the Setouchi Triennale, which sees temporary site-specific artwork installed across the islandscape. First organised in 2010 and running for about eight months each time, the Triennale was last held last year.

With the support of the National Arts Council (NAC), Singapore's independent arts centre The Substation and artist Grace Tan took part in the 2013 edition of this visual arts festival. Grace Tan's work, titled *In The Stillness*, transformed a classroom in a defunct school on Shodoshima with a huge cloud-like sculpture made of two million polypropylene loop pins. (These are the plastic bits you see in a department store which attach price tags to apparel.)

Artist Grace Tan's work, In *The Stillness*, transformed a classroom in a defunct school on Shodoshima with a cloud-like sculpture made of two million polypropylene loop pins. Grace, who spent about three

weeks in Japan, described how the work was constructed with the help of volunteers from Fukuda town, involving residents ranging from kindergarten and high school students to nursing home residents. They would spend time creating the sculpture bit by bit in the community centre or at other local sites, drinking tea and sharing local snacks.

Grace spoke of the warm ties that resulted from time spent together and how the completed work attracted Triennale visitors, who also got to enjoy the food specially prepared in the makeshift cafe within the defunct school. (Parallel to the art-making were workshops which taught local residents how to cook South-east Asian dishes, such as chicken rice and prawn noodles.)

For us to deepen the level of arts appreciation, there is the need for the arts to be relevant or accessible for first-timers, with the aim of helping them build a foundation of understanding and importantly, a love for the arts. This must be the only sustainable way to broaden the base of Singaporean audiences, readers and art collectors in the long term.

It is heartening that a Singapore artist like Grace can create work which resonates on so many levels, in both critical reception and social outcomes. It is a reminder of the power of good art. I suspect though, that in all likelihood, such broadly transformative arts projects are more the exceptions than the norm, across the globe.

Diversity in art

As the agency that champions the arts, NAC has to acknowledge that art in Singapore is created with different artistic intentions for diverse audiences. Singapore is a modern cosmopolitan country with a multi-ethnic, multi-religious heritage. This means we have artistic traditions that go back centuries as well as an open attitude towards external ideas. For sure, these circumstances create for a complex art-making and reception in a relatively young nation.

Borrowing the lingo from the marketing world, one could say that the potential consumer base for the arts in Singapore can be divided into discrete describable segments. Each segment has different attitudes and expectations of the arts, responds to different stimuli and thus, needs to be addressed differently, if NAC wants Singaporeans to embrace the arts.

Our most recent population survey in 2015 revealed that while eight in 10 Singaporeans attended an arts event, in reality, only four in 10 expressed an interest in the arts. It could mean, I remarked to colleagues in a moment of levity, that half the people who encountered the arts in 2015 – perhaps a free performance or exhibition in a public space – were dragged there reluctantly by family members, or had experienced the arts "accidentally" on a weekend errand run.

The statistics underline the fact that the appreciation of the arts is in its nascent state in Singapore. But when taken together with the upward trend of important indicators, it gives us in NAC some comfort. Things can only get better in the longer term.

This is especially so when we consider today's opportunities for arts exposure in our public schools. There is also increasing recognition that young people should chase their dreams and that there are many possible pathways to become a contributing member of society.

Art for all audiences and ages

For today's artists, there is little doubt that the base of interested audiences and arts appreciators (the four in 10 Singaporeans) is indeed a varied one. For every serious collector of conceptual art who visits international art fairs and enjoys in-depth discourse about art, there is someone who derives an uncomplicated aesthetic pleasure from a beautiful watercolour painting.

For every audience member who is willing to shell out top dollar for a hard-hitting stage drama on a difficult topic, there is someone who is happy to hear beautifully harmonised pop songs, reprised from

her youth. For every reader of serious poetry and follower of the vibrant literary scene, there is a parent hunting for accessible children's stories for his mobile-device addicted child.

With this demographic diversity – which we at NAC are trying to understand better – as well as the variety of art forms practised here, NAC's support of the arts needs to be multi-dimensional. We will need to cater to audiences who are encountering the arts for the first time as much as we need to champion artists who are presenting art which well-informed arts lovers expect of a global cultural city.

For us to deepen the level of arts appreciation, there is a need for the arts to be relevant or accessible for first-timers, with the aim of helping them build a foundation of understanding and importantly, a love for the arts. This must be the only sustainable way to broaden the base of Singaporean audiences, readers and art collectors in the long term.

Fortunately, there are many artists in Singapore like Grace who can develop work which can be accessed at different levels and who are interested to reach out to the community in the process of artistic creation. There are also many seasoned programmers, curators, and producers who know how to build bridges between the artwork and the audience, who know how to mediate that tricky space between artistic intention and critical reception. We can do more in this area, for sure.

Pushing boundaries and posing awkward questions

While we have said Singapore's arts scene is still relatively young, there is no denying that the last decade has seen a dynamic growth in the range and quality of cultural offerings.

There is a plethora of quality art which reflects our diverse communities, recognises our local contexts and poses thoughtful questions. We have, for instance, enjoyed theatre that uses humour to talk about integration of new immigrants, experienced installation art that expresses the hope of prisoners waiting for their day of release, and read poetry that mourns the loss of local landmarks and captures a forgotten way of life. This vibrant scene has not gone unnoticed internationally, with both international tourists and expatriates appreciating the sea change.

At the same time, there is a need to remember that art is not about the lowest common denominator. We cannot assess the merit of the arts based on the numbers of audiences, or exhibition attendees, or book sales. If we did, we would not support poetry, vernacular theatre, experimental performance art, or contemporary dance. Niche, we should not be shy to declare, is not a bad word in itself.

Of course, some Singaporeans will like their art immediate, not taxing or overly cerebral. They just want a good evening out after a demanding work day, or a stress-free excursion during the weekend with the children in tow. We have to respect that art serves that role too, and NAC must strongly support such endeavours.

In the same breath, it also needs to be said that we must also continue to support artwork that challenge boundaries or pose awkward questions. We should not be afraid. If a play pokes fun at us as Singaporeans, may we have the grace to laugh it off, recognise our foibles and think about the merit of the critique. If a piece of music sounds strange at the first listening, or a novel seems too difficult in the first few pages, may we have the patience to persist a little longer and give the artist that consideration. If we do not like any work in the end, may we have the generosity not to generalise all home-grown artwork.

Such works do reflect the polyphony of artistic voices in Singapore, even if at an individual level, we may not take a shine to some of these works. More often than not, they are unique to our island and collectively express perspectives on life here, ultimately adding to and enriching our growing national canon. Singapore would be poorer if we did not support such art forms.

Art in making a country home

My wish for the next few years is to see more arts in the heartland and for artists to keep creating works which have universal appeal but are yet locally anchored and to showcase more works that welcome multiple responses.

Critically, I hope to see more Singaporeans who understand that art, in all its forms and voices, is relevant to their lives, their sense of self and their well-being. When that happens, there would be greater recognition of the role of the artist in society, including a ready willingness to support the arts as patrons, collectors, ticket-buyers and volunteers.

With the present uncertainty in global geopolitics and gloomy talk of protracted slow growth, there should also be a recognition, however unquantifiable it may seem, that an appreciation of and participation in the arts too have a part to play in the future economy of this island.

The creative mind does not belong only to the artist. An engaged arts lover will have the intellectual curiosity and nimbleness of a creative disposition: An individual who can imagine broader horizons and may be better able to respond to challenges created by the "disruptions" that we see in the market today.

In this age of global connectivity and unprecedented movement of peoples, some have responded to the accompanying anxieties by looking inward or raising barriers. Singapore, as a port city and trading hub that has prospered by being open to ideas and people, cannot afford to do that.

While we must be careful of placing too much emphasis on the instrumental role of the arts, the truth is that the artwork being created in Singapore are uniquely placed to speak to our citizens and residents. They can capture, channel and reimagine the lives of residents in a way that an imported Broadway musical or a work by an international writer cannot.

The understanding and connections forged by such art can indeed be a bulwark against the vicissitudes of uncertain times or the anxieties of a borderless cyber world. What art can do is to root the young Singaporean who is still finding his or her voice and provide a link, through the imagination, to his or her forebears and a physical landscape that has been lost. It can also create a sense of empathy for the people we encounter in our midst – from the unhappy domestic worker to the newly retrenched office manager or the child from a new immigrant family.

At the end of the day, what makes a country home? The answer must lie beyond physical trappings, gleaming buildings and state-of-the-art infrastructure. The bedrock of that home must be in its social fabric – its people, the relationships they have with each other and the experiences they build in the common spaces they share. The arts and culture form a vital part of this fabric and there is so much potential yet unlocked.

On the one hand, Singaporeans can remember the lump in the throat when an entire stadium sings in unison to Cultural Medallion recipient Dick Lee's song *Home*. But what else is out there? What artwork can articulate what we know, remember and treasure about our world; capture the struggles and milestones of a young nation; and ultimately, help us see ourselves and the world beyond? What new visions of the future can inspire us?

If we want a glimpse of the answers, we should all support our artists as they imagine those possibilities and together celebrate the works they create.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- The author notes that “there is no denying that the last decade has seen a dynamic growth in the range and quality of cultural offerings” (lines 90-91). What might be some reasons contributing to such a trend in the local arts scene?

- The author believes that "the artwork being created in Singapore are uniquely placed to speak to our citizens and residents" (lines 135-136). What would be some examples of such works and in what ways do they especially speak to our citizens and residents"?
- The author briefly explores the idea that we should "continue to support artwork that challenge boundaries or pose awkward questions" (lines 106-107). What are some examples of these works of art, and what could be some possible implications of supporting such works in Singapore society?

Related essay questions:

1. 'The arts are nothing more than a luxury.' How far is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2021)
2. Examine the role of music in establishing a national identity in your society. (Cambridge 2017)
3. To what extent do the Arts contribute to the Singaporean identity? (RI 2023 Y6 Prelims)
4. There needs to be more emphasis on the arts in the school curriculum than the sciences.' How far do you agree? (RI 2023 Y6 Common Test)
5. Does your country do enough to develop the Arts? (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)
6. 'The Arts have no place in a society that values practicality.' What is your view? (RI 2020 Y5 Timed Practice)
7. Consider the consequences if all art museums and art galleries in your country were closed down. (RI 2017 Y6 CT1)
8. 'The progress of a society is sustained by the sciences rather than the arts.' How far do you agree with this statement? (RI 2016 Y6 Prelim)
9. 'The Arts are nothing but mere entertainment.' Is this a fair assessment of the Arts in your society? (RI 2015 Y6 CT1)
10. To what extent can the literary or performing arts be a vehicle for change? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelim)

Readings 7 - 9 will help you:

- Know more about Singapore's arts scene.
- Appreciate the tension between government support (or not) and artists' needs.
- Understand what it takes to support the arts, financially and otherwise, in Singapore.
- Consider whether the arts are a luxury or a necessity for a nation.

Reading 7: For artistic millennials, making a living out of the arts is a craft in itself **EUs 2, 4, 5**

Navene Elangovan | Adapted | TODAY | 12 January 2019

Unlike a typical office worker, Mr Ben Loong leads a life off the beaten track. From 9pm to 3am every day, the 30-year-old plies the roads as a Grab driver. After getting some shuteye, he usually heads down to art galleries around the island to do odd jobs, such as painting and partitioning walls. Some days, he also spends time working on art projects in these galleries.

His work, which seeks to question material culture and value systems by recontextualising industrial objects, is among those to be featured as part of the upcoming Singapore Art Week's Art After Dark series. The seventh edition of Singapore Art Week, which runs from Jan 19 to 27, will feature art installations and exhibitions across Singapore.

Mr Loong earns up to S$400 a month as a Grab driver to supplement his income from his art. While he makes just enough in total to cover his rent and expenses, he said that the sense of satisfaction in seeing his work up on a gallery wall keeps him going. "When I studied in Lasalle College of the Arts, we would go to art

galleries. It was inspiring to see the grandeur of the artwork on the wall. It makes you want the opportunity to be in that kind of position," said Mr Loong, who took part in three exhibitions last year.

Mr Loong's experience is not unique among artists in Singapore. Ceramic artist Ummu Nabilah, 24, returns home from her day job as an art teacher in the evenings, only to stay up till 2am working on pottery. She makes a few hundred dollars in profit from the sale of each batch of 15 pottery items, with each item costing up to S$30. The profit is just enough for Ms Ummu to invest in the materials that she needs for her next batch of pottery. She maintains that as long as she works hard enough, and if she manages her money well, she will eventually be able to focus fully on her ceramic art career.

Industry experts and veterans whom TODAY spoke to said that **while it remains very difficult for young Singaporeans to pursue artistic careers full-time, the arts scene has improved over the last decade, with more opportunities for artists to sustain themselves financially.** Government efforts to increase public participation in the arts, the advent of technology and a more supportive public attitude have also contributed towards a better working environment for Singaporean artists.

In October last year, Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community, and Youth, announced the launch of Our SG Arts Plan, which laid out the focus areas for Singapore's literary, performing and visual arts sectors from 2018 to 2022. Ms Fu said the plan would allow the Government to provide better support for arts professionals and make the arts more accessible to all.

The Our SG Arts Plan builds on the Arts and Culture Strategic Review released in 2012, which detailed the arts and cultural landscape for Singapore until 2025. The plan aimed to develop "a nation of cultured and gracious people, at home with our heritage, proud of our Singaporean identity". Since the launch of the review, the National Arts Council (NAC) recorded a high of nearly 6,000 non-ticketed performing arts activities in 2016, a five-year record attendance of over 9.2 million at these activities, and more than 5.1 million visitors to museums and heritage institutions. The NAC said that S$300 million was pumped into the culture sector between 2012 and 2017.

Building an arts nation

Apart from these two road maps for the arts scene, the Government has also introduced several initiatives over the last decade to raise the profile of the arts in Singapore, such as launching the School of the Arts (Sota) in 2008. As the first pre-tertiary arts school in Singapore, Sota's programme allows students to take one arts subject, in addition to the usual academic subjects taught in mainstream schools. At the end of their six years, students graduate with an International Baccalaureate diploma.

However, **it was reported in May 2017 that only three in 10 Sota graduating students went on to pursue arts-related university courses**. An article from The Straits Times raised questions about the effectiveness of Sota's programmes in preparing students for a career in the arts. At that time, Ms Lim Geok Cheng, Sota's principal then, commented on the lack of graduates going into arts-related courses by noting that its students continued to remain involved in the arts, regardless of the courses they chose.

While Sota's latest enrolment figures are not available, the school's student population had grown from just under 1,000 in 2012 to 1,120 in 2016. The steady increase in Sota's enrolment over the last few years shows that while the jury is still out on the success of its programmes, there is still a demand for an arts-oriented education programme in Singapore.

Several Sota graduates told TODAY that the school's curriculum had broadened their minds. For performer and music composer Amni Musfirah, 24, Sota had helped her to develop "a good sense of who I want to be, what I want to do and what do I want to achieve". "Many people outside of Sota thought we couldn't succeed because we were just doing 'arts' and had 'no brains'. Sota taught me the importance to believe in

ourselves and trust that our skills will pay off," said Ms Musfirah, who was part of the school's pioneer batch of graduates in 2012.

Mr Pavethren Kanagarethinam, 21, who graduated from Sota in 2016, said that its broad educational framework allowed him to consider non-arts related careers, such as those in the sciences and humanities. However, he decided to remain in the arts sector following his graduation, because his percussion-playing skills had improved under the tutelage of his Sota music instructor and he remained passionate about music.

Outside of the education sector, the Government has also made efforts to increase Singaporeans' participation in arts events — with mixed results. The 2017 Singapore Cultural Statistics Report showed that the number of tickets sold for performing arts events dipped from 1,562,404 in 2015 to 1,398,857 the next year. In 2016, 2,809,708 people attended a non-ticketed art performance, a jump of about 27,770 people from the previous year. The number of visitors to national museums and heritage institutes also increased by nearly 1,370,000 between 2015 and 2016. At the same time, the NAC recorded an overall drop in Singaporeans' engagement in the arts within the same period. In its latest Population Survey on the Arts released in 2017, the NAC recorded a 24 per cent drop in arts attendance from 2015 to 2017. Participation in the arts also dropped from 28 per cent in 2015 to 22 per cent in 2017.

Despite the mixed results in improving Singaporeans' participation in the arts, the Government has continued to be generous in its funding. The 2017 Cultural Statistics Report stated that an estimated S$412.8 million in funding was set aside the previous year for arts and heritage. Donations to arts and heritage causes had more than doubled from S$29.7 million in 2013 to S$61.3 million in 2016.

Thanks for the grants, but…

Many artists approached by TODAY acknowledged that the Singapore Government is a lot more generous than those in many other countries in the level of funding that it has set aside for the arts sector, and they are grateful for it.

Video artist Kray Chen, 31, the recipient of the NAC's Young Artist Award in 2017, said that he was a beneficiary of the council's funding. "There are only a handful of countries in the world that fund artists at an international level. We are very lucky to have a well-funded system. While we could lose out on freedom of expression, Singaporean artists have definitely gained on a practical level."

However, **some artists have expressed concerns over the stringent criteria to qualify for NAC grants and the key performance indicators (KPIs) that they have to meet.** Mr Chen said that the administrative and bureaucratic process imposed on artists to account for huge amounts of funding could be a "daunting" task. "The artist has to wear so many hats. He has to hire an accountant or be his own accountant, his own marketer and his own administrator."

The NAC requires artists who receive funding between S$25,000 and S$100,000 to provide a certified statement of accounts by a registered accountant. Grants above S$100,000 must be independently audited by a registered public accountant.

Some artists also feel that the KPIs imposed by the NAC could run counter to their objectives. Those who receive certain NAC grants have to complete self-evaluation forms which ask for information such as the total number of people who have attended the art event and the total number of tickets sold. Mr Chen said: "If you have to count the number of people who attended an event or write a report about what participants have learnt from the event to justify the impact of the artistic work, then that is a problem… Are we looking at a numbers game or are we actually assessing the art's social impact?" For him, an art project is more successful if 10 people see it and understood it deeply, rather than having 100 people see it but do not understand the project.

In response to TODAY's queries, the NAC said that self-evaluation reports were to help artists take stock of what they have accomplished through the course of their project. Subsequent grant applications by artists would be assessed based on the strength of their project proposals.

Mr Kamil Haque, founder and artistic director of Haque Centre of Acting & Creativity, said that while arts grants in Singapore are much higher and more accessible to artists compared to the United States, the red tape that artists have to surmount to receive those grants make it "onerous" for them to even start off. This makes it difficult for young artists to sustain their interest and pursue the arts full-time, said the 36-year-old, who had spent eight years in Los Angeles learning and teaching acting before returning to Singapore.

Recounting her own experience, Ms Ummu said that she had unsuccessfully applied for an NAC grant when she first started selling her ceramic pieces. According to Ms Ummu, to qualify for the grant, the artist needed to have a background in art exhibitions, and to justify how his or her art would benefit Singapore. As a fresh graduate from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa), Ms Ummu said that she was unable to meet the requirements, which seemed to favour more established artists. The NAC told TODAY that grant criteria are developed by the council to ensure that projects supported the aims of the grant.

Mr Kok Heng Leun, artistic director of Chinese-language theatre company Drama Box and former Nominated Member of Parliament, called for an overhaul in approach towards how the Government views arts funding. Referring to funding caps by NAC, Mr Kok said that grants are issued to artists with a "return of investment" thinking process, where they are expected to fund a certain percentage of their work in proportion to the grants that the NAC extends to them.

NAC grants are subject to funding caps. For instance, artists who apply for NAC's Participation and Presentation grant receive funds of only up to 50 per cent of the project's budget.

Mr Kok urged the Government to view the arts as a public good and increase the profile of the arts in national funding. "When you subsidise something because you view it as a public good, it is because you see it as important and good for every human being... We need to change the mindset that art is just to beautify our surroundings. Art is the thing that gives you sanity and comfort. Art is what gives you imagination and creativity. So it is a necessity."

Shifts in technology, attitudes

Despite these concerns, industry players acknowledged that broader changes in society have created more opportunities for young artists to pursue their careers. Major technological changes in the past 10 years have opened up a multitude of platforms for artists to showcase their works.

For actress Oon Shu An, 32, the Internet has allowed her to reach out to a global audience, with even foreigners recognising her when she travels overseas. "Now I can speak for myself and have a direct channel with people who want to follow me," said Ms Oon, who is the host of webshow series Tried and Tested. "It lets me reach a larger audience."

Like Ms Oon, Ms Ummu has been able to expand her market overseas through social media. While Singaporeans come to know of her ceramics work through art markets here, Ms Ummu's Instagram page allows her to connect with overseas buyers as far as the United States. Through her Instagram account, she is also able to exchange ideas with overseas-based ceramic artists, allowing her to improve her craft.

The Internet has also changed the way consumers buy art. The Hiscox Online Art Trade Report 2018 found that the online art market was worth an estimated US$4.22 billion, an increase of 12 per cent in the past year. The Artling's director, Ms Kim Tay, said that being an online gallery allowed it to reach a broader audience, regardless of geographic location. It also allowed its artists and designers to gain exposure beyond their own countries. "In the past five years, we've definitely seen a growth in people being willing to buy

artworks online. We try to give our customers as much information as possible about all the artworks on our website, and our augmented reality feature on our iOS app allows customers to visualise how an artwork will look in their space in real-time."

Besides technology, **the rise of the gig economy has created more opportunities for artists to find alternative sources of income**. From driving a private-hire car to part-time teaching, almost every artist interviewed by TODAY holds more than one job — as a safeguard against the irregularity and, in some cases, the low pay of the projects they undertake.

Mr Chen said that while he receives an artist fee for exhibitions, it is usually a nominal sum. In some cases, he has even had to dip into his own pocket as the amount did not cover the cost of the art project. However, he said that his part-time teaching stint at his alma mater Lasalle helps to supplement his income. While Mr Chen said that ideally, he would like to sustain himself through his art alone, his alternative income stream helps to take his mind off his financial burdens and allows him to concentrate on his art work when he receives projects.

For freelance performer Michelle Ler, 23, the biggest struggle in pursuing a career in the arts is the instability of it all. Unlike her friends from other universities who settled into one job after going through multiple interviews, the Lasalle graduate described her artistic career as "a never-ending job interview". "You get a job. It lasts from a few weeks to a month, and then it's the same cycle again."

Despite the financial obstacles, several industry experts pointed out that the shift in societal attitudes has created a more favourable environment for younger artists to pursue their careers. Lasalle's provost, Dr Venka Purushothaman, said that with Singaporeans becoming better-educated and more well-travelled, they have an increasing desire to embrace the arts. Over the last 15 years at Lasalle, he has seen **more young people committed to engaging in the arts**. He is also heartened by the support shown by parents. "In the previous generation, parents would have questioned their child's participation in the arts. However, the current generation of parents fully support their child's pursuit of their passion." Dr Purushothaman's observations reflect **the rise of "new-generation parents" who are willing to let their children follow their passions, so long as they are happy**.

One such parent is Ms Ummu's mother, 46-year-old Rosnita Ninggal. Explaining why she had urged Ms Ummu to join Nafa, Madam Ninggal said: "When I was young, my parents put many restrictions on me. I want my kids to pursue any interest as long as they are responsible and know exactly what they want in life."

For filmmaker He Shuming, 33, his then civil servant father and housewife mother were concerned about his decision to take up filmmaking. To assure them, Mr He worked on film sets to earn pocket money in his early years to convince them that he would be able to survive in the industry. "My parents could see that I was happy and they gave me the space to do what I thought I could be good at." His father, Mr Ho Soo Hoon, 69, said that while he was initially concerned that Singapore's market was too small for his son to pursue filmmaking, he eventually realised that there were opportunities for his son to earn a living, such as through directing television advertisements. While he still has some concerns over his son's "unpopular" career choice, such as the long hours, Mr Ho expressed confidence that his son would be able to survive in the industry for the long term.

Keeping the fire burning

"Naïve", "impulsive", "passionate". These were some of the words bandied about by several young artists to explain why they decided to pursue the arts as a career. While they acknowledged that the realities of life, particularly with respect to financial stability, had made it very difficult for them to continue in the field, they had also found ways to make ends meet, and would continue to find ways to do so.

For Mr Loong, quitting is not an option. "Choosing this path, you have to be able to see yourself doing it for the rest of your life. If not, there is no point." "To want to keep pursuing art, you need to live in this illusion to keep this fire burning. If you keep thinking about money, you are more likely to quit your dream." Mr Loong said that his aim as an artist is to achieve a regular stream of opportunities, along with financial progression. "I think finding alternative means to sustain yourself while building your artistic portfolio is part of the practice. Being able to keep my art projects going feels like a success in itself." He remains confident that he can pursue a full-time career in the arts, and looks beyond the home shores. "I think that so long as I remain confident in my work, I will be able to achieve a sustainable career."

For Discussion/Reflection:
Reading 7 presents the hurdles artists face in Singapore and some things the Singapore government has done to support the arts:

- Navine Elangovan reports that "it remains very difficult for young Singaporeans to pursue artistic careers full-time" (lines 20-21). Should artists be self-sufficient, or should they be funded at taxpayers' expense?
- Navine Elangovan also reports that the Singapore "[g]overnment has continued to be generous in its funding" (lines 69-70). In your assessment, what are some reasons why the government needs to take the lead in funding the arts, especially in Singapore?
- Based on what you have read above and your own knowledge, do you think the government has done enough to support the local arts scene? If more should be done, what and why?
- The reading references two different metrics for determining whether or not specific artists deserve funding, including "the number of people who attended an event" (line 91) and "the art's social impact" (line 93). What is the distinction between participation in an arts event and its social impact? Considering that budgets are limited, apart from the above metrics, what other considerations do you think are important when it comes to deciding which artists or what forms of the arts your society should support?
- "[C]oncerns over the stringent criteria to qualify for NAC grants and the key performance indicators (KPIs) [to be met]" (lines 80-81) were highlighted. What reasons can you offer for why government grants to the arts would come with such conditions? Can you think of reasons why the **nature of the arts** may make it more necessary to impose such conditions?
- Carry out independent research for specific examples of when art funding criteria or restrictions might have been excessive. In what ways might overly restrictive funding criteria be counterproductive?

Related essay questions:

1. 'The arts are nothing more than a luxury.' How far is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2021)
2. In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (Cambridge 2017)
3. 'For the majority of people, the arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2014)
4. Would it matter if all the performing arts venues in your society, such as concert halls and theatres, were closed down? (Cambridge 2010)
5. Does your country do enough to develop the Arts? (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)
6. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
7. 'Support for the arts should come mainly from the government.' Discuss. (RI 2020 Y6 Timed Practice)
8. 'We should abolish state funding for the Arts.' How far do you agree that this should be the case for your society? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelim)

Reading 8: Singapore Cultural Statistics – Arts Attendance & Revenue **EU 5**

Table B-1: Ticketed Attendance at Performing Arts* Events

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Ticketed Attendance^	1,946,322	1,812,697	1,911,266	2,194,844	1,991,950	215,884	320,906

Source: National Arts Council and People's Association^^

* Performing Arts refer to folk, traditional, classical and contemporary forms of dance, music (pop/rock concerts included) and theatre. Performing arts events may be held live, accessed digitally through electronic media or the Internet e.g. live-streamed performances or be held in a hybrid format with both in-person and digital modes of access. Events such as book launches, competitions, conferences, masterclasses, workshops etc are excluded.

^ Ticketed attendance refers to attendance at performing arts events that require a ticket for entry. It includes tickets sold and complimentary tickets issued.

^^ From 2020 onwards, data from the National Arts Council and People's Association for 2020 and 2021 includes amalgamated ticketed in-person and digital attendance.

Notes:
2018 data has been revised due to updates in data collection and classification.
2020 data has been revised to include ticketed attendance for digital performing arts events from the National Arts Council.

Table B-2: Ticket Sales for Performing Arts* Events

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Tickets Sold^	**1,562,404**	**1,398,857**	**1,489,685**	**1,819,944**	**1,579,602**	**106,653**	**203,136**
Music	728,305	639,713	747,493	743,157	855,320	25,307	61,822
Dance	75,973	70,874	69,266	77,150	73,155	14,827	12,719
Theatre	745,171	677,909	662,597	999,637	651,127	66,519	128,595
Others	12,955	10,361	10,329	-	-	-	-
Total Gross Takings ($mil)	**121.8**	**82.4**	**87.7**	**92.1**	**79.9**	**7.96**	**11.82**

Source: National Arts Council

* Performing Arts refer to folk, traditional, classical and contemporary forms of dance, music (pop/rock concerts included) and theatre. Performing arts events may be held live, accessed digitally through electronic media or the Internet, or be held in a hybrid format with both in-person and digital modes of access. Digital performing arts events include formats such as live-streamed performances and streaming pre-recorded videos of performances etc. Events such as book launches, competitions, conferences, masterclasses, workshops etc are excluded.

^ Figures include tickets sold through ticketing service providers like SISTIC and APACTix. It does not include tickets sold through Ticketcharge/Tickets.com and other site-specific or independent ticketing service providers.

Notes:
2018 data has been revised due to updates in data collection and classification.

Table B-3: Non-Ticketed Attendance at Arts and Cultural Events

Year		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Non-Ticketed Attendance		**9,017,614**	**9,536,519**	**11,308,550**	**11,714,936**	**13,647,967**	**37,627,044**	**27,155,841**
Total Non-Ticketed In-Person Attendance		9,017,614	9,536,519	11,308,550	11,714,936	13,647,967	4,689,348	5,398,263
Total Non-Ticketed Digital Attendance		-	-	-	-	-	32,937,696	21,757,578
Arts Events^	In-Person	2,781,937	3,065,452	3,011,342	3,728,969	3,725,939	1,997,363	2,905,195
	Digital	-	-	-	-	-	32,937,696	21,757,578
Heritage Events^^	In-Person	6,235,677	6,471,067	8,297,208	7,985,967	9,922,028	2,691,985	2,493,068

Source: National Arts Council^^^, People's Association^^^^ and National Heritage Board

^ Arts events refer to attendance at performing arts events organised and supported by the National Arts Council, Esplanade and the People's Association. Arts events may be held live, accessed digitally through electronic media or the Internet e.g. a virtual exhibition, or be held in a hybrid format with both in-person and digital modes of access.

^^ Heritage events refer to attendance at outreach events organised by the National Heritage Board (NHB). These events include community outreach activities organised by NHB institutions and museums, including the Museum Outreach and the Singapore Heritage Fest. The figure excludes incidental viewership and events where attendance figures are unable to be determined. Non-ticketed heritage events may also include some performing arts elements.

^^^ From 2020 onwards, data from the National Arts Council includes non-ticketed in-person and digital attendance.

^^^^ From 2020 onwards, data from the People's Association includes amalgamated non-ticketed in-person and digital attendance. Data in the table may not add up to the total due to amalgamated data.

Notes:
2018 data has been revised due to updates in data collection and classification.
2020 data has been revised to include non-ticketed attendance for digital performing arts events from the National Arts Council.

Table B-6: Museum Roundtable In-Person Visitorship

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Museum Roundtable Visitorship^	7,314,619	8,357,178	8,588,120	8,277,999	9,594,098	3,053,399	3,434,482

Source: National Heritage Board

^ Total Museums Roundtable in-person visitorship includes in-person visitorship to both public and private museums and galleries as classified in Table A-6.

Table D-1: Contributions to Arts and Culture

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Contributions ($mil)	**152.6^^**	**74.3**	**63.8**	**65.1**	**59.6**	**42.77**	**34.94**
Artefact Donations	0.5	1.4	6.6	1.2	2.7	0.78	1.46
Cash, In-kind Donations and Sponsorship^	152.1	72.9	57.2	63.9	56.9	41.99	33.48

Source: National Arts Council and National Heritage Board

^ Based on data on Patron of the Arts and Patron of Heritage Awards.

^^ The high value in 2015 was due to an increase in donations received for Patron of the Arts Awards in celebration of Singapore's 50th birthday and due to the establishment of the National Gallery Singapore.

Table D-2: Government Funding

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total Government Funding ($mil)	**937.2**	**720.0**	**438.13**	**458.66**	**494.49**	**486.15**	**489.19**
Arts & Heritage ^	522.7	420.1	417.63	414.96	445.49	408.42	436.92
Cultural Matching Fund ^^	80	19.8	20.5	43.7	49	35.6	19.4
Library ^^^	334.5	280.1	-	-	-	-	-
Arts & Culture Resilience Package^^^^						42.13	32.87

Source: Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Ministry of Communications and Information.

^ The Arts & Heritage figures are based on financial year, and reflect operating and development expenditure for the arts & heritage sector.

^^ The Cultural Matching Fund was set up by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, to provide dollar-for-dollar matching grants for private cash donations to arts & heritage charities and Institutions of Public Character (IPC).

^^^ The Library figures are based on financial year and reflect operating and development expenditure for libraries.

^^^^ The Arts & Culture Resilience Package was announced at MCCY's Committee of Supply debate on 6 March 2020 to support the sector. This figure comprises ACRP 1.0 and 2.0 funding.

Notes:

- 2020 figures reflect actual expenditure.
- 2021 figures reflect a mix of actual and revised budget figures. FY21 actual figures will be reflected in the FY23 Budget Book.
- Figures prior to 2012 were from the then Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.
- From 2017 onwards, film and library-related statistics have been excluded from the Singapore Cultural Statistics publication.
- Figures for Cultural Matching Fund in 2014 and 2015 were updated in 2020 to reflect actual expenditure.

Source:

Singapore Cultural Statistics 2022
https://www.nac.gov.sg/docs/default-source/resources-files/research/others/scs-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=3b80503d_2

Reading 9: COVID-19 has shown Singapore digital arts and humanities are quite the essential service **EU5**

Alistair Gornell | Channel News Asia | 21 June 2020

While COVID-19 represents an unprecedented challenge for the arts, culture and heritage sectors in Singapore, it has been striking that in defiance of the pandemic, we have still found new technological ways to turn to the arts and humanities for inspiration, solace, and fellow feeling. Cinematic performances, shows and podcasts have filled the spaces of our coronavirus circuit breaker period.

The recent fracas about whether the arts are an essential service only points to the value many see in them. This is an excellent juncture to think more critically about the nature of the digital arts and humanities, their role in society, and their potential to serve Singapore's interests on the international stage too.

A luxury we can afford

Both the arts and the humanities are sometimes unfairly viewed as a societal luxury and the "non-essential" service of academic disciplines. This is understandable. When national circumstances are humming along, the cultural and historical aspects of social cohesion can become something we take for granted. Yet in times of crisis like the outbreak we're living through, tensions bring to the fore society's fault lines, which may be primarily economic but are also deeply entangled with culture, religion and history.

The arts and humanities thus play an incredibly important civic role as a public source of authoritative knowledge, in promoting mutual understanding, and in providing a representative platform for social inclusivity.

Digital tools provide an opportunity to expand and enhance this core work. During the COVID-19 crisis, culture has become far more accessible through new digital platforms. A wonderful example is the National Arts Council's A List platform that has brought together digital content from Singapore's arts and culture scene.

More than a supplement

The widespread application of digital tools and technology in the arts and humanities is a fairly recent development. Within the last ten years, Singapore's cultural institutions have achieved remarkable success in several ambitious digital initiatives.

The National Library has digitised some of its collections and has made them publicly available through BooksSG. The Tamil Digital Heritage Collection, in particular, is a wonderful community-led initiative that digitised Tamil works composed in Singapore between 1965 and 2015. Galleries and museums too have curated digital exhibitions and have developed a digital archive of their artefacts in roots.sg, the interactive heritage portal launched in 2016. COVID-19 has brought new attention to these resources and has reinforced the fact that digital projects are more than simply an embellishment. With no way to leave our homes, virtual objects, whether images, films or recordings, have become a replacement for the real thing for many of us.

We should also start to think of digitisation not simply as a back-up but as a means of enhancing and improving access to our collective knowledge. While historical documents in the National Archive are being usefully scanned and uploaded on its website, many of them are not searchable and some have been stamped with digital watermarks.

Without modification, this form undermines the utility of these documents for more advanced forms of computer text analysis. There is scope going forward to think carefully when digitising about how to maximise the analytical potential of archives, especially as new technological tools develop.

Moving ahead, digital platforms have the potential to provide a more inclusive and diverse cultural space than is possible in physical libraries, galleries, and museums. There are already good examples of how this can be done. Ishvinder Singh's Sikh Heritage Trail mobile app is an excellent resource for understanding the story of Sikhs in Singapore, a history marginally represented in the National Museum.

And yet, while digitisation may increase accessibility and inclusivity, attention must be paid to the potential risks and problems of digital platforms. The push to digitise as a means of free distribution risks making the arts and culture sectors less economically viable. If smaller entities allocate more of limited funds or grant money to digitisation, it could also lead to less support for high-quality content and research.

Digitisation then does have an economic cost. If it cannot be more strongly supported by the government on top of current funding, greater private sector involvement could be encouraged, perhaps by offering tax incentives.

Reaching out beyond the nation

One consequence of the perceived civic value in the arts and humanities is that cultural institutions can often be inward-looking places focused only on national stories. Even when collections cut across vast regions and cultures, such as in the British Museum, the nation still plays a symbolic role as

civilisation's custodian. More recently, however, culture and heritage institutions are reaching out into the international arena, taking collections and exhibits on tour as a means of sharing knowledge, fostering cultural understanding, and strengthening diplomatic ties in ways traditional politics cannot.

As part of this cultural diplomacy, new collaborative digitisation projects between regions and nations have sprouted up, creating virtual platforms that support local heritage while making it universally accessible. As many retreat into competitive nationalism after COVID-19, Singapore could think more actively about leveraging its digital expertise to lead digital cultural diplomacy in the region. In 2018, for instance, ASEAN launched its Cultural Heritage Digital Archive (ACHDA), established with the help of the Japanese government and the NTT DATA Corporation.

There is no reason why Singapore cannot be at the forefront within ASEAN in exploring similar projects where digital technologies offer common ground in heritage cooperation. What is much needed however is for ASEAN's Committee for Culture and Information to better support regional collaboration between universities and cultural institutions in a similar way to its Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation.

While there are some encouraging digital ventures within ASEAN, regional institutions often look elsewhere for partners. The National Library of Laos recently collaborated with the German government and the Berlin State Library to create the Digital Library of Laos Manuscripts, an online collection of 12,000 historical texts.

The support of global partners is essential for cultural work in the region though the absence of ASEAN in many of these initiatives is perhaps a missed opportunity for greater regional collaboration. With its expertise in technology, its interdisciplinary world-class universities, and its successful culture and heritage institutions, Singapore could spearhead digital culture in ASEAN as a means of forging regional ties at a time of increasing nationalism.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- What costs and benefits does the writer bring up for the digitalisation of the arts? Rank these in terms of how important you feel they are.
- During the pandemic, rather than attend arts events in person, Singaporeans engaged in digital forms of dance and visual arts instead. In your opinion, does changing the form *(e.g. physical to digital)* change the essence or impact of an artwork? What are some examples that might support your argument?
- "With no way to leave our homes, virtual objects, whether images, films or recordings, have become a replacement for the real thing for many of us" (lines 33-34). How true is this of your experience with COVID-19 and how might it have changed your perception of the arts?
- Consider if the push for digitalisation of the arts is still necessary in the context of COVID-19 becoming endemic in Singapore. Why or why not?

Related essay questions:

1. 'Dramas on television or film are never as effective as a live performance.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2022)
2. 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2014)
3. To what extent should traditional art forms be preserved in a world driven by innovation? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelims)
4. How far do you agree with the view that the literary arts are about personal enjoyment rather than practical benefits? (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
5. In times of economic hardship, should a government be expected to provide financial support to the arts? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)

6. To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
7. To what extent has technology revolutionised the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelim)

Further reading:

- For more analysis on the state of the arts before, during, and in the aftermath of the pandemic, you may read NAC's special report: https://www.nac.gov.sg/docs/default-source/resources-files/research/digital-engagement/emerging-from-the-pandemic.pdf?sfvrsn=1c016df8_2

Reading 10: Art education holds some lessons on the way we teach: **EUs 5 & 9**

Ye Shufang | TODAY | 19 July 2019

This article will help you to understand:

- How art education can be a catalyst for better classroom discussion
- What benefits art education can have beyond the classroom
- How museums can play a key role in supporting art education

I am always struck by how students who study together cooperate to create a learning environment that suits them well. A handphone is playing music, another two are used to search for information online while a fourth phone is for sending text messages to other study groups to share the information learnt and help one another complete the assignment.

As a parent and educator, I often wonder how they concentrate and retain their learning with such "distractions" around them. Children and students are quick to make use of the latest technologies for learning. They create and share content, comment on other shared content, enhance and share their own content again; sometimes in a span of just a few minutes.

A decade ago, in response to how technology will change the way we learn and teach, researchers like Clayton Christensen, Thomas Arnett and Ron Ritchhart challenged educators to rethink their roles as knowledge or subject experts. They suggested that educators should start thinking of themselves as facilitators of good discussions.

With this in mind, how can parents and educators better facilitate learning and help transform information into knowledge and well-deliberated thinking? How do we encourage, guide and enable good discussions, while relying less on model answers?

The benefits of art education

This is where art education comes in. Art education provides many different entry points to kickstart good discussions. Artists communicate their thoughts on personal, historical and current issues differently from historians, journalists and writers. When looking at and discussing art, each of us, children included, can contribute differently to the interpretation and discussion of an artwork with our diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Art inquiry requires us to analyse and deliberate on the meaning of the visual imagery we encounter, as well as to consider the concepts and perspectives expressed by the artist. At the same time, we also study the social, cultural and historical contexts of the artwork when it was first created, against the current landscape to deepen our understanding of it. Through this process of inquiry, our children develop visual literacy, analytical skills and critical thinking. This strong connection between art inquiry and critical thinking has been studied and is well documented in many educative research projects like 'Artful Thinking', 'Project MUSE' and 'The Studio Thinking Project' by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Developing art education in Singapore

At the National Gallery Singapore, education is learner-centred with the long-term goal of developing self-motivated independent individuals. For instance, young children get many opportunities for self-guided imaginative play and art-making to nurture curiosity and imagination.

A close collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Education has enabled the gallery to co-develop a museum-based learning programme for primary school children, with the aim of developing knowledge, visual inquiry and appreciation of Singapore art and artists. On a gallery tour, students are guided to look at art, ask questions, and share their interpretations and responses with one another. A gallery education facilitator may start with a question such as: "What is the first thing you noticed about this artwork?" or "Imagine you were one of the figures in this painting, what would you hear?" Such open-ended questions encourage students to respond in a personal and imaginative manner, while reducing the expectation of a right or model answer.

The facilitators then continue to build on the students' thinking by asking more in-depth questions such as: "What do you think inspired and compelled the artist to create this work?" or "If you were the artist, how would you title the work differently and why?"

Given the space and time to share their responses, the children feel affirmed that their opinions matter and their voices are heard. As a result, they feel motivated and empowered to ask questions too. Some questions that children have asked at the gallery include: "Why don't artists smile in their self-portraits?" and "What happens to the art after a long time?" Their questions show us that children are observant, capable of making connections between the past and their present, and thinking beyond the subject at hand.

Art education & the "learner-centred approach"

The learner-centred approach acknowledges the learner's voice as being central to the learning experience. This approach has been adopted by many museums and education institutions. For example, the Children's Book Museum at The Hague — a fellow shortlisted institution for the Children in Museums Award 2018 — enables children to experience the power of stories and learn to make connections to their own lives and the world around them. Designed to include children as young as babies and toddlers, the experiences aim to develop language, creative expression, and motor skill development among the visitors as they listen, read, imagine and write stories freely.

The Young Museum in Frankfurt similarly encourages young visitors to explore the artefacts with their parents as they go on designed family trails where they experience collaborative, hands-on activities, without model answers to them. In 2018, Grand Rapids Public Museum High School in Michigan welcomed its first cohort of high school students who learn and study inside a museum in close proximity to artefacts and exhibits.

The innovative curriculum fosters a culture of co-learning where students learn collaboratively together in small groups under the guidance of teachers. In the process, students take on roles that involve acquiring, researching, cataloguing artefacts and curating exhibits.

As today's parents and educators, we do not necessarily need to establish ourselves as the content or knowledge experts to help our children and students learn. Instead, we can co-learn and search for the answers together with them.

We can engage in thoughtful discussions and debate our opinions with an open mind. We can also facilitate good discussions as we acknowledge their responses and accept differences in opinions. In this way, we aspire for, and look forward to, our children and students showing us new ways of interpreting and understanding the subject at hand, including art.

More importantly, while these unique viewpoints and different perspectives may not be similar to ours, this learner-centred, model-answer-free environment will help us nurture self-motivated independent learners ready for the future.

Ye Shufang is Deputy Director, Education at National Gallery Singapore.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In light of Ye's question concerning how children cope with ' "distractions" around them' (line 6), why does she then make reference to them "mak[ing] use of the latest technologies for learning" in lines 6-7?
- Ye also identifies some benefits of art education in lines 16-28: (a) Which have you encountered in your personal & schooling experience? (b) Which do you think is/are most needed in our education system & why?
- "Art inquiry" (line 21) is presented as providing the means for children to enhance "analytical skills and critical thinking" (line 25). How an arts education manages to achieve this is explained in lines 21-24. Do you believe this ability is unique to arts education? Why or why not? If not through an arts education, how else might the analytical and critical thinking skills of the next generation of students be enhanced?
- What are your thoughts about the facilitation of the "museum-based learning programme for primary school children" (line 33) described in lines 34-42 in terms of encouraging a learner-centred approach?

Related essay questions:

1. 'An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
2. 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2014)
3. 'Unlike the Arts, such as writing or music, Mathematics lacks the capacity for creativity.' How far do you agree with this statement? (Cambridge 2014)
4. 'There needs to be more emphasis on the arts in the school curriculum than the sciences.' How far do you agree? (RI 2023 Y6 Common Test)
5. How far do you agree with the view that the literary arts are about personal enjoyment rather than practical benefits? (RI 2020 Y6 Term 3 Common Essay Assignment)
6. To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
7. 'An education in sports or arts is still seen to be undesirable in your society today.' Do you agree? (RI 2017 Y5 Promo)
8. Consider the consequences if all art museums and art galleries in your country were closed down. (RI 2017 Y6 CT1)
9. 'The progress of a society is sustained by the sciences rather than the arts.' How far do you agree with this statement? (RI 2016 Y6 Prelim)

Further reading:

- "Art education key to developing an innovative mindset" – Ye Shufang, TODAY, 12 Sep 2017 @ https://www.todayonline.com/daily-focus/education/art-education-key-developing-innovative-mindset"

Reading 11: The full measure of an arts education **EUs 1 & 5**

Yuen Sin | The Straits Times | 1 June 2017

This article will help you to understand:

- What benefits an arts education offers school children
- What challenges there are in the teaching of the arts
- How an arts education provides skills that can be "transferred" to other areas of learning

News last month that fewer than three in 10 School of the Arts (SOTA) graduating students go on to pursue arts-related university courses stirred debate, with some saying this was too low a figure and asking if taxpayers' dollars were well spent in funding such a school. Those remarks invited heartfelt responses from a handful of Sota alumni and their parents, who defended the school and its programme and detailed the tremendous benefits of an arts education.

SOTA is the only secondary school here with a dedicated arts programme. Singapore's other arts schools offer programmes at tertiary level. The other secondary schools that offer specialised programmes include the Singapore Sports School, the School of Science and Technology, Singapore and the NUS High School of Mathematics and Science. At NUS High, some seven in 10 students go on to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem) courses in university.

But the SOTA-NUS High comparison may not be apt when one considers why SOTA was set up in the first place. When it was first mooted in 2004, the aim was not to set up a vocational school aimed solely at producing arts practitioners.

Instead, the committee that drew up the report on a School for the Arts back in 2004 said such a school would give students at the pre-tertiary level a strong foundation in the arts, and plug a gap in mainstream schools which lacked teaching resources and opportunities to expose students to an arts learning environment. SOTA students, the committee said, would be "better positioned to pursue higher education in the arts or arts-related fields, or apply their artistic and creative capabilities in other fields". That, in turn, would support Singapore's plans to develop its own artistic talents in its push to position itself as a "global city for the arts", and provide new opportunities for those with creative aspirations as society matures.

What numbers don't say

To secure a place in SOTA, Primary 6 pupils have to go through individual or group auditions in the art form they are interested in, whether music or dance. They may also have to prepare a portfolio of their artistic works, and are interviewed by the school's arts teachers. Once admitted, SOTA students embark on a six-year programme which culminates in an International Baccalaureate diploma. In the first two years, students are also exposed to art forms other than the one they are specialising in. They also study a full slate of academic subjects, including science and mathematics.

The arts are often integrated into the academic subjects and that allows students to approach what they are learning from multiple perspectives. So a music student may, for example, demonstrate during physics class how the pitch of a violin is adjusted and how that corresponds to sound frequency. Dance students may apply the principles of cultural anthropology to carry out research on different dance cultures.

As the SOTA committee said in its 2004 report, an arts education can help students develop critical thought and creative expression, nurture self-development and leadership qualities, and also enrich their study of other subjects.

Whether or not a SOTA student pursues a university degree in the arts is a poor indicator of the school's success. Some Sota alumni have moved into law or the humanities after graduation, but

continue to contribute to the arts scene, with some starting arts education programmes and others founding literary magazines. Yet others apply their ability to think critically and independently in the non-arts disciplines they have ventured into.

All this is consistent with the national push to encourage lifelong learning and with the SkillsFuture movement which emphasises that learning is a personal endeavour and that every person should be given the autonomy to decide when and how to apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired, and have the flexibility to switch from one industry to another depending on interest and market demand.

The other thing to note is that SOTA is a very young school, having been founded in 2008, which means it is just approaching its 10th year. It may be premature to size up its impact on society at this stage. The proportion of students entering arts courses at university excludes students who left Sota before completing the six-year programme to pursue tertiary studies in the arts, at institutions like the National University of Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music or the Central School of Ballet in London, as well as those who return to work full-time in the arts sector after working professionally in another discipline.

Singapore Management University Associate Professor Margaret Chan says: "It should not be seen as a failure of SOTA that their graduates go on to non-arts courses." She studied business administration at university before becoming an actress and earning a PhD in performance studies later. "Art is about meaning-making; it is understanding ourselves and society, reaching into ourselves and out to others," she adds.

Room for change

The recent debate has, however, served a useful purpose in surfacing questions about the teaching of the arts and how arts careers are perceived. That is partly due to reports that a sizeable number of teachers have left SOTA of late, with some citing a disconnect between educators and management on how the arts should be taught. Mr Charles Tee, a parent of a SOTA alumnus, also wrote to The Straits Times Forum to register his unhappiness that SOTA seems to be chasing after academic excellence at the expense of artistic development.

The question of what balance to strike between arts education and a rigorous academic curriculum is one that SOTA's management needs to address, SOTA teachers told The Straits Times. A related issue is the widespread perception among Singaporeans, including some parents of Sota students, that to pursue a career in the arts is to court unemployment and hardship.

Sota alumna Faye Tan, 21, who left SOTA after four years for the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London, says young people are discouraged by pessimistic labels attached to arts careers, such as "risky, difficult, poor and unappreciated". Now a full-time company artist and digital marketing manager at contemporary dance company Frontier Danceland, she says there is also no need for SOTA alumni to limit themselves to pursuing the arts as a hobby just because they are not training full-time or extensively in the arts.

Theatre practitioner and Nominated Member of Parliament Kok Heng Leun believes there is no lack of career options in the arts. But society's perceptions of artists need to change, he says. "We need artists to be respected. A lot of people still see artists as just entertainers or, for some, trouble-makers because they tackle difficult issues. Artists need to be seen as being as important as scientists, economists and entrepreneurs," he says. It is also important that people respect artistic work, he adds, as that reflects their appreciation of the time and effort the artist has invested in art making.

Paths for different talents

At the official opening of SOTA in 2011, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the school demonstrates how Singapore is opening up multiple paths to different talents, giving artistically-inclined students

every opportunity to excel. He added that SOTA's mission is "not to produce a single peak of excellence, along which everybody is trying to climb, but a whole mountain range with many peaks".

"Each person then chooses his own area of interest or focus, areas where he wants to put in his passion and his effort, and to excel and do well. And ultimately, we want to have lots of people standing on top of all of the mountains." He had also forecast that many SOTA graduates would go on to professions not directly related to aesthetics, such as medicine or engineering, but maintained that an education in the arts is of value in itself. Addressing SOTA students, he said: "I hope whatever you do, your training in the arts will equip you with a more comprehensive perspective and way of thinking and add an extra touch to the new profession which you will learn."

As Singapore's only dedicated arts school at the pre-tertiary level, SOTA is an important source of arts education. National Institute of Education don Jason Tan notes that the school also provides an avenue for pedagogical innovation. SOTA, he says, can develop creative models for imparting skills and content through the arts that other schools can consider adopting.

To pin the value of such a school to the percentage of students that go on to pursue arts degrees is reductionist. A better approach is to see where a SOTA education is working so as to draw out lessons for other educators and schools, and critique those aspects that are not working and in need of change. There will always be a place for the arts in society, and it is fitting that young people who are eager for an arts education have access to a secondary school that offers them just that.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In light of the original objectives of setting up SOTA, which was to provide its students “a strong foundation in the arts” (line 15) such that they would be “better positioned to pursue higher education in the arts or arts-related fields” (lines 17-18) and the finding that “fewer than three in 10 [SOTA] graduating students go on to pursue arts-related university courses” (lines 1-2), do you think Singapore should continue to fund a school with a dedicated focus on the arts? Why or why not?
- Associate Professor Margaret Chan is cited as saying that “[i]t should not be seen as a failure of SOTA that their graduates go on to non-arts courses” (lines 53-54). What might she be implying?
- Based on the section Room for change (lines 58-79), what reasons are there for greater emphasis on arts education in Singapore?
- Summarise the different benefits of an arts education given in Reading 11. Conversely, what might be some potential downsides of an increasing emphasis on arts education in Singapore? How would you attempt to weigh benefits against downsides in the context of funding arts education?

Related essay questions:

1. ‘An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.’ How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
2. ‘There needs to be more emphasis on the arts in the school curriculum than the sciences.’ How far do you agree? (RI 2023 Y6 Common Test)
3. ‘A career in sports or the arts is still undesirable.’ How far is this true of your society? (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
4. Is an arts education becoming irrelevant in your society? (RI 2016 Y5 CT)

Further reading:

- “Is arts education being de-emphasised in Singapore?” – Epoch Times, 20 Dec 2018 @ https://epochtimes.today/is-arts-education-being-de-emphasised-in-singapore/

SECTION C: REGULATING THE ARTS

Reading 12: Should we censor art? **EUs 3 & 10**

Adapted from Daisy Dixon | AEON | 27 May 2021

This reading will help you to consider:

- How some artworks can assert meanings and ideologies beyond the artist's intentions
- The value of art in society and how such interpretations of its value can be contested and challenged by different stakeholders
- The problems surrounding censorship of art

In 1970, Allen Jones exhibited Hatstand, Table, and Chair: three sculptures of women wearing fetish clothing, posed as pieces of furniture. The sculptures were met with protests and stink-bomb attacks, particularly from feminists, who argued that the works objectified women. Despite the artist's intentions for this piece – he has since identified as a feminist – the installation became part of an artistic narrative that has, historically, reduced women to passive objects in painting and sculpture.

In 2014, Brett Bailey's Exhibit B (2012) was shut down at the Barbican in London after protests caused 'security concerns'. The installation, based on 19th- and early 20th-century 'human zoos', showed Black people on display, chained and restrained. Even though the artist – a white South African man – intended the work to expose historic racist and imperialist violence, protesters implored the gallery to censor it: 'Caged Black People Is Not Art' read one banner.

And in 2019, an exhibition of Gauguin's portraits opened at the National Gallery in London with a public debate to address ethical concerns about the artist and his work. Paul Gauguin was a sexual predator, and when in the South Pacific – where he created some of his best-known paintings – he used his colonial and patriarchal privilege to sexually abuse girls as young as 13, knowingly infecting them with syphilis. Indeed, many of us struggle to reconcile an artist's appalling behaviour with their art: Pablo Picasso was, like Gaugin, a sexual predator, and a misogynist; Leni Riefenstahl was a Nazi and exploited Romani people in her filmmaking; and the sculptor Eric Gill was a paedophile. Often, we can sense the artist's moral character in their works: Picasso's views about women, for example, can be detected in many of his late portraits due to his manner of depiction.

These cases, among many more, show that, far from being innocuous objects hidden away in museums and white cubes, **artworks are historically informed objects that do things and say things.** Artworks are created by people in particular times, responding to specific events and ideals. There is more to a painting or sculpture than its aesthetic forms of colour, line and shape. External properties, such as the artist's identity and relevant events during the work's creation, must be considered to fully understand the work. Just how much the artist's intentions for their art determine that artwork's meaning is a deep question – one that I can't answer here. But, in general, most philosophers agree that an artwork can admit of many interpretations, and its meaning often diverges from what the artist intended. Crucially, **artworks are communicative objects, the messages of which are partly determined by the surrounding context and are sometimes different to what the artist had in mind.**

Relatedly, it's been argued that artworks – particularly pictorial ones – can be the equivalent of 'speech acts' – that is, they can be used to do things, such as protest or endorse something. Picasso's Guernica (1937), which depicts the Luftwaffe air raid that destroyed the town in the Spanish Civil War, has been described as a desolate 'protest-painting' and a 'powerful antiwar statement'. Such actions – protesting, stating – are things we normally do with words. When we speak, we don't merely express meanings; our words also have what J L Austin in 1955 called 'illocutionary force'. When an officer shouts to her troops: 'Open fire!', she's ordering them to shoot. But for an utterance to have a particular force, it needs to satisfy certain conditions. To order her troops to fire, the officer must have

authority, and she must use words her troops can understand. While Austin was mainly concerned with linguistic speech acts, he noted how they can also be nonverbally performed: consider silent protests or greeting another person by smiling. Such gestures must still be understood and recognised – this is what Austin called 'conventional'. There are conventional gestures within artmaking and curatorial display, too. Recognisable methods of depiction with particular use of perspective and light, visual metaphors, iconographic symbols and curatorial conventions governing display will facilitate a work's performance of speech acts. If artworks can be speech acts or, at least, can express meanings with certain forces such as assertion and protest (a claim that requires further defence than I can give here), then presumably they can be harmful acts too.

In parallel to this are the statues of slave traders and white supremacists. These public memorials don't just represent a particular person – they literally put them on a pedestal. Through various aesthetic conventions, statues commemorate and glamorise the person and their actions and, in doing this, they rank people of colour as inferior, legitimising racial hatred. As the mayor of London Sadiq Khan said after a monument to the 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston was torn down in Bristol in June 2020: 'Imagine what it's like as a Black person to walk past a statue of somebody who enslaved your ancestors. And we are commemorating them – celebrating them – as icons…' And look again at Jones's sculptures. The male artist depicted women as furniture within a society where women are still treated as secondary citizens. Regardless of the artist's intentions, it's thus plausible to interpret the work as amounting to a kind of sexist speech: it subordinates women by depicting us as household objects, ranking us as inferior and legitimising misogynistic attitudes.

Artworks speak, act and have concrete consequences for people's lives. Recognising artistic speech or expression reveals a distinctive potential harm towards marginalised groups. So how should we manage it?

It's our right to express views in public without fear of being silenced or punished, a right preserved (though not always upheld) under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes not just ordinary speaking but other forms of expression such as works of art. But as John Stuart Mill argued in On Liberty (1859), this freedom isn't absolute – most philosophers and lawmakers believe that there must be some limits. Yet some legal restrictions are less stringent than others: the US First Amendment affords protection to some racist hate speech, for example – far more than the laws of the UK, Australia and Canada do.

Some theorists, such as Jeremy Waldron, think that such speech should be banned in the quest for a just society, which publicly upholds the dignity of all persons. Such a call for tougher speech legislation could mean banning any works of art that, via their hateful messages and acts, cause similarly damaging social consequences or enact harms such as subordination. So, should we forever hide away Gauguin's paintings? Quietly remove all Confederate and slave trader monuments?

It's commonly assumed that artworks are special and should be almost immune to censorship; silencing artists is often considered deplorable. One familiar objection, expressed by museum professionals such as Vicente Todolí, former director of Tate Modern in London, is that censorship would mean losing great art. Indeed, several people present at the National Gallery debate in London said that taking down Gauguin's works would mean losing 'genius' and 'beauty'. Given that aesthetic experiences are considered valuable, this loss would apparently be regrettable.

Moreover, under the First Amendment, for example, **many artworks that express hateful messages would be protected as legal expression because it's hard to show that they incite violence**. Indeed, it's notoriously difficult to prove that particular artworks directly cause criminal behaviour. Meaning in art is more complex than ordinary speech, and the artist could deny having certain communicative intentions for their artwork, and so be let off the hook.

A different kind of concern about censoring harmful art is that doing so might sweep under the carpet problematic canons and past atrocities. Such erasure could even result in a widespread amnesia (at least within dominant groups), where many won't adequately confront our true history. Removing statues and paintings without anyone noticing might not properly engage with the problem in the first place; it could even be tantamount to dismissing the magnitude of the atrocities honoured by the monuments, or the immoral messages expressed by the paintings.

Instead of censorship, some have opted for an alternative response to hate speech. We can challenge, refute or even undo the harms of hate speech with more speech. Speaking back presents counternarratives and counterevidence to the falsehoods expressed. This might involve publicly denouncing instances of hate speech and affirming the dignity of the groups targeted, or refuting transphobic speech in social media forums, or challenging racist speech on public transport or at home.

Counterspeech, in particular this 'blocking', can illuminate parallel artistic and curatorial strategies to counter hate speech such as sexist paintings or racist monuments. The idea is that we should fight visual hate speech with artistic interventions and better curation; a kind of 'curatorial activism', as the feminist curator Maura Reilly put it in 2018. This approach has the distinct advantage of avoiding the issues with banning problematic art. I shall introduce just a few such strategies, although this is by no means an exhaustive list.

First, manipulation of an artwork and its curated space. Consider the Duke of Wellington monument in Glasgow, commemorating the military leader who led British armies to extend the East India Company's control. The friezes around the statue depict the duke sacking Indian cities and slaughtering South Asians. For many years now, the statue has had a traffic cone on its head. Thought to have originated as a drunken joke, this action has taken on new significance. Amid protests after the murder of George Floyd, the cone was replaced with a Black Lives Matter (BLM) substitute. Consider also political vandalism and the addition of new artworks. The Robert E Lee Confederate monument in Virginia was spraypainted with 'Blood On Your Hands' and 'Stop White Supremacy' by BLM protestors, and was targeted with projections of Floyd's face, bearing the words 'No Justice, No Peace'. The defaced monument is now deemed one of the most influential American protest artworks since the Second World War. And on antislavery day in 2018, the art installation Here and Now appeared beneath the Colston statue in Bristol. The work took the shape of a slave-ship hull, with concrete figurines as cargo.

There are also interactions with pieces in galleries. In her painting Open Casket (2016), based on the mutilated face of the teenager Emmett Till who was lynched in 1955, Dana Schutz was accused of cultural appropriation in using Black pain as 'raw material'. In response, the artist Parker Bright stood in front of the painting wearing a T-shirt reading 'BLACK DEATH SPECTACLE' and spoke about the work's harms: 'no one should be making money off a Black dead body'.

Second, transparent curation. A few days before a Gauguin exhibition opened at the National Gallery of Canada in 2019, the curators edited some of the wall texts to avoid culturally insensitive language. Gauguin's 'relationship with a young Tahitian woman' was changed to 'his relationship with a 13- or 14-year-old Tahitian girl'. And consider Michelle Hartney's Performance/Call to Action (2018), in which the artist placed #MeToo-inspired wall labels next to paintings by Picasso and Gauguin at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, to underscore their transgressions. For example, next to Gauguin's Two Tahitian Women (1899), Hartney quoted an essay by Roxane Gay: '[I]t's time to say that there is no artistic work, no legacy so great that we choose to look the other way.'

Curation tells stories about the work on display, and curators have a responsibility to give accurate and true narratives surrounding the art. Facts shouldn't be suppressed to furnish more convenient narratives obscuring truth. Artistic curation such as Hartney's recontextualises these pieces, exposing

the violent reality behind them, prompting the viewer to look again and reconsider their sometimes-dismissive attitude to artmaking contexts.

Artistic and curatorial strategies might to some extent sidestep these issues. Placing a cone on a statue's head doesn't require much cognitive labour in unpacking what the statue is saying and presupposing: the action itself swiftly opens up discussion, which then exposes the harm of the monument. Moreover, protest art can offer collaborative activities with graffiti, dramatic curation or performance, which give marginalised groups better positions of power from which to shout back.

Some responses to harmful art will inevitably be redescribed as vandalism, thus causing legal issues. But not reacting to such works can carry even greater risks to society due to the implied collusion or indifference to the issues such works raise. I've mentioned just a few activist strategies to manage dangerous art; there are also methods that highlight marginalised artists, such as new retrospective exhibitions, as well as decolonising and democratising art education through platforms such as the Black Blossoms School of Art and Culture in the UK.

Outright censorship is rife with problems generally, let alone art censorship, which is far more complex than straightforward speech. So we need to find new ways of signalling our disquiet, disgust and outrage at art that perpetuates social injustice. As the Bristol poet Vanessa Kisuule puts it: 'I'm not necessarily for getting rid of statues… I want people to scribble on them, to make counteractive art about them.' Curatorial and artistic responses are the way forward here; complacency certainly isn't.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Dixon recounts instances whereby art intended to prompt meaningful debate were met with outrage (lines 1-10). What are some reasons why our interpretations of art sometimes diverge from the artist's original intentions? Should there be a universal objective definition to what aesthetic beauty is?
- In paragraph 4 (lines 28-29), Dixon claims that meaning in art is "partly determined by the surrounding context and are sometimes different to what the artist had in mind." To what extent is this a realistic take on diversity in the world of art? May such subjectivity in the meaning in art also be a function of **time** on top of being informed by **place**? Can you think of any examples that illustrate such subjectivity in the interpretation of artistic meaning?
- In lines 41-42, Dixon states that "There are conventional gestures within artmaking and curatorial display, too." What are real-world examples of 'gestures' that result in some artworks being more controversial/offensive than others?
- Based on lines 74-89, Dixon claims that "[a]rtworks speak, act and have concrete consequences for people's lives [in that] artistic speech or expression reveals a distinctive potential harm towards marginalised groups." Do the costs always outweigh the benefits whenever artworks are put up for public display and consumption? How might **time** and **place** also play a role in terms of the variability of the calculus between the costs and benefits of artistic consumption?
- Dixon cites instances where "cultural appropriation" (line 117) and "transparent curation" (line 120) are used as tools to promote public engagement with art. What are some possible tensions which may arise when they do not bring about consensus among people?

Related essay questions:

1. Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society. (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'Censorship of the arts is necessary to maintain social cohesion.' To what extent is this view still relevant to your society? (RI 2023 y6 Timed Practice)
3. 'The arts ask questions while science provides answers.' How valid is this view? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)

4. 'Now more than ever, the arts should be subject to government censorship.' Comment. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
5. Examine the claim that artists should have complete freedom of expression. (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
6. Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
7. 'Real art is something that makes us uncomfortable.' Do you agree? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)

Further Reading:

- "Can you love the Art and hate the Monster?", Melissa Febos, The New Yorker, 24 May 2023 @ https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/can-you-love-the-art-and-hate-the-artist

Reading 13: Art vs government in Singapore **EU 3**

Steph Harmon |The Guardian | 9 September 2017

This reading will help you to consider:

- The tensions between state funding & state regulation of the arts
- The challenge a state faces in balancing between supporting creative expression via the arts and protecting existing standards of public morality
- The difficulty faced by arts practitioners when state regulators make decisions without sufficient dialogue between the two parties

In many ways, theatremaker Ong Keng Sen was a natural fit to run the Singapore international festival of arts when it relaunched in 2014. A recipient of Singapore's Cultural Medallion, Ong's company TheatreWorks signalled a new creative movement when it was founded in 1985. He was there for the birth of Singapore's arts scene and 30 years later is still a major player within it.

But for a festival run by a famously restrictive government, Ong was also a risky choice: an outspoken artist known for avant-garde experimental work, and for pushing buttons that others wouldn't push. "You can't go into a new festival with censorship hanging over your head," Ong explains over lunch. "That was the only reason why I would take the job: if it was not going to be a government directed festival ... [but] the promise of no censorship evaporated within about 15 months."

With his final festival closing this weekend, Ong is eager to speak about the arts in Singapore, and his history battling the various bodies which regulate it. "I wouldn't want to go on for another four years," he says. "I feel drained by the fighting. You're not told what's not possible"

"Strings attached" arts funding

In just 50 years since independence, Singapore has established itself as a global city-state, one of the richest places on earth and one of the most expensive to live in. It's clean, safe, multicultural and meticulously organised: a green city with nature parks, biodomes and waterviews, with gardens falling down the sides of skyscrapers built on reclaimed land, and some of the best schools, and food, in the world.

One marker of its economic success is the thriving arts scene, up to 85% of which is funded by the government according to its data. During the week the Guardian visited, there were at least three publicly-funded arts festivals being held, and many speak of the sector's vibrancy. Writer Ng Yi-Sheng says on the whole, Singapore has become a more culturally healthy place thanks to the government's arts funding. "Many people have benefited, many of my friends have benefited ... and having works officially valued by institutions gives the average person here more sense of wellbeing, belonging."

But as many artists explain, that money comes with strings attached. Australian theatremaker Edith Podesta moved to Singapore a decade ago and was immediately struck by the government's control over the arts. "At the beginning I remember it being quite shocking," she says. "The funding here is far better than in Australia – like, *far* better, and there's lots of opportunity for someone who wants to do more experimental avant-garde work to find their audience ... But it's like constant juggling: where there's a plus point, there's also a negative."

Singapore has been under the rule of the People's Action Party since it won self-governance in 1959, and society is still heavily regulated. Protest is legal only in one designated park, subject to pre-approval; the press is categorised as "not free" by the Freedom House watchdog; and there are restrictions – formal and informal – on which topics are permissible for public discussion.

These restrictions are known as "OB markers" – as in, out-of-bounds markers, and include issues of politics, race, religion and sexuality. "Singaporeans are very aware of where they should align themselves without being told," Ong explains. "You're not told what's not possible, but you are given an indication that that's *not* the way you should go, and you just internalise it, and co-ordinate yourself and your desires." In the arts, those OB markers are regulated from above.

Censorship and the arts

Censorship is a two-sided coin for creatives in Singapore. On one side is the government grant application process, which can lead an artist to adapt their art to make it more palatable to the National Arts Council, and grants the NAC the right to take back funds if the work produced is in breach of their guidelines. And on the other is the Infocomm Media Development Authority: the regulatory body that issues licenses and audience restrictions before any performance, film, TV show or exhibition goes public.

TV or radio content that "promotes, justifies or glamorises" homosexuality is unacceptable under the IMDA and will be censored. For example, the Guardian was told of a Singaporean student who was surprised to hear there were gay characters in *Glee*[3], because they'd all been cut for local broadcast. Meanwhile, IMDA's Arts Entertainment Classification Code regulates all live performances and exhibitions to protect the young from "unsuitable content" and to ensure that content will not "undermine public order, national security and/or stability" or go against "prevailing community standards of morality and decency".

In a statement to the Guardian, an IMDA spokesperson said: "The IMDA aims to strike a balance between reflecting generally accepted social norms, while giving due consideration to the events' artistic merits." But in effect, this means if a performance hits any of the "OB markers", its creators will probably be asked to make changes, or will have their audience restricted to over 16s or over 21s. The show could even be denied classification, which results in an effective ban.

These restrictions, Ong says, have huge consequences for the quality of art produced, and its potential for critique. "Singapore is [portrayed as] this kind of garden paradise, but you don't know where the landmines are. And of course most tourists won't step on them, but for locals there are lots of controls ... I want to reveal them, to have a more transparent society." Until Ong came on board to revive the festival, it had been curated by the government and had therefore been exempt from licensing restrictions. "They forgot about that for the first year, and in the first year we had *carte blanche*," Ong says. "But in my second year, the censorship came back."

In February 2015, it was announced that the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) would need to apply for licenses for each event – which this year numbered more than 90, including 16 commissions. In what's widely regarded as an administrative headache, the IMDA asks for finalised scripts and content checklists to be sent in at least two months before opening night. As many

[3] *American musical comedy-drama television series that aired from 2009 to 2015*

theatremakers know, a work can change dramatically during this period – even during dress rehearsals. “We were quite shocked,” Ong says. “In the first place, it’s impossible to commission effectively that way.”

In 2015, two foreign films were withdrawn from Ong’s festival after the IMDA refused classification. The following year SIFA brought Swiss director Milo Rau’s *Five Easy Pieces to Singapore* – a challenging work about a convicted murderer and paedophile, which features seven young performers aged eight to 13 telling the story themselves. The IMDA slapped it with an R18+. “It was ridiculous. The only children allowed in the theatre were performing for the adults,” Ong says. “It became cannibalistic. We were consuming these children, who were performing for us what was meant to be a morality tale for them.”

Also that year, the IMDA requested the removal of work from Iranian photojournalist Newsha Tavakolian. The official line was that her portraits of female Kurdish soldiers fighting against the Islamic State had the potential to “undermine public order, national security and/or stability”. But instead of cutting the show, the organisers and the artist replaced each censored photograph with a black card. The exhibition became a statement about censorship itself. “One of the first steps towards compromising the integrity of the festival is when you try to hide the censorship as it occurs,” Ong explains. “I think it’s very important to know when there has been a public disappearance.”

When Singapore’s founding father Lee Kuan Yew died in 2015, Ong says, it led to “a kind of tenuousness”, or loss of identity, that was felt throughout the city-state – and led to a government more afraid to take risks: “We started again after LKY passed away ... and from 2015, the conversation became more restrictive,” he says. “I feel like the officials are closing the spaces quite quickly ... it’s not getting better, let’s put it that way.”

“I have this fear...”

With a high profile and proven track record, Ong is able to take more risks than others, and be more outspoken. But with the huge audience provided by SIFA, he also is less likely to fly under the radar – and his frequently critical Facebook posts are now preceded by a disclaimer: “The postings on this site are my own and do not represent [the government’s] opinions or positions.”

“There have been several feedback sessions where I got the sense of what the borders are,” Ong says carefully. But he fears that once his tenure at SIFA is over, there will be real consequences. “I have this fear that once I leave the festival, they will punish me ... They won’t punish me directly, but through my company TheatreWorks. Withdraw funding. Withdraw our space,” he says. In a high profile story in 2010, theatre company W!ld Rice had $20,000 of its annual funding cut for projects “incompatible with the core values” of the government.

The price of life in Singapore, city of rules: 'It’s a Faustian deal' “I’m very aware that everything I say now affects the company later,” Ong says. “I’m just waiting for it to happen. And it may never happen. But it’s a fear I live with.”

In a statement to the Guardian, a spokesperson from the NAC said: “Apart from our funding conditions, we do not have any theme or issue which is deemed ineligible for funding ... We respect the artistic direction made by various artists and arts companies.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a major theme running through Ong’s 2017 festival was “transparency”. In *The Making of Enchantment Moments*, Filipino director Lav Diaz opened the set of his forthcoming film to the public, to watch the making of it; in Open Homes, everyday Singaporeans invited 20-30 strangers into their private lives and told them their story; and in collaboration with Podesta, graphic novelist Sonny Liew’s stage show Becoming Graphic became as much about his new book as the process of creating it.

When Ong launched SIFA, he also launched the Open: an annual pre-festival of ideas aimed to encourage public dialogue. This year the Open kicked off with a public forum held across two nights, tackling taboo subjects including LGBT representation and plurality in Singapore, and Singapore's ageing population. It took two months of internal meetings with high ranking officials before they could get a license – and by the time it was green lit, its original vision had been watered down.

Give the people more credit

Noorlinah Mohamed, the Open's artistic director, believes Singaporeans are much more open and progressive than the government gives them credit for – but she says many do internalise top-down restrictions. It becomes mythologised in our psyche that these are areas we should leave alone; that our government knows best for us.

"We're taught to say, 'Oh we should not challenge authority,' or, 'We should not question race or religion, because that might lead to the race riots of 1964' ... It becomes mythologised in our psyche that these are areas we should leave alone; that our government knows best for us. And because of that we tend to censor ourselves a lot more." The artist, she explains, constantly has to weigh up which is more important: having the work go ahead as intended, or making requested changes and reaching a bigger audience. "You start to become preoccupied with these questions. You add them into the equation of every single creation."

Another SIFA commission this year was *Dragonflies*, a geopolitical work written by Stephanie Street and produced by acclaimed Singapore theatre company Pangdemonium, which is run by the husband and wife team of actor Adrian Pang and theatremaker Tracie Pang. Tracie Pang believes the government's restrictions are unnecessary: "We have a community of arts goers who are intelligent enough to make up their own minds." But, she adds, they can have positive consequences for the work as well – if artists "box clever" enough. Their first commissioned work Tango, which dealt with gay themes, was an example of that.

"I would say it makes us work harder to ask the same questions but in a different way, which then makes the work become intellectually more stimulating," she explains. "As a company, we feel it's better to work with them than against them ... The people [at the IMDA] kind of have their hands tied. When we talk to them there is a sense of, 'Guys, we really want to help you, but we have this rule book!'"

Need for dialogue

When Singaporean graphic artist Sonny Liew first heard the government was taking back his $8,000 grant, in May 2015, he was surprised. "I thought we were safe," Liew says. "I had my editors look at it, and historians, lawyers – everything was fact-based and well-researched. "So when a friend texted me a few days before the book launch and said 'I hear your book is getting withdrawn', I was like, 'What are you talking about?'"

The book in question, *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, went on to win the Singapore literature prize and recently took out three of its six nominated categories at the prestigious Eisner Awards at San Diego's Comic-Con. It follows comic book artist Charlie Chan on an unblinkered journey through Singapore's post-independence years, featuring Lee Kuan Yew as a character.

It was the reinterpretation of Singapore's official history, Liew presumes, that got him into trouble. But all he can do is guess. The National Arts Council released a statement saying Liew's grant, which had been awarded to publisher Epigram Books, had been revoked because of "sensitive content" that "potentially undermines the authority and legitimacy of the government and its public institutions".

The problem is that there's no dialogue about any of the process. The final version didn't deviate from the draft which had won the grant, Liew says, so he assumes someone higher up got their hands on

the book and vetoed the money. "The problem is there's no dialogue about any of the process, so we don't know anything – but that's the impression we have."

When Liew became the first Singaporean to win at the Eisners, the NAC published a clipped congratulatory post on Facebook – but as many noted in the comments below, it failed to mention the book. The NAC has offered to fund one of Liew's next works, which he says he's "grappling with". Self-censorship, he says, is real. "Let's say for example I wanted to make a movie of Charlie Chan. That would require a lot of funding, right? ... So do I now become a bit more well-behaved, so I don't tread on toes? Or do I just do what I want to do? "[Charlie Chan] has become part of the conversation about arts and censorship in Singapore ... so now I'm just trying to figure out [what to do]."

In a recent editorial for Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, poet Toh Hsien Min argued that artists shouldn't expect money to come for free. "The NAC may be the only organisation funding the arts whose grant recipients routinely expect to have no stake in the outcomes," he wrote. "If artists are not happy with the conditions set by whichever organisation is offering funding, the only real option is to decline that funding."

But in a young arts economy that has few funding alternatives, only the privileged can afford to say no to a grant. "If [young artists] behave, they will get the funding – and naturally, as a young artist, you need the funding," Ong explains. He has proposed an alternative model of funding, where the government sponsors only operational aspects such as studio space and administrative costs, leaving the artists to create what they want.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Reading 7 states that, for arts funding in Singapore, 'money comes with strings attached' (line 24):
  a. Explain what this means, in the context of the Reading
  b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement, including those that might be unintended? Justify your response by citing ideas from the Reading.
- The article mentions two instances of arts regulation that were ostensibly guided by concerns over morality (lines 72-80) and "public order, national security and/or stability" (line 80):
  a. To what extent were the decisions justifiable?
  b. What are your thoughts about the organisers' and artist's response to the latter's artwork being removed (lines 81-82)? In general, how might decisions to censor, restrict or ban works of art achieve counterproductive effects?
- Artistic director Noorlinah Mohamed believes that 'Singaporeans are much more open and progressive than the government gives them credit for' (lines 117-118). Theatre practitioner Tracie Pang argues that '[w]e have a community of arts goers who are intelligent enough to make up their own minds' (lines 131-132):
  a. To what extent is this a realistic depiction of the current arts scene in Singapore?
  b. If local audiences have indeed become more discerning, what factors might have contributed to greater audience maturity?
  c. How far do you agree that, with greater audience maturity, "restrictions are unnecessary" (lines 131)? Conversely, why might there be a correlation between excessive state regulation of the arts and stunted development of audience maturity?

Related essay questions:

1. Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society. (Cambridge 2023)

2. Does your country do enough to develop the Arts? (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)
3. 'The arts ask questions while science provides answers.' How valid is this view? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
4. Consider the value of creativity in society. (RI 2020 Y5 Timed Practice)
5. 'Now more than ever, the arts should be subject to government censorship.' Comment. (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
6. 'We should abolish state funding for the Arts.' How far do you agree this should be the case for your society? (RI 2017 Y6 Prelims)
7. 'The progress of a society is sustained by the sciences rather than the arts.' How far do you agree with this statement? (RI 2016 Y6 Prelims)
8. Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
9. 'Different for the sake of being different.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
10. 'The arts disturb while the sciences reassure.' How true is this? (RI 2011 Y6 CT1)
11. Is creativity all about breaking rules? (RI 2010 Y6 Prelim)
12. Should the arts ever be censored? (RI 2010 Y5 CT)

Further reading:

- "When Queer Art Isn't Fit for Singapore's General Public Consumption" by Kimberly Lim, RICE Media, 11 October 2023 @ https://www.ricemedia.co/when-queer-art-isnt-fit-for-singapores-general-public-consumption/
- "Singapore's art market and the burden of censorship" by Robert Bociaga, Asia Media Centre, 1 February 2023 @ https://www.asiamediacentre.org.nz/features/singapores-art-market-and-the-burden-of-censorship/
- "Don't Just Blame The Government For Our Struggling Art Scene" by Isabel Pang, Millennials of Singapore, 26 Apr 2018 @ https://mosg.tv/2018/04/26/problem-singapores-art-scene/
- "Censorship in Singapore" by Rennes Lee, The Ridge Magazine, 25 February 2017 @ https://theridge.sg/2017/02/25/censorship-in-singapore/
- "This parliamentary speech by Arts Nominated MP Kok Heng Leun is more important than you think" by Jeanette Tan, Mothership, 6 Apr 2016 @ https://mothership.sg/2016/04/this-parliamentary-speech-by-arts-nominated-mp-kok-heng-leun-is-more-important-than-you-think/

Reading 14: Against the wall: The journey of Singapore's street art scene from fringe to mainstream **EUs 3 & 4**

Mayo Martin | Channel News Asia | 20 January 2018

This reading will help you:

- Understand the evolution of street art as an art form and its changing significance in Singapore across the years.
- Recognise how the originally guerrilla character of street art in Singapore has progressively been replaced by a formally recognised status coupled with the creation of state-sanctioned spaces that accommodate it.
- Reflect on the way in which political concerns and themes in street art are nonetheless distinctly frowned upon by the authorities in Singapore.

In one of the rooms at Aliwal Arts Centre, you'll get a snapshot of what Singapore's street art scene used to be like – if you look hard enough. Inside 10 small black boxes are dioramas recreating old

graffiti pieces done by artists such as Skope, Syco and Killer Gerbil. Long since erased, some of these date back to the early 2000s and were once seen in places such as railway tracks and *longkangs*. These painstakingly created works are part of the exhibit MATAS (Make A Terrific Artwork Someday).

Presented by street art collective RSCLS and artist Ryf Zaini as part of the Aliwal Urban Arts Festival during Singapore Art Week, the show also includes a section where visitors can do their own "tagging" – under the watchful eyes of CCTV cameras that broadcast their movements in another space full of television screens. This reflects how the local street art movement originated with practitioners creating work that was often at risk of falling foul of the law.

RSCLS founder Zero, whose real name is Zulkarnaen Othman, points to one of the dioramas. It's a stylised illustration of a rat with the words "On Yer Mark" beside it. It's an old work by artist OneTwoDelta, who painted it near the train tracks in Kembangan. "He just came around with a small bucket of black paint and a brush. Two hours. Just like that," said Zero.

It started in the streets

The graffiti works on display may have once been created in a flash, but the whole story of street art in Singapore has been a slow and steady one, full of highs and lows through the decades. Most practitioners peg its beginnings to 1995, the year when early pioneers Skope and Xero took to the streets with their aerosol cans. The two eventually formed Operation Art Core (OAC). Another pioneering group, Zinc Nite Crew (ZNC), also came up in 1998.

"I guess you could call that the 'practice stage'. Most of it were taggings and bombings," recalled former OAC member Sufian Hamri, also known as TraseOne, referring to the practice of spray-painting (or "writing") initials on walls. In 1999, a hip-hop gig at Somerset Youth Park, which featured a handful of graffiti artists, signalled a shift. "From there, it just blew up from 2000 onwards," he said.

The start of the decade saw practitioners invading not just the streets but schools and galleries, as the Singaporean public was introduced to a new art movement. Among the events were Graffitude, a workshop at LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts in 2003, where TraseOne and his peers invited 200 students from different schools to try their hand at graffiti. Exhibitions were also held at The Substation, The Esplanade, and the Singapore Art Museum, where an event called We Bomb SAM saw artists painting the museum's facade.

Street art seemed to be on its way to gaining mainstream acceptance. A new Singapore Street Festival kicked off in 2002 and artists were working with companies like Levi's, Puma and Nokia. Even pioneer Skope saw his works featured in a music video by Too Phat, Malaysia's most famous hip-hop duo at the time.

From NDP to guerrilla shows

Practitioners even found themselves on the biggest national stage of all. During the National Day Parade in 2004, there was a short "street culture" segment that featured a handful of graffiti artists. "We had to wear those National Day costumes, and walked along the mobile ramps spray painting beside BMX riders. Back then, the most important thing was we had fun. But the street cred part was a bit…" said TraseOne, with a laugh.

While these were taking place in the public's eye, the scene was also diversifying. A new group called ARTVSTS – which was also co-founded by RSCLS' Zero – emerged in 2003. Unlike the early practitioners, they were using stencils and wheatpaste posters, and introduced characters instead of simply using stylised letters. Artists continued doing unsanctioned work out on the streets, too. "Back then, we'd hang out either around Kampong Glam or the area around the old NAFA building – there was an alley at the back which was all covered with posters, taggings and drawings. Eventually, these just got painted over," said Zero.

It was also a very active scene. Zero recalled how one of the scene's most elusive groups, Urban Zombies, once held a guerrilla exhibition at a back alley near Club Street. Another of the group's most infamous works was a huge poster piece near Stamford Primary School in Victoria Street – an image of a local punk rock mosh pit with the phrase Punk Is Not Dead.

Cleaning up Singapore

But by the mid-2000s, things started to change. A series of international events held in Singapore signalled the start of some outdoor spring cleaning. In 2006, the country played host to the IMF-World Bank meetings. Two years later, Formula 1 rolled into town. In 2010, it was the Youth Olympic Games. "Before these events, if you walked along Orchard Road, you would see stickers in every lamp post. And then suddenly, the city got cleaned up," said TraseOne. "There was much less street art. Then people just forgot about it."

These high-profile international events also meant heightened security surveillance. Suddenly, there were eyes everywhere. While practitioners had always played cat-and-mouse with the police since the very beginning, the works they created even in sanctioned areas were also subject to scrutiny.

Zero recalled how ARTVSTS had a brush with the authorities over an anti-war mural at Skate Park in 2006. Artists Slac Satu and ClogTwo had created a piece titled For Palestine With Love. It featured a child wearing a kaffiyeh and they had signed it in Arabic-style letterings. The wall was whitewashed. Three years later, at the same venue, the group also held a fund-raising art event for the women and children of Gaza. It was deemed too political and the wall was cordoned off.

But incidents weren't always about politics – recent years have seen the occasional reports dealing with graffiti and vandalism. The most high-profile of these has been the case of "Sticker Lady" SKLO (Samantha Lo) and Antz (Anthony Chong), who were caught for a series of interventions revolving around the former's now-infamous My Grandfather Road work. The incident took place in 2012 and the conversations it generated added fuel to a resurgence that was slowly taking place.

SG street art Version 2.0

By the early part of this decade, street art was back with a bang. But it was in a wholly different environment – the contemporary art scene had finally gotten wind of these artistic rebels and institutions were slowly embracing them.

Group and solo exhibitions sprung up at private galleries; Government bodies and private institutions were commissioning street artists to spruce up their restaurants, hotels, malls and HDB blocks; art fairs were displaying their works. In 2013, Zero became the first street artist to receive the Young Artist Award (along with fellow ARTVSTS founder and former practitioner Zaki Razak).

Practitioner Farizwan Fajari, also known as Speak Cryptic, said he noticed things were different as soon he started getting calls from Government agencies to do murals. The artist, who's incidentally part of ArtScience Museum's own ongoing international street art show, added: "What was surprising was when they said 'do your thing'. Like, really? I think that's when I felt that things were changing in the street art movement. There's a lot more 'tolerance'."

Tolerance might seem an apt word to describe the new situation. Unsanctioned graffiti on the streets is still considered vandalism, but state-sanctioned and endorsed spaces and opportunities have opened up for artists.

Alongside with places and events like the Aliwal Urban Arts Festival and *Scape Youth Park are more recent ones such as the now-defunct Rail Corridor Art Space. The most recent space can be found at 369 Tanjong Katong Road. Since June 2017, the former Katong Student Hostel has been transformed into a temporary "practice space" managed by the Singapore Land Authority and the National Arts Council (NAC).

Among the many street artists who have been using the space is Anastasia Catharina, also known as Anacathie. Together with her artist partner-in-crime Freaky Fir, they have created eight of their anime-style pieces scattered throughout the spaces, including the main courtyard and hallways.

For Anacathie, who has been practicing for a year, the place has been a boon – she goes there almost every other weekend. "I really love the space. It opens up opportunities for me to grow as a street artist, as we could do with more of such practice spaces/walls in Singapore," she said.

Murals, nostalgia, commodity

The 369 space is perhaps the best place to find street art at its rawest expression in Singapore. But there's a catch – it's closed to the public and artists have to sign up before they can go in. "If you go there, it looks damn awesome. It probably has the highest density of graffiti art here in Singapore – but it's only for the (street artist) community," said Zero. "Yes, if you want to paint and have fun, it happens there. But it's like a studio where nobody sees the process and what not." For some practitioners, it's a rather odd situation where sanctioned spaces are opening up but within certain guidelines and limitations.

And what of the proliferation of street art in Singapore? "Many of them are not street art but murals, which have existed way before street art. And many are packaged to pull at the heartstrings of people – the old playgrounds, the Samsui women and what not – it's all about nostalgia," Zero said. For him, much of street art has now become a "commodity". "Nowadays, every city has their own festivals with giant murals. The proliferation of imagery has become something that's attached to a kind of lifestyle. Even being rebellious is a kind of commodity now."

Forgotten layers of street art

But fellow practitioner Sheryo thinks this mainstreaming of street art – and the presence of sanctioned spaces – is something local practitioners just have to deal with. "I don't think (Singapore's street art scene) has lost its edge. If anything, it's more interesting here because it's still developing. It's a good time to catch the moment," said the Brooklyn-based Singaporean who works with fellow artist Yok from Australia. They, too, have a joint mural up at the ArtScience Museum show.

"Every city has its challenges and Singapore has its own. If street artists are going to stop doing art just because of sanctioned walls, then it will never progress. Besides, Singapore is such an easy place to hop around from – you can go outside the country to paint, too."

The NAC also prefers to look at the situation in a more positive light. The council has actively been working with public agencies to make spaces available for street artists and presenting street art through its various platforms such as Noise Singapore and Arts In Your Neighbourhood. "Street art is important in bringing vibrancy to our Singapore landscape," said Chua Ai Liang, senior director for engagement and participation. "With Singaporeans and residents experiencing the arts within their communes, there is increased public awareness on how the arts can vitalise communities as part of creative place making."

As the local street art scene enters its third decade – and the street art movement continues to grow as a global artistic force that's hard to ignore – the debate is sure to continue. But practitioners want the discussion to grow too. "It kind of gets tiring when the issues are always about whether it's vandalism or not," said Zero. "What I hope people to see are the reasons why the street was the medium used – a deeper understanding of why these are done in such a way."

Wherever this debate will lead to in the future, one thing is for sure: The scene has had a truly rich and long history, and Zero has tangible proof. For one of his most recent projects, the street artist went down to *Scape Youth Park last year not to create a new work, but to show what has been done before. With a few assistants, he slowly cut out huge pieces of the existing works up on the wall with a pen knife. These rectangular pieces, which he eventually hung up in an exhibition, revealed the thick

layer of paint that had accumulated through the years, some of which were up to 3cm-thick. The project was called The Sum Of Us. "What I wanted to reveal was the layers of history," he said. "And this is what we have been relegated to – forgotten layers on a wall."

For Discussion/Reflection:

- How would you define beauty in the context of street art? How would you draw the line between vandalism and art from the perspective of key stakeholders stated in article?
- Is the fact that street art has been granted formal recognition by the authorities and displayed in state-sanctioned spaces at odds with its original goals? What are some possible tradeoffs that street artists may need to accept when their works are legitimised in this manner?
- How far should Singapore street artists explore political themes and concerns as part of their practice? What issues may arise from their doing so?
- Research on state regulations on street art in Singapore. Is there more change or continuity based on how it was perceived a decade ago? Justify your response.

Related essay questions:

1. Does your country do enough to develop the Arts? (RI 2022 Y5 Promo)
2. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
3. Examine the claim that artists should have complete freedom of expression. (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
4. Examine the extent to which graffiti can be considered art. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
5. Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI 2016 Y5 CT)
6. 'Real art is something that makes us uncomfortable.' Do you agree? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)
7. There is too little artistic freedom in Singapore today.' Comment. (RI 2012 Y5 CT)
8. Is creativity all about breaking rules? (RI 2010 Y6 Prelims)

Reading 15: Artists rally around Alfian Sa'at after Ong Ye Kung cites his poem during Yale-NUS debate

EUs 3, 4, 10

Olivia Ho | The Straits Times | 8 October 2019

This reading will help you:

- Understand the tricky relationship between art and politics
- Explore different reactions from the art community and the state in response to a com
- Unpack the concerns & priorities of the Singapore government when it comes to managing the arts

Members of Singapore's arts community are rallying around the writings of poet and playwright Alfian Sa'at online after Education Minister Ong Ye Kung quoted some lines from Alfian's 1998 poem Singapore You Are Not My Country in Parliament on Monday (Oct 7). Many felt these lines had been taken out of context and have begun sharing the poem in its entirety on social media, as well as other early poems by Alfian.

Mr Ong was speaking about the withdrawal of a proposed Yale-NUS College module on dialogue and dissent last month, which would have been led by Alfian. The minister told MPs he wanted to give them a flavour of Alfian's thinking, saying concerns that the project might be used for partisan political activities to sow dissent against the Government are not unfounded. He noted that the programme included dialogues with persons convicted of public order offences, and those who had shown disloyalty to Singapore.

Mr Ong quoted a few lines from the poem, “Singapore, I assert you are not a country at all/ Do not raise your voice against me, I am not afraid of your anthem” and “…how can you call yourself a country,/ you terrible hallucination of highways and cranes and condominiums/ ten minutes’ drive from the MRT? This is a poem, and we might concede some artistic licence," he added. "But Mr Alfian Sa'at continues this attitude consistently in his activism."

Ambassador-at-Large Tommy Koh, a champion of the arts, wrote on Facebook: "We should not demonise Alfian Sa'at. He is one of our most talented playwrights. I regard him as a loving critic of Singapore. He is not anti-Singapore. I admire very much his plays, Cooling Off Day and Hotel. It is of course true that some of his writings are critical of Singapore. But, freedom of speech means the right to agree with the government as well as the right to disagree."

Alfian, a much-lauded writer who has won multiple Straits Times Life Theatre Awards for plays such as Nadirah (2009) and Hotel (2015), has often been critical of the establishment in his writing and called for more freedom of expression in the arts. Actress and former Nominated MP Janice Koh wrote that Singapore You Are Not My Country is one of her favourite poems by a Singapore writer. "What we truly need, more than ever, is an appreciation of loving critics and critical lovers," she added. Singapore Literature Prize-nominated poet Theophilus Kwek reposted Alfian's 2001 poem Autobiography, using it to illustrate that Alfian is a poet "whose love hits home".

He wrote that although he may disagree with Alfian on things, he turns "almost instinctively" to Autobiography when asked to teach Singapore poetry. "And whoever they are - schoolchildren, migrant workers or even passers-by, drawn by the poem's magic - I've never once had to explain to my students that this is a poet who loves his country. Not the glossy Singapore of tourist ads, but the other one that lies beneath the skin, far closer to the bone." Others took the route of humour. Poet Gwee Li Sui posted a spoof of Singapore You Are Not My Country, which began "Yale-NUS, you are not my university".

Singapore You Are Not My Country is more than 20 years old and was first published in Alfian's debut collection One Fierce Hour when he was 21. Over more than 100 lines, the speaker questions his relationship with a rapidly developing Singapore and examines the country's own uncertainty about its national identity. In 2016, ST reported that Singapore You Are Not My Country had been taught in a global literatures module at the University of York for the past three years.

Anne Lee Tzu Pheng, one of Singapore's most eminent poets, reviewed One Fierce Hour for The Straits Times in 1998, saying of Singapore You Are Not My Country: "What, for me, makes this and the other seemingly contentious poems better than mere attention-seeking harangue is the presence of intense personal struggle."

Lee, a Cultural Medallion recipient, was herself the subject of controversy when she published her 1967 poem My Country And My People, which began with the line: "My country and my people/ are neither here nor there." It was banned from performance on radio.

In her review of Alfian, she noted: "The greatest poets, in any language, have been critical of their society or government, yet their art has shown effectively that their criticism is based on love. We tend to forget that love of country is, in essence, love of human beings. No relationship based on love is ever easy but it is worth striving for. In art, as in life, we only ask that it be pursued with integrity and spiritual passion."

Veteran architect Tay Kheng Soon, an adjunct professor at the National University of Singapore, said on Facebook that Mr Ong "is a good guy, I like his honesty and activism - that's why I think he made a mistake to rub down Alfian Sa'at by referencing his poem". "We are in crisis," he added. "Crisis is

opportunity. Opportunity to nip in the bud tender shoots or to farm the garden of discontent for many flowers to bloom. It is always easier to flatten the soil but create a wasteland instead."

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In your opinion, is it possible to distinguish art from activism? What are the possible **tradeoffs** – involving costs and benefits – for artists or the state if art and activism are treated synonymously and judge on equal terms?
- Do you find Minister Ong's depiction of Alfian Sa'at's poetry as "activism" (line 16) to be justifiable? Why/why not? Is it reasonable to argue that no one can claim to have a true or **authentic** interpretation of an artwork other than the artist himself/herself?
- In lines 25-26, actress and former nominated MP Janice Koh maintains that "what we truly need, more than ever, is an appreciation of loving critics and critical lovers". What would you define as a "loving critic and critical lover" of Singapore? Do you believe that there is an increasing need for Singapore to have such loving critics? Why/why not?
- Has there been more positive change or regression in the kind of roles artists are allowed to play in national development so far? Give support for your response.

Related essay questions:

1. Consider the argument that there should be no censorship of the arts in modern society. (Cambridge 2023)
2. 'Censorship of the arts is necessary to maintain social cohesion.' To what extent is this view still relevant in your society? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
3. 'The arts ask questions while science provides answers.' How valid is this view? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
4. Examine the claim that artists should have complete freedom of expression. (RI 2018 Y6 CT2)
5. To what extent can the literary or performing arts be a vehicle for change? (RI 2014 Y6 Prelims)

Reading 16: Generative AI is a minefield for copyright law **EUs 3, 4, 10**

Robert Mahari, Jessica Fjeld, and Ziv Epstein | The Conversation | 15 June 2023

This reading will help you:
- Understand the controversy surrounding AI-generated art.
- Recognise how the rise of generative AI has raised questions about copyright laws and ownership of AI-generated images.

In 2022, an AI-generated work of art won the Colorado State Fair's art competition. The artist, Jason Allen, had used Midjourney – a generative AI system trained on art scraped from the internet – to create the piece.

The process was far from fully automated: Allen went through some 900 iterations over 80 hours to create and refine his submission.Yet his use of AI to win the art competition triggered a heated backlash online, with one Twitter user claiming, "We're watching the death of artistry unfold right before our eyes."

As generative AI art tools like Midjourney and Stable Diffusion have been thrust into the limelight, so too have questions about ownership and authorship. These tools' generative ability is the result of training them with scores of prior artworks, from which the AI learns how to create artistic outputs.

Should the artists whose art was scraped to train the models be compensated? Who owns the images that AI systems produce? Is the process of fine-tuning prompts for generative AI a form of authentic creative expression?

On one hand, technophiles rave over work like Allen's. But on the other, many working artists consider the use of their art to train AI to be exploitative. We're part of a team of 14 experts across disciplines that just published a paper on generative AI in Science magazine. In it, we explore how advances in AI will affect creative work, aesthetics and the media. One of the key questions that emerged has to do with U.S. copyright laws, and whether they can adequately deal with the unique challenges of generative AI.

Copyright laws were created to promote the arts and creative thinking. But the rise of generative AI has complicated existing notions of authorship.

Photography serves as a helpful lens

Generative AI might seem unprecedented, but history can act as a guide.

Take the emergence of photography in the 1800s. Before its invention, artists could only try to portray the world through drawing, painting or sculpture. Suddenly, reality could be captured in a flash using a camera and chemicals.

As with generative AI, many argued that photography lacked artistic merit. In 1884, the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in on the issue and found that cameras served as tools that an artist could use to give an idea visible form; the "masterminds" behind the cameras, the court ruled, should own the photographs they create.

From then on, photography evolved into its own art form and even sparked new abstract artistic movements.

AI can't own outputs

Unlike inanimate cameras, AI possesses capabilities – like the ability to convert basic instructions into impressive artistic works – that make it prone to anthropomorphization. Even the term "artificial intelligence" encourages people to think that these systems have humanlike intent or even self-awareness.

This led some people to wonder whether AI systems can be "owners." But the U.S. Copyright Office has stated unequivocally that only humans can hold copyrights.

So who can claim ownership of images produced by AI? Is it the artists whose images were used to train the systems? The users who type in prompts to create images? Or the people who build the AI systems?

Infringement or fair use?

While artists draw obliquely from past works that have educated and inspired them in order to create, generative AI relies on training data to produce outputs.

This training data consists of prior artworks, many of which are protected by copyright law and which have been collected without artists' knowledge or consent. Using art in this way might violate copyright law even before the AI generates a new work.

Computer generated image made to look like a painting of a face with wires spilling out of its head surrounded by a field of grass and flowers.

For Jason Allen to create his award-winning art, Midjourney was trained on 100 million prior works.

Was that a form of infringement? Or was it a new form of "fair use," a legal doctrine that permits the unlicensed use of protected works if they're sufficiently transformed into something new?

While AI systems do not contain literal copies of the training data, they do sometimes manage to recreate works from the training data, complicating this legal analysis. Will contemporary copyright law favor end users and companies over the artists whose content is in the training data?

To mitigate this concern, some scholars propose new regulations to protect and compensate artists whose work is used for training. These proposals include a right for artists to opt out of their data's being used for generative AI or a way to automatically compensate artists when their work is used to train an AI.

Muddled ownership

Training data, however, is only part of the process. Frequently, artists who use generative AI tools go through many rounds of revision to refine their prompts, which suggests a degree of originality.

Answering the question of who should own the outputs requires looking into the contributions of all those involved in the generative AI supply chain.

The legal analysis is easier when an output is different from works in the training data. In this case, whoever prompted the AI to produce the output appears to be the default owner.

However, copyright law requires meaningful creative input – a standard satisfied by clicking the shutter button on a camera. It remains unclear how courts will decide what this means for the use of generative AI. Is composing and refining a prompt enough?

Matters are more complicated when outputs resemble works in the training data. If the resemblance is based only on general style or content, it is unlikely to violate copyright, because style is not copyrightable.

The illustrator Hollie Mengert encountered this issue firsthand when her unique style was mimicked by generative AI engines in a way that did not capture what, in her eyes, made her work unique. Meanwhile, the singer Grimes embraced the tech, "open-sourcing" her voice and encouraging fans to create songs in her style using generative AI.

If an output contains major elements from a work in the training data, it might infringe on that work's copyright. Recently, the Supreme Court ruled that Andy Warhol's drawing of a photograph was not permitted by fair use. That means that using AI to just change the style of a work – say, from a photo to an illustration – is not enough to claim ownership over the modified output.

While copyright law tends to favor an all-or-nothing approach, scholars at Harvard Law School have proposed new models of joint ownership that allow artists to gain some rights in outputs that resemble their works.

In many ways, generative AI is yet another creative tool that allows a new group of people access to image-making, just like cameras, paintbrushes or Adobe Photoshop. But a key difference is this new set of tools relies explicitly on training data, and therefore creative contributions cannot easily be traced back to a single artist.

The ways in which existing laws are interpreted or reformed – and whether generative AI is appropriately treated as the tool it is – will have real consequences for the future of creative expression.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- What was the source of controversy surrounding the AI-generated artwork that won the Colorado State Fair's art competition in 2022, and how did artist Jason Allen create his winning piece using generative AI? (lines 1-5)
- The article discusses the controversies and legal complexities surrounding generative AI in the art world. From the information provided, what are some of the **tradeoffs** or compromises that artists, AI developers, and policymakers might need to consider in the development and use of generative AI for creative expression?
- Consider the perspectives of both technophiles who appreciate AI-generated art and working artists who may view the use of their art in AI training as highly disruptive. How does the article address the **authenticity** of creative expression in the realm of generative AI?
- Carry out some independent research to find out what steps Singapore has taken to regulate generative AI. How do these steps compare to what other countries are doing?

Related essay questions:

1. To what extent should traditional art forms be preserved in a world driven by innovation? (RI 2022 Y6 Prelims)
2. 'Support for the arts should come mainly from the government.' Discuss. (RI 2020 Y6 Timed Practice)
3. To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
4. Should the Arts always challenge the status quo? (RI 2016 Y5 Promo)
5. To what extent has technology revolutionsed the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelims)
6. Is creativity all about breaking rules? (RI 2010 Y6 Prelims)

SECTION D: DIFFERENT GENRES OF THE ARTS

Reading 17: High & Low Art **EUs 1, 4, 8**

Matt Plescher | The Rapidian | 10 March 2013

This reading will help you:
- Consider the difference between high (fine art) and low art (craft)
- Examine the relationship between art genres and its assigned value in society

Are some forms of art "higher" than others? Is classical music a higher form than rock music? Is poetry above detective novels? Most people are aware of a distinction between high and low art. High art is appreciated by those with the most cultivated taste. Low art is for the masses, accessible and easily comprehended.

The concept of high and low can be traced back to 18th century ideas about fine art and craft. Writers in the 1700s drew a line between work that is contemplated purely for aesthetics (fine art) and work that has some sort of utility or function (craft). The fine art grouping of painting, sculpture, music, architecture and poetry was established at this time. The familiar phrase "art for art's sake" comes out of this view, and is so culturally pervasive that many people accept it as the "correct" way to classify art.

There are instances the fine art method doesn't work well classifying art. A hand-made box with carved decoration is not considered fine art because of its utility. However, the decoration could be aesthetically contemplated. Is the decorative part high and the utility part low? Some travel posters can be contemplated aesthetically in the same way as a fine art painting, but they were intentionally created to be easily accessible and function as mass-distributed advertisements. Does that mean they are high and low art at the same time? What about movies? Movies appeared after the traditional fine art groupings were established. Are they always low art or can they be high art too? Can they be both?

Another problem with the fine art/craft distinction is the way it implies value. The fine art view holds in esteem one way of interacting with art—aesthetic contemplation. However, art had other functions before the fine art distinction was made and continues to have those functions now. Art can instruct, entertain, mystify, propagandize and frighten to name just a few. However, the fine art approach reserves the status of "good" for work that is primarily aesthetic. Contemplation is the highest and purest goal for art. Other functions of art are considered somehow impure. Hence the loaded words high and low, which simultaneously classify and judge.

This affects how people interact with the arts. People who feel strongly that high art is good and low art is bad will think of low art as something to be avoided. Some would even consider a poor classical piece better than a great rock song, simply because the classical piece is considered a higher style. Others take a more tolerant position. They hold high art to have higher value, but see low art as "having a place." Someone with this view would consider a symphony a higher art form, but would be okay listening to pop music in the car. Those who place a greater value on high art sometimes believe that high art serves a kind of spiritual or moral function. A common assumption is that high art is "edifying" and low art is "mere entertainment." If only the masses can be steered into the concert halls and museums, the power of high art will awaken them from their low art-induced stupor. To them, art has a quasi-religious function, with beauty lifting us to a higher level of spirituality. It's no accident that museums are often designed to feel like temples.

The fine art/craft approach is a problematic way to classify art to begin with, and is further weakened by the way it assigns value to narrow slice of the art experience. Another approach is to simply contrast limited-audience art with popular art, initially leaving value judgments aside.

There are several factors that contribute to whether a work will be broadly popular or not. One is how distinctive or unique the work is. Art that places a high premium on uniqueness will generally have a narrower audience. In contrast, popular art often follows proven formulas that have been shown to appeal to large groups. Popular forms are also often deliberately lower in complexity in order to be easily accessible. In short, popular art will very often be crafted to appeal to a large audience with a minimum of effort by the viewer. Lastly, popular art is almost invariably mass produced. Using these criteria, an artwork can be placed along a continuum without the black and white distinction of high and low.

Once the work has been placed on a limited-audience/popular art spectrum, the second step would be to judge the success of the work within that context (I discuss judging success in more depth in this article). This avoids the implied value judgment of the words high and low, or fine art and craft. Judging a work's success in this way can take into account the goals of the artist, including whether the work was made for a limited audience or was meant to be popular.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In lines 23-24, Plescher states that it is often regarded that "Contemplation is the highest and purest goal for art. Other functions of art are considered somehow impure." What are your thoughts on this? Do you agree that popular art/music, which primary function is to entertain, is therefore a lesser form of art?
- Plescher describes a common perception that "a poor classical piece is better than a great rock song, simply because the classical piece is considered a higher style" (lines 27-28). Do you think that there is a tendency to associate less accessible forms of art with a higher style, and conversely, more popular forms of art with a lower style? Why is this the case? What implications might there be in terms of how artistic value or **beauty** is ascribed to different forms of arts?
- In lines 35-36, Plescher mentions that art has a "quasi-religious function" and that "It's no accident that museums are often designed to feel like temples." Based on your personal experience going to art museums, analyse the different aspects in which museums are intentionally designed to feel like temples.
- What are your thoughts on the author's proposal, which is to understand different art genres using a limited-audience/popular art spectrum approach instead of the conventional classification of high and low art? Explain how **subjectivity** is unavoidable in terms of assessing the quality of different art, regardless of whether the limited-audience/popular or the high-low classification is used.

Related essay questions:

1. 'Dramas on television or film are never as effective as a live performance.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2022)
2. Examine the claim that music without words lack both meaning and appeal. (Cambridge 2022)
3. 'Art is only worth what people will pay for it.' Do you agree? (RI 2021 Y6 Prelims)
4. 'Pop music has no value beyond being a source of entertainment.' What is your view? (RI 2021 Y6 Timed Practice)
5. How far do you agree that popular music serves no real purpose? (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
6. Examine the extent to which fashion can be considered art. (RI 2018 Y6 Prelims)
7. 'Comic books have little to offer us except entertainment.' Comment. (RI 2017 Y5 Promo)
8. Examine the extent to which graffiti can be considered art. (RI Y6 CT1 2016)

Reading 18: Music helps us remember who we are and how we belong during difficult and traumatic times **EUs 2, 4, 10**

Emily Abrams Ansari | The Conversation | 7 May 2020

The following reading will help you:
- Understand more about the value of music to people and societies
- Consider the role of music in times of crisis

Has the music we listen to, and why we listen, changed during the coronavirus pandemic? Beyond the well-documented evidence of pandemic music-making at a distance and over social media, music critics have suggested there is an increased preference for music that is comforting, familiar and nostalgic.

Data from major streaming services and companies that analyze them may support this view. On Spotify, the popularity of chart hits dropped 28 per cent between March 12 and April 16. Instead, Spotify listeners are searching for instrumental and "chill" music. In the first week of April on Spotify, there was a 54 per cent increase in "listeners making nostalgia-themed playlists, as well as an uptick in the popularity of music from the '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s."

More than half of those participating in a survey conducted by Nielsen Music/MRC Data at the end of March 2020 said they were "seeking comfort in familiar, nostalgic content" in their TV viewing and music listening. The survey was based on responses by 945 consumers in the U.S. aged 13 and older, plus online responses.

As a researcher who has examined music's power in times of crisis — most recently, exploring the music of people who were refugees from civil war El Salvador during the 1980s — I believe such work can help us understand our apparent desire to use familiar music for psychological support during this challenging period.

Reconnecting to ourselves

In a time when many are confronting both increased solitude and increased anxiety, familiar music provides reassurance because it reminds us who we are as people. Whether it is a hit we danced to with our teenage friends, or a haunting orchestral piece our grandmother played, music lights up memories of our past selves.

Music allows us to create an emotional narrative between the past and present when we struggle to articulate such a narrative in words. Its familiarity comforts us when the future seems unclear. Music helps to reconnect us to our identities. It also helps us, as all the arts do, to pursue an otherwise inexpressible search for meaning. In so doing, it helps bolster our resilience in the face of difficulty.

People have used music to such philosophical and psychological ends even in times and places where one would think music would be the last thing on peoples' minds. In one of the most extreme among many examples, survivors of Nazi concentration camps report having sung familiar songs to reinforce their sense of self and their religious identity, when both were gravely threatened.

Civil war survival

My current research considers music's use for such purposes during the 1980s by refugees from the civil war in El Salvador. Subsistence farmers (*campesinos/campesinas*), who fled government oppression for refugee camps in Honduras, have told me they considered music essential to their psychological survival.

In a sometimes-dangerous new land, away from their war-stricken home, *campesinos* and *campesinas* performed, listened and danced to old and new folk songs to help sustain a connection to their pre-war identities in the nation they had left behind. Traditional folk songs were sometimes given new words to document the refugees' persecution.

Songs thus provided both a means to maintain identity and an emotional narrative for traumatic events that were hard to describe in words. This helped the refugees manage the challenges of the present and face an uncertain future.

Norberto Amaya

In 2019, I helped conduct research for a short documentary about one leading refugee singer-songwriter in El Salvador, Norberto Amaya. Amaya's story shows how Salvadoran musicians harnessed music to help their refugee compatriots manage the psychological challenges of their situation. The film was a collaboration between Western University and Juan Bello of Triana Media, with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

The songs of El Salvador's civil war refugees make clear that music, whether old or new, serves a vital function for humans facing hardship, both on personal and cultural levels.

Community connection

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit some communities much harder than others, and demonstrated how existing inequalities are thrown into even greater relief in times of crisis. Yet in all affected communities, the pandemic has the capacity to trigger anxious feelings about earlier traumas and current separations.

Listening to music we know well reminds us of the friends and family that have made us who we are. In our current situation, different as it is from that faced by Salvadoran civil war refugees, familiar music is similarly permitting reconnection both to personal identity and to a much larger community of family, friends and strangers who also love these familiar songs. This helps us better manage our isolation and anxiety.

This apparent human instinct to seek out mechanisms that enable cultural reconnection is a smart one. Trauma scholars believe that, for some people, familiar cultural practices may actually be more effective than psychiatric treatment in helping people deal with potentially traumatic events.

American poet and activist Maya Angelou once movingly wrote: "Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness." Many can surely relate to such a sentiment. We may not yet have the words to articulate our response to the situation in which humanity currently finds itself. But engaging with music soothes us in these difficult times, providing a means to begin to process our emotions, to stay connected to our pre-pandemic identities and to participate in something larger than ourselves, even while we live apart.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- The author explores how music connects to personal identity and to a much larger community who also love these songs. How applicable are her views to you and Singapore, particularly during difficult times (such as the COVID-19 pandemic)?
- To what extent is music a part of your identity? What do you think give music such power in shaping or strengthening identity?
- Consider the rise of apps like TikTok today, which spread viral ideas of all kinds through clips of popular music. Does this make popular music more like a significant cultural mover or 'noise'?

- The author suggests that music is a way to "enable cultural reconnection" (line 57), which in turn, may help people "better manage [their] isolation and anxiety" (lines 55-56). Considering relevant changes or trends in your society today, do you believe that such a role of music would grow or diminish? Why?

Related essay questions:

1. Examine the claim the music without words lacks both meaning and appeal. (Cambridge 2022)
2. 'An appreciation of music is vital for a fully rounded education.' How true is this of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
3. Examine the role of music in establishing a national identity in your society. (Cambridge 2017)
4. 'The arts, such as music and literature, are of no real value to society.' Is this a valid comment? (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
5. Does music offer anything more than momentary pleasure? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)

Further reading & discussion

- *"Songs of Black Lives Matter: 22 New Protest Anthems" – Brittany Spanos & Sarah Grant, Rolling Stone, 13 Jul 2016 @ https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/songs-of-black-lives-matter-22-new-protest-anthems-15256/*

Reading 19: How NFTs are fuelling the digital art boom

EUs 4, 10

Andrew Chow | TIME | 22 March 2021

The following reading will help you consider:

- The rise in popularity of NFTs in recent years
- How NFTs impact artists and collectors, as well as the larger community

Just a few months ago, Jazmine Boykins was posting her artwork online for free. The 20-year-old digital artist's dreamy animations of Black life were drawing plenty of likes, comments and shares, but not much income, aside from money she made selling swag with her designs between classes at North Carolina A&T State University.

But Boykins has recently been selling the same pieces for thousands of dollars each, thanks to an emerging technology upending the rules of digital ownership: NFTs, or non-fungible tokens. NFTs—digital tokens tied to assets that can be bought, sold and traded—are enabling artists like Boykins to profit from their work more easily than ever. "At first, I didn't know if it was trustworthy or legit," says Boykins, who goes by the online handle "BLACKSNEAKERS" and who has sold more than $60,000 in NFT art over the past six months. "But to see digital art being bought at these prices, it's pretty astounding. It's given me the courage to keep going."

NFTs are having their big-bang moment: collectors and speculators have spent more than $200 million on an array of NFT-based artwork, memes and GIFs in the past month alone, according to market tracker NonFungible.com, compared with $250 million throughout all of 2020. And that was before the digital artist Mike Winkelmann, known as Beeple, sold a piece for a record-setting $69 million at famed auction house Christie's on March 11—the third highest price ever fetched by any currently living artist, after Jeff Koons and David Hockney.

NFTs are best understood as computer files combined with proof of ownership and authenticity, like a deed. Like cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, they exist on a blockchain—a tamper-resistant digital public ledger. But like dollars, cryptocurrencies are "fungible," meaning one bitcoin is always worth the same as any other bitcoin. By contrast, NFTs have unique valuations set by the highest bidder, just like a Rembrandt or a Picasso. Artists who want to sell their work as NFTs have to sign up with a

marketplace, then "mint" digital tokens by uploading and validating their information on a blockchain (typically the Ethereum blockchain, a rival platform to Bitcoin). Doing so usually costs anywhere from $40 to $200. They can then list their piece for auction on an NFT marketplace, similar to eBay.

At face value, the whole enterprise seems absurd: big-money collectors paying six to eight figures for works that can often be seen and shared online for free. Critics have dismissed the NFT art craze as just the latest bubble, akin to this year's boom-and-bust mania around "meme stocks" like GameStop. The phenomenon is attracting a strange brew of not just artists and collectors, but also speculators looking to get rich off the latest fad.

A bubble it may be. But many digital artists, fed up after years of creating content that generates visits and engagement on Big Tech platforms like Facebook and Instagram while getting almost nothing in return, have lunged headlong into the craze. These artists of all kinds—authors, musicians, filmmakers—envision a future in which NFTs transform both their creative process and how the world values art, now that it's possible to truly "own" and sell digital art for the first time. "You will have so many people from different backgrounds and genres coming in to share their art, connect with people and potentially build a career," Boykins says. "Artists put so much of their time—and themselves—into their work. To see them compensated on an appropriate scale, it's really comforting." Technologists, meanwhile, say NFTs are the latest step toward a long-promised blockchain revolution that could radically transform consumer capitalism, with major implications for everything from home loans to health care.

Digital art has long been undervalued, in large part because it's so freely available. To help artists create financial value for their work, NFTs add the crucial ingredient of scarcity. For some collectors, if they know the original version of something exists, they're more likely to crave the "authentic" piece. Scarcity explains why baseball-card collectors, for example, are willing to pay $3.12 million for a piece of cardboard with a picture of Honus Wagner, a legendary Pittsburgh Pirate. It's also why sneakerheads obsess over the latest limited-edition drops from Nike and Adidas, and why "pharma bro" Martin Shkreli bought the sole copy of Wu-Tang Clan's Once Upon a Time in Shaolin for $2 million in 2015.

But baseball cards, sneakers and that Wu-Tang CD all exist in the physical space, so it's easier to understand why they're worth something. It can be harder to understand why digital art, or any other digital file, has value.

Some digital-art collectors say they're paying not just for pixels but also for digital artists' labor–in part, the movement is an effort to economically legitimize an emerging art form. "I want you to go on my collection and be like, 'Oh, these are all unique things that stand out,'" says Shaylin Wallace, a 22-year-old NFT artist and collector. "The artist put so much work into it–and it was sold for the price that it deserved." The movement is also taking shape after many of us have spent most of the past year online. If nearly your whole world is virtual, it makes sense to spend money on virtual stuff.

The groundwork for the digital-art boom was laid in 2017 with the launch of CryptoKitties—think digital Beanie Babies. Fans have spent more than $32 million collecting, trading and breeding these images of wide-eyed one-of-a-kind cartoon cats. Video gamers, meanwhile, have been pouring cash into cosmetic upgrades for their avatars—Fortnite players spent an average of $82 on in-game content in 2019—further mainstreaming the idea of spending real-world money on digital goods. At the same time, cryptocurrencies have been booming in value, fueled in part by celebrity enthusiasts like Elon Musk and Mark Cuban. Bitcoin, for instance, is up more than 1,000% over the past year, and anything remotely crypto-adjacent—including NFTs—is getting swept up in that mania.

Sensing an opportunity, tech entrepreneurs and brothers Duncan and Griffin Cock Foster last March launched an NFT art marketplace called Nifty Gateway. At the time, NFT art was just heating up in some circles, but it was difficult for newbies to buy, sell and trade pieces. Nifty Gateway prioritized

accessibility and usability, helping fuel wider adoption. “It was such an early stage, we didn’t have many expectations about how it would turn out,” Duncan Cock Foster says. But Nifty Gateway users ended up buying and selling more than $100 million worth of art during its first year. Similar platforms, like SuperRare, OpenSea and MakersPlace, have seen similar surges; they typically pocket 10% to 15% of initial sales.

Big businesses and celebrities are getting in on the action: NBA Top Shot, the National Basketball Association’s official platform to buy and sell NFT-based highlights (packaged like digital trading cards), has racked up over $390 million in sales since its October launch, according to parent company Dapper Labs. Football star Rob Gronkowski has sold NFT trading cards of Super Bowl highlights for over $1.6 million; rock band Kings of Leon made over $2 million by selling NFT music. Twitter founder Jack Dorsey put his first-ever tweet up for auction as an NFT, and it’s expected to sell for at least $2.5 million. The past few months have been a feeding frenzy, with new highs almost daily. Perhaps Beeple put it best after his record-setting auction: “I’m pretty overwhelmed right now,” he told fans and collaborators gathered on chat app Clubhouse.

So-called whales are making the biggest deals in the NFT art world. These deep-pocketed investors and cryptocurrency evangelists stand to benefit financially from hyping anything remotely related to crypto. “A Winklevoss spending 700 grand on a Beeple or whatever is very much marketing spend for an idea that they are heavily invested in,” the technologist and artist Mat Dryhurst says, referring to Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss, two well-known cryptocurrency bulls who bought Nifty Gateway in late 2019 for an undisclosed amount.

One of those whales is Daniel Maegaard, an Australian crypto trader who made much of what he claims is a $15 million-plus fortune when Bitcoin exploded in value in 2017. Maegaard has bought and sold millions of dollars worth of digital art and other NFT-based goods, like a $1.5 million parcel of land in Axie Infinity, a virtual universe. While Maegaard initially saw NFTs as a means of adding to his wealth, he’s become a true fan of the work, proudly displaying his collection online and excitedly sharing news of new purchases and sales with his followers. He’s particularly attached to a piece called CryptoPunk 8348, an image of a pixelated man who looks vaguely like Breaking Bad’s Walter White. Maegaard, who uses the work as his social media avatar, recently declined a $1 million offer for the piece. “People almost now tie that character to me,” he says. “It’s almost like I’d be selling a part of myself if I ever sold him.”

But even investors who see NFT art solely as an asset to be bought low and sold high are putting money into artists’ pockets. Andrew Benson, a Los Angeles-based artist, has been experimenting with psychedelic, glitchy digital video work for years. He’s landed his work in museums and galleries, but he’s long held a day job at a software company and taken on commission work for musicians like M.I.A. and Aphex Twin to support himself. “For a long time, my perspective has been that the best way to survive as an artist is to not have to survive as an artist,” Benson says.

A year and a half ago, when his plans to exhibit a new series of videos fell through, Benson was plagued with doubt about his future in the art world. “I was thinking, Do I even want to go through the trouble of trying to do this kind of work and finding places to show it?” he recalls. Then, in January, a friend who works at an NFT platform called Foundation asked Benson to submit a piece. Benson didn’t think much of it, but sent over a video that otherwise “would have gone on a website or something,” he says. The piece—which looks something like a kinetic, colorful Rorschach—sold within 10 days for $1,250. Since then, Benson has sold 10 more works in the same price range. He’s now pondering a future in which he could sustain himself entirely through his art. “It really kind of shook my worldview, actually,” he says. “Seeing this work find a context and a place where it matters makes me want to think like an artist more.”

Many other artists working in groundbreaking and sometimes controversial styles are also receiving unprecedented interest from NFT collectors. Art with whirling 3-D renderings, street-style

oversaturated color schemes, and hyper-referential (and often crass) cartoons are thriving. These Internet-fueled aesthetics are grabbing the attention of both a younger generation raised on Instagram and a rabble-rousing crypto clientele. “The street art and countercultural styles are being used to reinforce the impression most finance-crypto people have that they are the ‘punks’ in the broader tech and finance world,” Dryhurst says.

These developments have left many in the conventional art world agape. “You have a lot of traditional collectors who look at the NFT space and they can’t plug it into any acceptable system of belief,” says Wendy Cromwell, a New York-based art adviser. “We’re at a real inflection point: a lot of the deeply experienced people in the art world are older and don’t have the interest or mental bandwidth to parse the language of the Internet.” Following Christie’s Beeple sale, however, rival auction house Sotheby’s quickly announced its own partnership with NFT artist Pak, showing that even if art powerhouses might not understand the genre, they understand its financial potential.

With or without the establishment’s support, a new wave of digital artists is banding together in tight-knit NFT communities, echoing past generations of artists across disciplines and genres hanging out and influencing one another’s thinking, approach and output. “There is a huge ethic of generosity happening in the space,” Benson says. “Typically in the worlds of independent music or fine art, there is a sense that one person is going to make it out of a scene. With this, there’s a feeling of abundance where it really does seem like everyone could benefit.”

In some cases, the whales and minnows are swimming in tandem. The buyer of the $69 million Beeple piece turned out to be a collector group called Metapurse, two anonymous Singapore-based investors who have been experimenting with tech-driven collective-ownership models. In January, the duo bought 20 Beeple artworks, placed them in a virtual museum that can be visited for free, and then fractionalized their new enterprise into tokens which are now co-owned by 5,400 people. Their value has since increased sixfold as of March 16. The duo is considering a similar move with their latest headline-grabbing purchase, which they hope to display in a cutting-edge virtual museum. The idea, says Metapurse co-partner Twobadour, is to “open up both the experience of art and its ownership to everybody.”

Even as artists, collectors and speculators benefit from the NFT craze, the phenomenon is not without its dark side. The barriers to entry—it costs money and requires tech savvy to sell an NFT—could prevent some creators from joining in on the action. Many are concerned that young artists of color in particular will be left out, as they have long been marginalized in the “traditional” art world. Legal experts are scrambling to determine how existing copyright laws will interact with this new technology, as some artists have had their work copied and sold as an NFT without their permission. “It’s providing another platform for people to take advantage of other people’s work,” says artist Connor Bell, whose work was plagiarized and posted on an NFT marketplace.

Then there are the environmental concerns. Creating NFTs requires an enormous amount of raw computing power, and many of the server farms where that work happens are powered by fossil fuels. “The environmental impact of blockchain is a huge problem,” says Amy Whitaker, an assistant professor of visual arts administration at New York University, though some cryptocurrency advocates argue these fears are overblown.

Theoretically, climate-minded artists could move to some alternative blockchain platform with less environmental impact. They’re already finding ways to bend NFT technology in other beneficial ways. Some, for instance, are setting up their tokens so they’re compensated every time their work is resold, like an actor getting a royalty check when their show airs as a rerun. Taiwanese tech startup Bitmark has started an NFT-like program to give rights and royalties to music producers around the world. And artists who join NFT-based social media sites, like Friends With Benefits, receive fractional ownership in the platform and can receive direct compensation for the work they create through the network, in sharp contrast to existing tech giants like Facebook and Instagram.

For technology evangelists, meanwhile, the NFT frenzy is just more evidence of their long-held beliefs that cryptocurrency, and blockchain platforms more broadly, has the power to change the world in profound ways. Blockchain technology has already been implemented in attempts to make voting more secure in Utah, combat insurance fraud at Nationwide Insurance, and secure the medical data of several U.S. health care companies. Advocates say it could also help companies ensure transparency in their supply chains, streamline mutual aid efforts and reduce biases in historically racist loan-application processes.

"The potential societal impact … is so important that we should do everything in our power to make it manageable, environmentally and otherwise," Whitaker says. "New idealistic technologies are always really imperfect in their rollout: they can have a speculative boom, and people can misuse them in unsavory ways," she adds. "I try to stay centered on what's possible."

For Discussion/Reflection:

- This article examines the development of NFT art and how this trend has impacted the industry. What are the benefits and potential risks of NRT art?
- Consider Reading 1 on What is Art and Reading 2 on How to define Art. How would you apply the criteria provided to 'NFT art'?
- As NFT art becomes more common, what do you foresee would be the impact on the diversity of art that is produced, as well as how the artistic merit of different art is measured?
- What value may there be in setting criteria for the definition of art and how its quality is judged?
- Chow lists and explains a number of adverse consequences arising out of the NFT art boom. Which are you the most concerned about, and why?

Related essay questions:

1. To what extent has technology had a negative impact on the arts, such as music or photography? (RI 2018 Y6 CT1)
2. 'Different for the sake of being different.' Is this a fair assessment of the arts? (RI 2015 Y5 Promo)
3. To what extent has technology revolutionised the arts? (RI 2012 Y6 Prelim)

Further reading:

- "Artificial Intelligence: How AI is Changing Art" by Editorial team, Aela, 1 April 2023 @ https://aelaschool.com/en/art/artificial-intelligence-art-changes/
- "High vs Low Art" by Jon Robinson, medium.com, July 19, 2020 @ https://medium.com/art-direct/high-vs-low-art-24a4eeb8b0c *A simple comparison between two visual artists and their art to demonstrate how we judge some art as highbrow and others as lowbrow.*
- "Arts on Television", artsontelevision.wordpress.com. January 2, 2015 @ https://artsontelevision.wordpress.com/2015/01/02/can-television-be-art/
- "Video Games Can Never Be Art" by Roger Ebert, rogerebert.com, April 26, 2010 @ https://www.rogerebert.com/roger-ebert/video-games-can-never-be-art *The late Roger Ebert, famous film critic, discusses why video games cannot be on the same level of his beloved films.*

SECTION E: THREATS TO CULTURE & ARTS

The next two readings will help you:

- Understand the arguments for and against repatriating artworks to their countries of origin
- Place these arguments within the wider contexts of culture, national identity and pride, history, sovereignty, underlining that artwork repatriation is often a political issue too
- Provide specific examples of artworks that have been at the heart of repatriation debates

Reading 20: Give the Easter Islanders their statue back – it doesn't belong in the British Museum

EUs 8, 9, 10

Simon Jenkins | The Guardian | 24 November 2018

Be prepared. The great museums of Europe are about to see an invasion of former colonies demanding the return of their stuff. This week the governor of Easter Island, Tarita Alarcón Rapu, tearfully pleaded with the British Museum to have back her ancestor, immortally embodied in a statue in its possession. "You have our soul," she said. Her audience must have cringed.

For Rapu's people, the statue, one of many, carries with it the spirit of her island. For Britain, it is just a statue, stolen by a British frigate as a bauble for Queen Victoria in 1868. But then Britons can be equally dotty about the Stone of Scone and the Crown Jewels.[4]

The figure joins a lengthening list of items now in contention. Egypt wants back the Rosetta Stone. Nigeria wants the Benin Bronzes. Ethiopia wants the Maqdala crown, and a sacred lock of its emperor's hair. Various places on the Indian subcontinent claim the Koh-i-Noor diamond, embedded in a UK's royal crown. There is also the matter of the Parthenon Marbles, which never goes away. This is the thin end of a sizeable wedge.

To keep or to return?

Most rows over "cultural appropriation" come from the wilder shores of identity lunacy. This appropriation is different. The fact that British and other museums are so frantic to hold on to their objects shows the power such things exert over nation states. To the British Museum, the Parthenon Marbles are like fragments of the True Cross.[5] The first response to demands for restitution is simple. Concede to them. We have tons of other stuff in basements and attics. To be fair, this is starting to happen. France's President Emmanuel Macron is legislating to "return Africa's heritage to Africa". The British Museum itself returns objects under permanent loan. The Benin bronzes are going to Nigeria and it has indicated a readiness to talk with Easter Island.

A deeper worry is what restitution will mean to the purpose of world museums. They really are the heirs to empire. Their apologists incant the curatorial shtick, that they are global custodians, a scholarly resource, a place that gives context to art. If context really matters, why not put the Lewis Chessmen or the Lindisfarne Gospels or the Parthenon Marbles back where they were meant to be enjoyed? The only real argument museums have, if pressed, is that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

Not the "real thing" – does it matter?

[4] *The Stone of Scone is an oblong block of red sandstone that has been used for centuries in the coronation of the monarchs of Scotland, England, Great Britain and the United Kingdom following the treaties of union. The Crown Jewels are a collection of royal ceremonial objects kept in the Tower of London, which include the regalia and vestments worn at their coronations by British kings and queens.*

[5] *The True Cross consists of physical remnants which, by the tradition of some Christian churches, are said to be from the cross upon which Jesus was crucified.*

The reality is that in the age of mass travel and digital reproduction, the convenience of a tiny group of scholars, or even a larger group of tourists, cannot seriously override the looming politics of national self-confidence. A museum, as French art historian André Malraux noted, has always been an artificial concept, a wrenching of objects not into context but out of it. The tossing together of disparate artefacts – most of them never displayed – is like burying them in a mausoleum. It suggests the museum is not about art or beauty but about acquisition, ownership and status.

Next week, the most exhilarating room in any London museum is to reopen: the Cast Courts at the Victoria and Albert[6]. Everything in it is fake – majestic, glorious fake – from Trajan's Column to Michelangelo's David, from Ghiberti's Gates of Paradise to the Nymph of Fontainebleau. It is a hugely enjoyable satire on what modern museology has become.

Museum objects can now be immaculately reproduced, in photography, film, hologram and cast. The ruins of Palmyra and Nineveh can be restored with 3D printing and carving, even using the original stone and sand. It may not be the same as the original, any more than gothic Chartres or medieval Bodiam are "the same". The ancient obelisk that forms the focus of the British Library's current Anglo-Saxon exhibition is made of polystyrene. I doubt if it worries anyone, any more than Venetian tourists dislike the horses of San Marco for being copies. Of course material antiquity can affect the aura of a work, influencing its rarity and thus its price, but not necessarily its intrinsic beauty.

The word most beloved of museums is "authenticity". I accept that the British Museum's ice-age exhibition in 2013 was moving because we were looking at objects carved 12 millennia ago. But that was exceptional. I do not despise a Nash terrace or a Rodin statue because it is a replica of an original. The glory of a Robert Adam ceiling lies in its design, not its execution. Enjoyment lies in the genius of what we see, not the age of its materials.

There is no reason why the Easter Island statue cannot be perfectly reproduced. If its spiritual content matters so much to the Easter Islanders, why on earth deny them the original? The issue is one of politics, not aesthetics. I fear that unlike art, politics never ages.

Reflection questions and related Cambridge/RI essay questions are found at the end of Reading 21.

[6] *The Cast Courts house reproductions of some of the most famous sculptures in the world. Most of the copies were made in the 19th century.*

Reading 21: To return or not: Who should own indigenous art? **EUs 8, 9, 10**

Jason Farago | BBC Culture | 21 April 2015

The British Museum in London is opening a major new exhibition with a rather interesting subtitle: "Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation", seen as the most important show ever in the United Kingdom to look at the art and culture of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders.

And though the exhibition has a massive 60,000-year timescale, it presents indigenous Australian art as part of a continuous culture. Objects from the museum's collection, such as a shield taken by Captain Cook from Botany Bay – now the site of Sydney's airport – will be displayed alongside bark painting from West Arnhem Land, placards from recent indigenous protest movements and works of contemporary art that reckon with Australia's past and future.

After the show closes in August, many of the objects on display will travel to the National Museum of Australia in Canberra – and there, debate is already roiling. Numerous indigenous activists are distressed, not to say furious, that artworks and artefacts they consider rightfully theirs will travel to Canberra only to return to London: "just rubbing salt into the wounds," as one activist had it.

What could have been a celebration has quickly become a major front in the endlessly challenging debate over the repatriation of artworks from museum collections to their place of origin. If, as the British Museum subtitle has it, indigenous cultures form an "enduring civilisation", then are they the proper guardians of their own heritage?

"Who owns culture?"

Indigenous claims to objects in Western museums should be understood separately from similar claims on behalf of nation states.

The British Museum, of course, knows all about the latter: its prized Elgin Marbles, acquired (or looted?) in the early 19th Century, have been claimed by Greece since 1925. No country has been more forceful in its claims to cultural patrimony in recent years than Turkey, whose culture ministry has laid claims to Byzantine artworks made millennia before the establishment of the Turkish republic, and blocked loans to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre and the Pergamon.

Such nationalistic muscle-flexing not only rests on sometimes dubious historical premises, but also on a myopic understanding of culture itself, which has never confined itself to national limits. So to the question "Who owns culture?" we can confidently assert the truth of one response: not the nation state. Cultures do not line up with the boundaries on maps.

But in the case of works of art from indigenous Australia, we are looking at a very different question. Here the petitioners for restitution are not the government of the Commonwealth of Australia, but rather contemporary indigenous communities whose understanding of culture, time and kinship comes into direct conflict with the imperative of the Western museum.

This is a much harder, much more fraught debate, raising some of the biggest questions of art and politics: what does it mean to be modern? Does all culture form part of a global heritage that should be available to everyone, even after centuries of war and colonisation? Must everything be presented for universal understanding, or is some knowledge correctly kept secret?

For many indigenous Australians, the objects in the London and Canberra exhibitions are not the material remnants of past lives, but very real connections to their history and their ancestors. They have a point – one that museums have ignored for too long. It remains all too common to see cultural works by indigenous peoples treated as natural history, to be filed away with rocks and bird carcasses,

rather than treated as a vital culture in its own right. (When I was a student of art history, I remember the shock of discovering an aboriginal Australian painting in my university's natural history museum rather than at the art gallery, even though the painting dated from 1988.)

As many anthropologists have shown, there is nothing 'natural' about the designation of a cultural object as an 'artefact' or an 'artwork', as living or dead. The distinction is a historically freighted, constantly negotiable dance. In Paris, for example, pre-Columbian sculptures have migrated over and over: from the Louvre and the Musée Guimet in the early-to-mid-19th Century, where they were exhibited as antiquities; to the ethnographic Trocadéro in the late 19th Century, where aesthetics were irrelevant; and now to the Musée du Quai Branly, which proudly calls itself an art museum.

What should be restituted? Some cases are clear – notably the case of human remains, which were acquired (or stolen) by Western museums as recently as the mid-20th Century and have very rarely served any scientific or historical purpose. Indigenous peoples have rightly campaigned for the return of these remains, and they have had success. In 2010, the Smithsonian in Washington returned the skeletons of more than 60 people from Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory, all of which were less than 120 years old. In 2013, the Charité hospital in Berlin made similar repatriations to Australian and Torres Straits populations. These are excellent examples of museums respecting the claims of indigenous peoples and righting past wrongs.

Toward a solution

The case of sacred objects is trickier, and perhaps irresolvable. The idea of the 'universal museum', for all its Enlightenment virtues and educational potential, is at its core a Western imperial project, and museums that acquired sacred objects in earlier times absolutely must rethink their display, their function and their narrative. This can only be done along with native populations; the Association of Art Museum Directors, the main museum authority in the United States, instructs its members to work with indigenous groups on display and interpretation.

Yet, the legitimate injustices of colonisation cannot be undone even if every object in every museum were restituted. What's more, the very recourse to a terminology of "ownership" imbues ancient cultural questions with modern, capitalist practices – suddenly, culture sounds not so much like a living thing, but rather a lot like a copyright.

The most extreme claims of cultural ownership can turn so absolute that it's hard to account for them. Some indigenous people, for example, believe that a representation of an ancestor (such as in a photograph or a recording) embodies its subject – and thus no such documentation should be permitted. Important though it is to understand this cultural sensitivity, there's just no way to undo the entirety of modern anthropology and museology. Some compromise has to be found.

The goal must be for museums to honour and nurture the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples and *at the same time* to foster the understanding and the cross-cultural communication that pluralist liberal democracy requires. This can be done – and Australian institutions in particular have shown a way forward. Since the 1970s, the Australian Museum in Sydney has collaborated with indigenous communities to improve its interpretive displays and to understand the sacred character of some objects. The museum has an outreach unit that trains indigenous people in New South Wales with curatorial and conservation skills. And it now collects contemporary indigenous artworks, whether in traditional or in 'Western' media, to counteract the damaging falsehood of static culture.

We cannot unwind the universal museum, but we can build a better one – one where indigenous peoples participate at every step of the way in the display, interpretation and exhibition of their heritage. In this way, indigenous people can use the universal museum to *rectify* historical inequities,

rather than merely let the museum promulgate the sins of the past. Exhibitions of cultural objects can provide evidence for indigenous claims to land, for example.

Indigenous collaborations with museums can lead to more heterogeneous understandings of national or regional culture, and thus to fairer laws and fairer representations. Museums, even the British Museum, should not be seen as old imperial villains, but as living and mutable enterprises that can transform our understanding of others and of ourselves. That would benefit not only indigenous peoples, but all of us who want to build a more just and more cosmopolitan future.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- In Reading 20, Jenkins argues for the repatriation of artworks based on the reason that they 'can now be immaculately reproduced' (line 39). How far do you agree, weighing this against the reasons for museums wanting to keep them for 'authenticity' (line 46)?
- Jenkins further goes on to argue that replicas are not necessarily inferior to originals since the brilliance of a piece of art "lies in its design, not its execution" (line 49), and our appreciaItion of art "lies in the genius of what we see, not the age of its materials" (lines 49-50). How far do you agree with his view? What are the implications in terms of how we view **authenticity** in the creation of artworks?
- From Reading 21, identify and evaluate the author's arguments against the repatriation of 'every object in every museum' (line 65).
- How do both authors show that artwork repatriation is a political issue?

For further research:

After reading the two articles:

- Work in small groups to find out the circumstances in which specific artworks/pieces mentioned were acquired.
- Work in small groups to find out what it takes to maintain artworks in museums.
- Based on these findings: Discuss the role and value of museums in preserving artworks. Consider which of the two authors' arguments you find more convincing and why.

Related essay questions:

1. Should artworks that have been removed from their country of origin be returned? (Cambridge 2018)
2. 'Any adaptation of a novel for a film, television or the theatre is never as effective as the original.' Discuss. (Cambridge 2016)
3. To what extent should the arts in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? (Cambridge 2015)

Supplementary reading:

- London's British Museum won't return the Elgin Marbles to Greece, saying their controversial removal was a 'creative act' (Naomi Rea, 30 Jan 2019, Business Insider) @ https://www.businessinsider.com/london-british-museum-will-not-return-elgin-marbles-2019-1

Reading 22: The dos and don'ts of cultural appropriation **EUs 8, 9**

Jenni Avins Quratzand | The Atlantic | 20 November 2015

This reading will help you:

- Identify the reasons why cultural appropriation is not only inevitable but also beneficial today
- Identify several ways in which cultural appropriation can be done in a contextually sensitive and productive manner

Sometime during the early 2000s, big, gold, "door-knocker" hoop earrings started to appeal to me, after I'd admired them on girls at school. It didn't faze me that most of the girls who wore these earrings at my high school in St. Louis were black, unlike me. And while it certainly may have occurred to me that I – a semi-preppy dresser – couldn't pull them off, it never occurred to me that I shouldn't.

This was before the term "cultural appropriation"[1] jumped from academia into the realm of Internet outrage and oversensitivity. Self-appointed guardians of culture have proclaimed that Miley Cyrus shouldn't twerk, white girls shouldn't wear cornrows, and Selena Gomez should take off that bindi[2]. Personally, I could happily live without ever seeing Cyrus twerk again, but I still find many of these accusations alarming.

At my house, getting dressed is a daily act of cultural appropriation, and I'm not the least bit sorry about it. I step out of the shower in the morning and pull on a vintage cotton kimono. After moisturizing my face, I smear Lucas Papaw ointment – a tip from an Australian makeup artist – onto my lips before I make coffee with a Bialetti stovetop espresso maker a girlfriend brought back from Italy. Depending on the weather, I may pull on an embroidered floral blouse I bought at a roadside shop in Mexico or a stripey marinière[3]-style shirt – originally inspired by the French, but mine from the surplus store was a standard-issue Russian telnyashka[4] – or my favourite purple pajama pants, a souvenir from a friend's trip to India. I may wear Spanish straw-soled espadrilles (though I'm not from Spain) or Bahian leather sandals (I'm not Brazilian either) and top it off with a favourite piece of jewellery, perhaps a Navajo turquoise ring (also not my heritage).

As I dress in the morning, I deeply appreciate the craftsmanship and design behind these items, as well as the adventures and people they recall. And while I hope I don't offend anyone, I find the alternative – the idea that I ought to stay in the cultural lane I was born into – outrageous. No matter how much I love cable-knit sweaters and Gruyere cheese, I don't want to live in a world where the only cultural inspiration I'm entitled to comes from my roots in Ireland, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe.

There are legitimate reasons to step carefully when dressing ourselves with the clothing, arts, artefacts, or ideas of other cultures. But please, let's banish the idea that appropriating elements from one another's cultures is in itself problematic.

Such borrowing is how we got treasures such as New York pizza and Japanese denim – not to mention how the West got democratic discourse, mathematics, and the calendar. Yet as wave upon wave of shrill accusations of cultural appropriation make their way through the Internet outrage cycle, the rhetoric ranges from earnest indignation to patronizing disrespect.

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[1] *Cultural appropriation is the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas of one people or society by members of another and typically a more dominant society or people.*

[2] *Coloured dot worn on the centre of the forehead, originally by Hindus and Jains from the Indian subcontinent.*

[3] *Cotton long-armed shirt with horizontal blue and white stripes. Characteristically worn by quartermasters and seamen in the French Navy.*

[4] *Undershirt horizontally striped in white and various colours and which may be sleeveless. It is an iconic uniform garment worn by the Russian navy, airborne troops and marines.*

And as we watch artists and celebrities being pilloried and called racist, it's hard not to fear the reach of the cultural-appropriation police, who jealously track who "owns" what and instantly jump on transgressors.

In the 21st century, cultural appropriation – like globalization – isn't just inevitable; it's potentially positive. We have to stop guarding cultures and subcultures in efforts to preserve them. It's naïve, paternalistic, and counterproductive. Plus, it's just not how culture or creativity work. The exchange of ideas, styles, and traditions is one of the tenets and joys of a modern, multicultural society.

So how do we move past the finger pointing, and co-exist in a way that's both creatively open and culturally sensitive? In a word, carefully.

1. Blackface is never okay

This is painfully obvious. Don't dress up as an ethnic stereotype. Someone else's culture or race – or an offensive idea of it – should never be a costume or the butt of a joke.

You probably don't need an example, but U.S. fraternity parties are rife with them. Sports teams such as the Washington Redskins, and their fan bases, continue to fight to keep bigoted names and images as mascots – perpetuating negative stereotypes and pouring salt into old wounds. Time to move on.

2. It's important to pay homage to artistry and ideas, and acknowledge their origins

Cultural appropriation was at the heart of this year's Costume Institute exhibition, "China: Through the Looking Glass," at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. There was a great deal of hand-wringing in advance of the gala celebrating the exhibit's opening – a glitzy event for the fashion industry which many expected to be a minefield for accidental racism (and a goldmine for the cultural-appropriation police).

Instead, the red carpet showcased some splendid examples of cultural appropriation done right. Among the evening's best-dressed was Rihanna, who navigated the theme with aplomb in a fur-trimmed robe by Guo Pei, a Beijing-based Chinese couturier whose work was also part of the Met's exhibition. Rihanna's gown was "imperial yellow," a shade reserved for the emperors of ancient Chinese dynasties, and perfectly appropriate for pop stars in the 21st century. Rihanna could have worn a Western interpretation, like this stunning Yves Saint Laurent dress Tom Ford designed for the label in 2004, but she won the night by rightfully shining the spotlight on a design from China.

3. Don't adopt sacred artefacts as accessories

When Victoria's Secret sent Karlie Kloss down the runway in a fringed suede bikini, turquoise jewellery, and a feathered head dress – essentially a "sexy Indian" costume – many called out the underwear company for insensitivity to native Americans, and they were right.

Adding insult to injury, a war bonnet like the one Kloss wore has spiritual and ceremonial significance, with only certain members of the tribe having earned the right to wear feathers through honour-worthy achievements and acts of bravery.

"This is analogous to casually wearing a Purple Heart or Medal of Honour that was not earned," Simon Moya-Smith, a journalist of the Oglala Lakota Nation, told MTV. For this reason, some music festival organizers have prohibited feather headdresses. As The Guardian points out, it's anyone's right to dress like an idiot at a festival, but someone else's sacred object shouldn't be a casual accessory. (Urban Outfitters, take note.)

4. Remember that culture is fluid

"It's not fair to ask any culture to freeze itself in time and live as though they were a museum diorama," says Susan Scaëdi, a lawyer and the author of Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in

American Law. “Cultural appropriation can sometimes be the saviour of a cultural product that has faded away.”

Today, for example, the most popular blue jeans in the U.S. – arguably the cultural home, if not the origin of the blue jean – are made of stretchy, synthetic-based fabrics that the inventor Levi Strauss (an immigrant from Bavaria) wouldn’t recognize. Meanwhile, Japanese designers have preserved “heritage” American work wear and Ivy League style, by using original creations as a jumping-off point for their own interpretations, as W. David Marx writes in Ametora: How Japan Saved American Style: America may have provided the raw forms for Japan’s fashion explosion, but these items soon became decoupled from their origin. More importantly, the Japanese built new and profound layers of meaning on top of American style – and in the process, protected and strengthened the original for the benefit of all. As we will see, Japanese fashion is no longer a simple copy of American clothing, but a nuanced, culturally rich tradition of its own.

Not to mention the *ne plus ultra* for many American denim-heads.

5. Don’t forget that appropriation is no substitute for diversity

At Paris Fashion Week earlier this month, the Valentino designers Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pierpaolo Piccioli sent out a collection they acknowledged was heavily influenced by Africa.

“The real problem was the hair,” wrote Alyssa Vingan at Fashionista, pointing out that the white models wore cornrows, a style more common for those with African hair, “thereby appropriating African culture.”

In a recent video that went viral, the African American actress Amandla Stenberg’s offered an eloquent discourse on the complex cultural context of cornrows. But the real problem at Valentino was not the hair; it was the conspicuous absence of women of colour on the runway. Lack of diversity is an issue for the entire industry, but the problem was particularly visible at Valentino, where the designers talked the talk of multicultural acceptance: “The message is tolerance,” Piccioli told Vogue, “and the beauty that comes out of cross-cultural expression.”

If that’s the point, the faces on the catwalk – regardless of their hairstyle – should reject it.

6. Engage with other cultures on more than an aesthetic level

“What would America be like if we loved black people as much as we love black culture?” asks Stenberg in the aforementioned video, a particularly salient point in an America coming to terms with an epidemic of police violence against young black men.

The rapper and TV personality Nicki Minaj echoed the message in The New York Times Magazine, in reference to Miley Cyrus, who criticized Minaj’s comments about being overlooked for the Video Music Awards because of her race.

‘‘Come on, you can’t want the good without the bad,” said Minaj. “If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, dance with us, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us. You shouldn’t not want to know that.’’

Cherry-picking cultural elements, whether dance moves or print designs, without engaging with their creators or the cultures that gave rise to them not only creates the potential for misappropriation; it also misses an opportunity for art to perpetuate real, world-changing progress.

7. Treat a cultural exchange like any other creative collaboration – give credit, and consider royalties

Co-branded collaborations are common business deals in today's fashion industry, and that's just how Oskar Metsavaht, the founder and creative director of the popular Brazilian sportswear brand Osklen, treated his dealings with the Asháninka tribe for Osklen's Spring 2016 collection.

Francisco Piyako, an Asháninka representative, told Quartz the tribe will get royalties from Osklen's spring 2016 collection, as well as a heightened public awareness of their continued struggle to protect land against illegal loggers and environmental degradation.

In return, Metsavaht returned from his visit with the Asháninka with motifs and concepts for Osklen's spring 2016 collection: Tattoos were re-proportioned as a print on silk organza; the striking "Amazon red" of a forest plant accented the collection; and women's fabric slings for carrying children reappeared in the crisscross shape of a dress. Metsavaht's photographs of the Amazon forest, the Asháninka, and wild animals also appeared on garments, as well as Osklen's website.

"Sharing values, sharing visions, sharing the economics, I think it's the easiest way to work," said Metsavaht. "This is the magic of style. It's the magic of art. It's the magic of the design."

And it's a magic that I'd be happy to appropriate for my closet.

For Discussion/Reflection/Research:

- Research on the negative implications of cultural appropriation for the culture being appropriated and its people, and the dominant culture doing the appropriation.
- Are there positive effects of cultural appropriation, especially in terms of the **continuity** of less dominant or more threatened cultures?
- What instances of cultural appropriation have you come across in Singapore? Which of the seven tips suggested above would be most relevant in these instances?
- Reading 22 is heavily informed by American norms and attitudes. What differences are there between the author's observations and suggestions concerning cultural appropriation and Asian societies?

Related essay questions:

1. Should efforts be made to preserve traditional art forms? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
2. How far do you agree that traditional clothing is outdated and impractical in today's world? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
3. Consider the view that the globalisation of culture is to be embraced and not feared.' (RI 2022 Y6 CT)
4. Discuss the significance of fashion in today's world. (RI 2018 Y5 Promo)
5. 'Fashion is as much a good thing as a bad thing.' To what extent do you agree? (RI 2015 Y6 CT2)
6. To what extent has popular culture destroyed traditional art forms? (RI 2014 Y5 Promo)
7. Consider the view that globalisation destroys culture. (RI 2011 Y5 CT)

The following pair of readings will help you to understand:

- The cultural value of languages
- Some factors that contribute to language loss
- The negative impact of language loss to those directly affected and to the rest of the world
- How technology is helping to preserve & revive threatened languages

Reading 23: Why are languages worth preserving? **EUs 8, 9**

Anastasia Riehl | Anthropology Magazine | 8 November 2019 [adapted]

I met the last speaker of Naati on an empty stretch of beach on Malekula, an island in the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu. We exchanged greetings in the local creole, and the conversation quickly turned to the topic of my unlikely appearance on these shores. I told the man, Ariep, that I was in the country to study one of its many Indigenous languages. When he learned I was a linguist, he excitedly shared that he speaks Naati.

With a mix of pride and sorrow, he revealed that he is the last fluent speaker of Naati. Although a few of his family members have some knowledge of the language and make an effort to use it together, he fears that with his death, Naati will soon disappear.

Naati's predicament is not unique. Of the roughly 7,000 languages spoken on the planet today, 50 to 90 percent are considered vulnerable to extinction by the end of the century.

The crisis has received increasing public attention over the past decade, punctuated by lines such as "one language dies every two weeks" and illustrated by poignant tales of the death of a last speaker. In this UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages, as alarm bells sound and preservation efforts are celebrated, we should pause to ask: Why does it matter?

If we are heading toward a future in which we all speak one of a few large languages, isn't that a good thing? Couldn't it be a way to facilitate communication and level the playing field across nations? Is the desire to "save" these small languages purely sentimental – a romantic notion fostered by scholars in ivory towers of isolated peoples untouched by the exhausting rush toward globalisation?

I argue "no." As a linguist who has worked with endangered language communities in Canada and the Asia-Pacific, I know that language loss is a critical and urgent problem – not only for the speakers who lose their languages, but for everyone. Languages are a vital source of culture and identity for individual communities, and for the global community, languages are an invaluable source of information about human cognition. A linguistically diverse world benefits us all.

Language as cultural glue

Consider what has happened to people whose language has been forcibly taken from them, supplanted by one of the larger, ostensibly more useful languages. This scenario has played out countless times across centuries at the hands of colonial powers or as a tool of national governments to suppress minority groups. It occurs around the world today in classrooms where children are punished or humiliated for using languages and dialects that deviate from an accepted standard.

The response of these communities has not been to celebrate the subsequent generations who speak English, Spanish, Swahili, or whatever the language of power might be. Rather, they decry this cultural genocide and, where possible, fight back against the theft of their linguistic heritage.

In Canada during the 19th and 20th centuries, the national government oppressed Indigenous people in part by removing children from their families and placing them in residential schools. In these spaces, children suffered a range of physical and mental abuses, including punishment for speaking their languages. These injustices severely disrupted the transmission of dozens of Indigenous languages, the majority of which are now endangered.

Today, despite a scarcity of resources to address numerous challenges after decades of persecution, Indigenous Canadian communities are making huge investments in reclaiming their languages. From the "language nest" in Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory in Ontario, where children are exposed only to Mohawk throughout the day, to the Nehiyawak language and culture camps in Saskatchewan, where families learn and share their Cree heritage, Indigenous language education across Canada is flourishing.

It would seem easier, cheaper, and infinitely more practical just to accept English (a language that is no less highly desirable internationally) and shift the resources elsewhere. The fact that people struggle to reclaim their languages despite the obstacles[1] says something crucial about the value of language and the tragedy of loss.

Language is the cultural glue that binds communities together. Language loss is a loss of community heritage – from histories and ancestral lineages known only through oral storytelling, to knowledge of plants and practices codified through words unwritten and untranslated[2].

Language loss is also a loss of community identity, collective purpose, and self-determination. While harder to quantify, such losses have real, detrimental effects on health and quality of life. Conversely, the ability of community members to speak their indigenous language together enhances well-being.

In British Columbia, youth suicide rates are more than six times lower in Indigenous communities where at least 50 percent of the population speaks the native language. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia, young people who speak an Indigenous language have lower rates of binge drinking and illegal drug use compared to non-speakers, as well as a decreased chance of becoming victims of violence.

Why language(s) are important

The disappearance of a language may seem like an unfortunate loss only to the people involved. However, the impact for all of us is real and substantial.

This impact goes beyond the losses of particular bits of information, like indigenous names for medicinal plants yet to be classified by scientists outside a community, or concepts and worldviews reflected in the words and structures of one language that do not have parallels in another. Understanding language is vital to understanding human cognition. Each language is a piece of the puzzle that we need in order to determine how language works in the mind. With each missing piece, we are further from seeing the full picture.

Languages may appear to differ wildly from one another, but they are all variations on a theme. Regardless, whether your language is spoken or signed, it draws on a limited set of forms and structures, and it uses them in consistent and predictable ways. The remarkable similarities across languages suggest that there is some cognitive capacity that underlies all human language, directing how language develops and setting the boundaries for what is possible.

Analysing these patterns is far from an esoteric academic exercise; it has real implications for our lives. The more we understand about how language functions, the better equipped we are to improve our therapies for communication disorders and our methods for language teaching.

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[1] *Language has been forcibly taken from many, supplanted by one of the larger, ostensibly more useful languages. This has happened at the hands of colonial powers or as a tool of national governments to suppress minority groups. It occurs around the world today in classrooms where children are punished or humiliated for using languages and dialects that deviate from an accepted standard.*

[2] *Lulamogi speakers in Uganda, for example, worry that as people forget the dozens of terms that describe methods of trapping and eating white ants – such as "okukunia", "okutegerera", and "okubuutira" – they will forget this important cultural practice. Also at risk are the phrases and associated customs for welcoming the agricultural seasons and washing the bodies of the dead.*

This knowledge contributes to technological innovation as well. Research on sound patterns is used in creating speech synthesis software, while models of grammatical structure aid in developing linguistic components for artificial intelligence.

Understanding language in turn gives us a window into cognition. Observations about the strikingly similar ways that children acquire language, across languages and cultures, provide insight into how the brain develops. Psycholinguistic experiments involving language production, comprehension, and recall tasks reveal clues to how the mind organises information.

The challenge of saving languages

However, taking into account all languages, or even a representative sample, is a huge challenge. Thousands of languages are undocumented or only very poorly described, and no one – neither linguists nor speakers – understand how they work.

Documenting a language thoroughly is a major undertaking involving years of collaboration between the members of a speech community and linguists (who may or may not be speakers themselves). Given the rapid rate of language loss in the world today, many languages are in danger of disappearing before they have been documented, taking with them irreplaceable information about human cognition.

The very limited documentation we have of Naati reveals that the language has a sound called a "bilabial trill." These trills were once considered impossible speech sounds, but now linguists know that they are common in the languages of Malekula.

As I watched Ariep turn back toward the cliffs that day on the beach, taking with him a wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge, I wondered, Does Naati contain other features that could challenge our understanding of language?

What can the many undocumented languages teach us about language structure and cognition, about the richness of our cultures and traditions, about our very humanity? For the sake of the speakers of endangered languages, for the sake of us all, we must preserve the world's languages as we search for answers and work to ensure linguistic diversity for generations to come.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- How does the author support her assertion that 'the impact [of language loss] for all of us is real and substantial' (line 59)?
- Find some examples of extinct and threatened languages (individually or in small groups):

(a) What factors contributed to their respective decline?
(b) Which are the most common factors, comparing across the languages you've researched on?
(c) Are these factors likely to persist? Give reasons for your views.
(d) What efforts have been made to salvage the languages you've researched on? To what extent have they been successful & what factors have contributed to their relative success or lack thereof?

- Languages in Singapore:

(a) To what extent has there been loss of linguistic diversity in Singapore?
(b) What factors have contributed to this?
(c) To what extent is such loss of diversity acceptable?
(d) What efforts have been made to revive and preserve linguistic diversity? To what extent have they been successful & what factors have contributed to their relative success or lack thereof?

Related essay questions:

1. Consider the view that spoken language is more important than the written form. (Cambridge 2013)
2. Is there any value in preserving minority languages in the world today? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)

Further reading:

- "Languages: Why we must save dying tongues" – Rachel Nuwer, BBC, 6 Jun 2014 @ https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20140606-why-we-must-save-dying-languages
- "Keeping the mother tongues alive: Singapore's bilingual challenge" – Tee Zhua, The Straits Times, 3 Nov 2019 @ https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/keeping-the-mother-tongues-alive-singapores-bilingual-challenge

Reading 24: How technology is used to preserve endangered languages **EUs 8, 9**

Demetrius Williams | TranslateMedia | 30 October 2018 [adapted]

Languages have a history of dying out, but the number of languages disappearing is growing at an alarming rate – around 3,500 languages are expected to be extinct by the end of this century.

Languages can die for a number of reasons. Some have become extinct relatively quickly due to natural disasters, civil conflict and world wars. The indigenous people of El Salvador, for example, abandoned their cultural practices and language to avoid being killed during the 1932 Salvadoran peasant massacre – which was aimed at the poorer citizens of El Salvador, many of which were indigenous people.

In the 21st-century, language loss occurs mainly due to a lack of people speaking them. In fact, UNESCO describes endangered languages as those whose speakers have disappeared or shifted to another language – usually the main language of a dominant group. This usually takes the form of parents passing on their native tongue to their children who later on in life use the dominant language of the country they're in to gain socioeconomic advantages or avoid discrimination.

Although advances in modern technology are seen as a contributing factor of language loss, technology has been embraced by many developers, philanthropists and linguists in order to help preserve endangered languages across the globe.

All roads lead to the internet

Non-profit organisations who research and document endangered languages have naturally navigated to the internet to release their research for easy access to the public. Organisations such as The Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages publish scientific papers, conduct linguistic fieldwork and even create online talking dictionaries to preserve indigenous languages.

The institute takes a unique approach to language acquisition by organising digital workshops where local endogenous language activists are trained how to record and edit phrases in their language with the elders of local people.

Not only do these language activists gain additional technical skills, but many activists also become highly skilled researchers within their region while becoming local ambassadors for the institute. Since 2005, The Living Tongues Institute has helped to create more than one hundred talking dictionaries containing tens of thousands of words and images.

With Google as one of its founding partners, The Endangered Languages Project, another web-based platform, acts as a collaborative hub of language enthusiasts, linguists and industry partners all helping to strengthen endangered languages. Users of the website act as contributors by uploading language samples in text, audio, link or video format using a unique tagging system that allows for easy searchability.

Probably one of the most notable languages that have had a revival in the 21st century is Yiddish. Once spoken for over 10 million Jews worldwide, the number of Yiddish speakers decreased dramatically due to the Holocaust and survivors who were forced to assimilate and use the native tongue to avoid persecution. The use of Yiddish had all but disappeared bar a small amount of Hasidic communities.

With the rapid popularity of online forums in the 2000s, the internet became a common place for Yiddish speakers to converse in their tongue and over time, the virtual world became the prime destination for Yiddish speakers.

Sites such as The Idishe Velt (The Jewish World), a message board which boasts 200,000 visits per month, and Kave Shtiebel (The Coffee House), which features Yiddish pop up ads, are just a few examples of how Jewish communities are keeping Yiddish alive by creating safe spaces online where users can easily communicate with each other in their own language.

With online platforms becoming a destination for language preservation, language learning start-ups, including Duolingo, have diversified their product offering to contribute to the preservation process. With 25 million monthly active users worldwide, the US-based start-up's main focus is with Native American languages, such as Navajo, where an estimated 1,500 people are learning the language in the more traditional way of passing it down from one generation to another.

Although Duolingo has the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of young people in the US to encourage Native American language learning, at this early stage it would be unwise to conflate this with becoming a fluent, everyday speaker of a language.

The gamified app requires users to commit to using the app daily and it could take years to master fluent proficiency. But it does raise awareness of language diversity within the United States where a single language has dominated public and economic life.

Unconventional methods in Africa

Saving a language isn't just a matter of recording words or phrases and digitising them to be held in an online vault. Language is inherently about people, culture and identity. In order to keep a language alive, it needs to be spoken by many, immersed in everyday culture and actively passed on to future generations.

Countries in Africa are considered vulnerable to language loss despite the African continent being home to some 2,144 languages. That's not surprising when you consider the continent's history of nearly 200 years of colonisation and many indigenous languages historically being passed on orally, through images and in written form.

As a result, African languages have lost their seat at the diplomatic table and you're more likely to be taught English, Portuguese, French and Mandarin in the classroom to ensure a better socioeconomic future.

To tackle this, young Africans are experimenting with new ways to ensure local languages are passed down to younger generations. Some in the diaspora have taken to YouTube to create video tutorials in order to educate parents on how to teach their children their native tongue.

Gbemisola Isimi, a UK-based Nigerian created CultureTree TV, a YouTube channel that uses the effectiveness of music and video to teach children Yuroba. Launched in 2016, the YouTube channel features videos including common English nursery rhymes, as well as well-known children's stories and educational videos about animal names, professions and body parts all translated into Isimi's native Yuroba language.

It's become a trend that's inspired Nigerian writers to create innovative language learning children's books and opened the doors of opportunity for local women to write romance novels in order to ensure their stories are being told in their local communities – in their language.

Similarly to rural parts of India and China, low levels of literacy on the African continent still remain a barrier to technology that some in Western markets consider everyday essentials. However, unsurprisingly, smartphone adoption is on the rise. In Mali, the literacy rate was at 38.7% in 2015 according to the United Nations.

In order to tap into a market where 30% of the population who own a smartphone can't read its content, Mali-born, Mamadou Sidibe, created a voice-based messaging platform, Lenali, to capitalise on the way people already communicate.

In a country where many people can run a small business without being able to read, the messaging app has proven useful for local merchants who wish to promote their goods and services online while still being part of a 21-century online community.

Although technology is levelling the playing field for language preservation, the internet still plays a key role in snuffing out minority languages.

The internet is ruled by only a handful of dominant languages (such as English, Mandarin and French) and there's even evidence to suggest that only 5% of languages have a chance of surviving in the digital world[1]. But only time will tell if language activists can truly win the long game of language preservation.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Identify the tech-related strategies used to help preserve languages, as detailed in the passage's second section (lines 16-53) and third section (lines 54-90).
- According to the author, what factors have contributed to countries in Africa being 'vulnerable to language loss' (line 58)? To what extent might similar factors be contributing to loss of linguistic diversity in Singapore?

Related essay questions:

1. Assess the view that accurate translation between languages is always necessary. (Cambridge 2023)
2.
3. Is there any value in preserving minority languages in the world today? (RI 2017 Y6 CT2)

Further reading:

- "The internet is changing the way we preserve endangered languages" – Lucy DiSanto, The Outline, 14 March 2019 @ https://theoutline.com/post/7156/the-internet-is-changing-the-way-we-preserve-endangered-languages?zd=1&zi=jqgqpsdv
- "In Singapore, Chinese dialects revive after decades of restrictions" – Ian Johnson, The New York Times, 26 Aug 2017 @ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/world/asia/singapore-language-hokkien-mandarin.html?auth=login-email&login=email

[1] *"Digital language death" – András Kornal, PLoS One, 22 Oct 2013 @ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3805564/*

Reading 25: How data threatens shared mass culture **EUs 6, 7, 8, 9**

Kyle Chayka | Vox | Adapted from Can monoculture survive the algorithm? 17 Dec 2019

This article will help you to understand:

- Why shared mass culture, including film, TV and music, can be useful in providing universal reference points for facilitate the formation of collective communal experiences for societies
- How the rise of digital services and streaming, which appear to increase the diversity of choices and threaten mass culture, has instead led to greater homogenisation due to the heavy-handed application of recommendation algorithms
- Why diversity in mass culture and the arts is important

The past year has felt like a peak in mega-budget world-spanning media spectacles that command our attention, one outrageous finale after another. On April 26, 2019, the film *Avengers: Endgame* was released in the United States. By July, the movie — the closing of a phase in the vast Marvel Cinematic Universe — was the highest-grossing movie in the history of Hollywood; it has so far achieved a global box office of around $2.8 billion.

This communal moment of mass culture has occasioned celebration as well as a bout of anxiety. We're in the midst of the Streaming Wars, with so many different media products and platforms competing for our attention — Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, Disney+, AppleTV+, and the still-to-come Peacock and HBO Max, to name but a few. Journalists and critics are worried that the huge popularity and sense of universality that *Avengers* and *Game of Thrones* achieved are now disappearing for good. The word often used to describe these omnipresent mass-entertainment products is "monoculture."

Within the monoculture obsession, there are two concerns. The first is that in the digital streaming era we have lost a perceived ability to connect over media products as reference points that everyone knows, the way that we used to discuss the weather or politics, at least in a bygone time before our realities were split by climate change and Fox News.

The second concern is that, because of the pressures of social media and the self-reinforcing biases of recommendation algorithms that drive streaming, culture is becoming more similar than different. We are worried that our digital niches cause a degree of homogenization, which the word monoculture is also used to describe.

These two concerns appear in some ways irreconcilable, and yet they coexist. Is there less monoculture today, or is culture more mass than ever? Are we siloed within our own preferences or are we unable to escape the homogenized net-average, consuming all the same things?

The Meaning of Monoculture

Today, the word monoculture is used to describe a ***monolithic*** *culture*: the range of artifacts, characters, voices, and stories that a specific demographic find recognizable and relatable. But the word also evokes a homogenized space, a Monocultural Cinematic Universe in which everything is bright, vapid, and family-friendly, and any whimpering of dissent is smoothed over into sameness: ***monotonous*** *culture.*

The universality that monoculture entails is valuable, because what everyone already knows is what they are likely to keep consuming — hence the overwhelming popularity of reboots and sequels. It's also why Netflix paid $100 million in 2018 to keep *Friends* on its platform for another year.

Big-budget productions try to worm material into the monocultural framework by manufacturing new universal reference points, as *The Mandalorian* has with its insta-meme Baby Yoda. Piggybacking on old monoculture is less risky than starting from scratch. Businesses turn their own intellectual property into self-reproducing mini-monocultures because monopolies are easiest to monetize. The various

signature franchises form walled gardens: nothing else is allowed to grow; there is no cross-pollination.

Watching Together; watching separately

More than a sheer volume of viewers, what monoculture entails is a feeling. Broadcast TV gave us a monocultural feeling because we knew tens of millions of other people were watching the same channel as us at the same time, though we couldn't see them. While *tuned in* we felt connected to the "grid of 200 million," the social community of American TV watchers that George W.S. Trow observed in his 1980 essay on television, *Within the Context of No Context*. (Social media is our new grid, and its fervent fandoms in part a response to the desire for more communal experience.)

If monoculture depends on this feeling of watching together, then streaming makes it more difficult to establish, because we watch different things at different paces for different reasons. Though widespread popularity is clearly still possible, there's a distinction between media's content — its subject matter — and its context — the social environment, or lack thereof, in which we consume it.

Martin Scorsese critiqued the Marvel movies' lack of communal social context as well as their artistic content: "To be in a packed house in one of the old theaters watching *Rear Window*[1] was an extraordinary experience: It was an event created by the chemistry between the audience and the picture itself, and it was electrifying."

Scorsese complains about the homogenization of "market-researched, audience-tested, vetted, modified, revetted and remodified" content. Yet in terms of representation and access, this change feels like a step forward. The range of widely available mass media no longer represents the vision of only one demographic group. The retro-monoculture of *Goodfellas,* or *Friends*, or *Seinfeld*, is just one choice among many. But what do our other choices look like?

Monoculture of the algorithm

Rather than the monoculture dictated by singular auteurs or industry gatekeepers, we are moving toward a monoculture of the algorithm. Recommendation algorithms — on Netflix, TikTok, YouTube, or Spotify — are responsible for much of how we move through the range of on-demand streaming media, since there's too much content for any one user to parse on their own. We can make decisions, but they are largely confined to the range of options presented to us.

In September 2019, the country music star Martina McBride attempted to create a country playlist on Spotify. The platform can automatically recommend songs to add to a playlist; in this case, it suggested 14 pages of songs by male country artists before it came up with a single woman. McBride was shocked, posting on Instagram: "Is it lazy? Is it discriminatory? Is it tone deaf? Is it out of touch?"

Contrary to our expectations of personalization, Spotify's playlist-recommendation function only takes into account the title of the playlist, not the habits of the individual user. According to the algorithm, country = men. Spotify had created its own homogenous definition of the genre.

We all get driven toward the same things. This both immediately decreases diversity and operates at the level of perception: If we think we are getting relatively unbiased, data-backed recommendations, then we're more likely to absorb the way an algorithm defines a genre and accept it as all that exists.

Data Drives Sameness

Jada Watson, a professor at the University of Ottawa who studies country radio airplay, described how the country radio charts, like Billboard's Hot Country Songs list, which includes streaming, "have become incredibly homogenous, not just in gender but with songs that stay number one the entire

[1] A 1954 classic thriller by famous director Alfred Hitchcock

year." She sees the homogenization of music as being caused by data — a consequence of the fact that streaming, radio, and record companies can access more information about their listeners than ever, faster than ever.

On the broadcaster side, the data motivate snap business judgments: "If a particular style is really driving ratings of your service up, whether radio or streaming, you'll want to continue to play that kind of artist, based on fear of loss of ratings." On the label side, the data create an excuse for homogenization. "If artist X is doing really well with a particular style, or a particular production value, then a label might do the same thing with artist Y," explained Watson.

We thought the long tail of the internet[2] would bring diversity; instead we got sameness and the perpetuation of the oldest biases, like gender discrimination. The best indicator of what gets recommended is what's already popular, according to the investor Matthew Ball, a former head of strategy at Amazon Studios. "Netflix isn't really trying to pick individual items from obscurity and get you to watch it," Ball said. "The feedback mechanisms are reiterating a certain homogeneity of consumption."

An Updated Definition of Monoculture

Instead of discrete, brand-name cultural artifacts, monoculture is now culture that appears increasingly similar to itself wherever you find it. It exists in the global morass of Marvel movies designed to sell equally well in China and the United States; the style of K-Pop, in music and performance, spreading outside of Korea; or the profusion of recognizably minimalist indie cafes from Australia to everywhere else. These are all forms of monoculture that don't rely on an enforced, top-down sameness, but create sameness from the bottom up. Maybe the post-internet monoculture is now made up of what is *aesthetically recognizable* even if it is not *familiar* — we quickly feel we understand it even if we don't know the name of the specific actor, musician, show, or director.

A monocultural product reinforces our established range of taste-signifiers rather than challenging them or adding something new. Is it better to choose between a few things that everyone knows, or between 100 things that share a fundamental similarity, algorithmically sorted into a you-may-also-like category? The latter may not be that much more authentic, original, or diverse than the former. In fact, it often feels oppressive, as if there isn't much of a choice at all. By the metric of similarity, we have more monoculture than ever.

Relying on algorithms to dictate our culture means evaluating things on the basis of popularity, engagement, scale, and speed. Yet we already know that what is popular is not necessarily good, and what is good is not necessarily popular. On top of that, the data provided by Netflix and Spotify are biased, shaped by their proprietary algorithms. Their parameters are still set by a small group: not Hollywood producers, but white, male engineers and data scientists.

More diversity yet less of it

The critics giving *Avengers* and *Game of Thrones* the epitaph of Last Universal Content are wrong: Today's form of monoculture is both larger in scale and less human, more mechanically automated, than ever before. Culture is now Big Data. Just what we have lost in the transition from human to machine tastemakers is still bearing out.

There seems to be more *opportunity* for diversity (anything can theoretically go viral) and yet the cultural artifacts that do become mainstream appear relentlessly optimized for the digital platforms of the attention economy. There isn't enough room for products or projects (or places) that are not memes, that aren't pre-optimized for sharing or scaling. The non-homogenized alternatives to the

[2] The theory that the structure of the internet drives demand away from products with mass appeal towards more obscure or niche offerings

mainstream become harder to find. As we grow more accustomed to the algorithmic monoculture, allowing it to occupy our senses, we might lose our understanding of, or our taste for, anything else.

Recapturing the value from the unexpected

Art's deepest impact comes when it is least expected. In contrast, algorithmic recommendations lead us down a path of pleasant monotony: a looming monoculture of the similar. To resist it, we should embrace obscurity, difficulty, diversity, and strangeness as just as important as recognizability or universality.

These are the qualities that need most to be preserved against the frictionless consumption pushed by our automated feeds. Otherwise, any new, surprising content that enters the machine of digital monoculture will quickly have its innovative quirks stripped and copied, scaled up and repeated until they become cliches. They will be incorporated into a constantly updated global homogeneity that possesses the sheen of familiarity but no substance beyond style. The algorithm is a replacement for our internal monologues and our judgements about what we want to consume.

The magic is still in what the algorithm can't surface, what data doesn't touch — the introspective space in which you can develop your own opinions in private before making them public commodities and measuring them against the mainstream. Because once something enters the cycle of digital monoculture, its essence will, inevitably, be lost. So enjoy it while you can.

What we stand to lose

The desire for a shared monoculture is understandable, though its disappearance is more perception than reality. Art is communal. We want to connect with other people over experiences that we share in common. But just as important is being alone, having a unique encounter — not seamlessly recommended or autoplayed — with something that another person created, and then gauging your deepest emotional response. The internet makes this more difficult, even as it makes sharing (or superficially liking) things easier and faster.

Rembrandt died in 1669, impoverished, in obscurity. And yet it is his late work, the deeply luminous portraits with scumbled[3] brushstrokes, completely unpopular with his contemporaries, that strikes us most today. It took centuries for the paintings to become mainstream. The process was neither fast nor convenient, though it may now seem like a foregone conclusion.

Digital media, by contrast, prioritizes immediate engagement over the slow blooming of art. I get the sense that today's algorithms would prioritize Deep Dream[4] patterns — a memetic style without content — over late Rembrandt. The danger of prioritizing the monoculture is that we might not get as many Rembrandts in the future.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- Chayka outlines the two concerns surrounding the 'monoculture obsession' (lines 12-19). In your own words, explain why these concerns seem 'irreconcilable' (line 20).
- Chayka defines 'monolithic culture' as 'the range of artifacts, characters, voices, and stories that a specific demographic find recognizable and relatable' (lines 23-24). Reflect on the ways 'monolithic culture' is useful to societies.
- Chayka posits that the communal experience of 'Broadcast TV' (line 37) has changed, and that social media satisfies our 'desire for more communal experience' (line 42). How is the communal

[3] Scumbling refers to a painting technique

[4] Deep Dream is a computer vision programme that uses deep learning techniques and neural networks to process images and turn them into dream-like, psychedelic pictures

experience obtained through social media different from that of more traditional mass media? What are the implications of such a difference, if any?

- Chayka cites Spotify's playlist-recommendation function as a specific example of how algorithms reduces diversity (lines 61-67). Based on your own experience, what other examples are there where algorithms may end up limiting our choices when it comes to cultural consumption?
- Taking into consideration the sections 'Monoculture of the algorithm' and 'Data Drives Sameness' (lines 56-87), summarise the ways in which digital media have led to greater homogenisation of mass culture.
- Explain what the author means when he says that the new monoculture 'create[s] sameness from the bottom up' (line 93).
- Chayka asserts that the way digital media works today would lead to any original content or products 'copied, scaled up and repeated until they become cliches' (lines 123-124), and that we might not get 'as many Rembrandts in the future' (line 144). Do you agree or are you less pessimistic? Why?

Related essay questions:

1. 'Films are concerned with escaping from the problems of everyday life, rather than addressing them.' Discuss (Cambridge 2021)
2. 'The arts are nothing more than a luxury.' How far is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2021)
3. Do films offer anything more than an escape from reality? (Cambridge 2014)
4. How far do you agree that popular music serves no real purpose? (RI 2019 Y6 CT1)
5. Assess the impact of foreign films or foreign TV programmes on the culture of your society. (RI 2013 Y6 CT1)
6. Consider the view that popular culture thrives on the trivial. (RI 2011 Y5 Promo)

Reading 26: Cultural Heritage on the Frontline: the destruction of peoples and identities in war
Dr Timothy Clack| University of Oxford Opinion | 4 Oct 2022 **EUs 6, 7, 8, 9**

This article will help you to understand:
- How conflict and politics can pose an irreversible threat to our cultural heritage and our shared humanity.
- The significance of physical artifacts/structures in shaping and strengthening our cultural heritage and why destroying or removing them means that we as a collective species are all worse off.
- How the act of culturecide can serve both as a means to reinforce and erode one's identity.

The Russian invasion has precipitated humanitarian challenges not seen in Europe since the Second World War. It has also seen the deliberate damage of hundreds of places of worship, museums, historic buildings, and memorials. Cultural heritage has also been destroyed and weaponised at scale in recent conflicts in Ethiopia, Mali, Myanmar, Nagorno-Karabakh, Somali, and Syria.

The systematic destruction of heritage often forms part of strategic acts of 'culturecide'. The obliteration and theft of cultural heritage from Jewish and Roma peoples throughout Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War was such an offensive, compounding the drive to dehumanise and delegitimise entire ethnicities. More recently, a campaign of malicious cultural 'unfixing', accompanied by extreme physical and sexual violence, was prosecuted by Daesh (Islamic State) against the Yazidi and other communities in Iraq and Syria. Women, specifically, were brutalised and left bereft of gender-specific cultural norms.

There are many reasons why conflict actors – from the forces of large states to lone wolf terrorists – train their sights on cultural heritage. Attacks on both tangible (buildings, monuments, and artefacts) and intangible (practices, customs, and knowledges) heritage are not only forms of propaganda by deed, but serve to deny people their very identities – their sense of self.

This loss is particularly egregious as cultural heritage is central to a person's sense of belonging and attachment to place. It anchors, orientates, and locates a person, a people, in time and space. In short, this destruction disrupts and dislocates, often leaving victims psychologically adrift and emotionally hopeless.

International Humanitarian Law, including The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), to which 133 state parties – including Russia – are currently signatories, require states to ensure heritage is not damaged or misappropriated in war. The exception to such protection is military necessity. Thus, forces are permitted to damage heritage, if an adversary is utilising it to present a threat. It is legitimate, for example, for a military force to use proportionate means to neutralise a sniper in a church spire.

Despite these legal protections, however, cultural heritage remains a strategic target in war and conflict. There are, in fact, many reasons why these attacks occur. They are often intended to impact self-identity and denude the will to fight (for instance in 'The Blitz', 1940-1), or they can be the means to punish an adversary (for instance, the 'carpet bombing' of Hamburg, 1943). Other motivators include: iconoclasm, the removal of symbols of legitimacy and authority (e.g. the targeting of the Four Old Things during the Cultural Revolution in China, 1966-7); generation of publicity in order to provoke support, outrage, or other response (such as the Taliban's ruination of the Bamiyan Buddhas, 2001); wanting to gain access to spoils (e.g. sacking of the City of Benin, 1897); and opportunistic and organised looting (including thefts from the Iraq National Museum, 2003). During war, there is often also considerable collateral, inadvertent, and neglectful damage caused by armed forces.

Irregular warfare actors and terrorist organisations are often equally destructive of cultural heritage. Islamic terrorist attacks on the West, for example, are primarily focused on 'soft targets' that will

attract considerable media attention and are deemed justifiable – if only to the perpetrators and facilitators – on the basis of being stages of decadence, degeneracy, and impurity. The result is, a terrorist attack profile that includes music concerts, nightclubs, sporting events, economic hubs, and magazine offices. These often go unrecognised as heritage, officially, and in popular consciousness, but they are, individually and collectively, emblematic of Western liberal democracies.

Cultural heritage is also used as a stage to amplify propaganda. During its hold on the World Heritage Site of Palmyra, for instance, Daesh routinely used the ancient architecture publicly to execute prisoners and otherwise terrorise locals. With time being a dimension of power, the site was mobilised to intimidate and as a symbol of their (self-perception of) legitimacy.

Military forces are also increasingly involved in the humanitarian response to natural disasters around the world. As climate change takes its toll – through rising sea-level, heatwaves, and wildfires, as well as in driving displacement and conflict – the need to protect heritage will escalate.

Understanding the character of the heritage and conflict relationship better equips states to deliver peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction missions, mitigate threats, generate soft power advantage, as well as protect cultural heritage directly.

Heritage is a human rights issue, insofar as it relates to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, and religion. Protecting heritage can, thereby, play a prominent role in safeguarding human security and the return to 'normality' in the aftermath of conflict. Heritage can help people find home again.

Western military forces are increasingly conscious of these issues and are acting to build relevant capabilities. Examples include the US Army's Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command's 38G/6V Heritage and Preservation Officer Program and the British Army's Cultural Property Protection Unit. These modern day 'monuments men and women' not only protect heritage in conflict theatres, but support operational readiness through related planning, training, and intelligence work.

This familiarity between soldiering and heritage is long-standing, and derives, in part, from the shared features of mapping, fieldwork, and the large-scale deployment of people and equipment. T.E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia') was an archaeologist before he was a soldier, and Augustus Pitt-Rivers, whose founding collection was the genesis of the Pitt Rivers Museum, made the opposite transition.

Reflecting changes in modern warfare – from conventional wars of attrition and exhaustion to hybrid and subthreshold hostilities – state and non-state actors continue to deploy or destroy cultural heritage for political ends. Indeed, the current trajectory indicates an escalation in heritage targeting and weaponisation as part of strategies to either reinforce or erode people's identities in and around conflict zones. Destruction in such contexts is often a matter of domination, and protection of resistance.

The Russian invasion is a case in point. President Putin has made clear that he believes Ukraine is an inalienable part of Russian history and culture. Despite these assertions, the targeting of Ukrainian cultural sites indicates an internal recognition of the robust and distinct character of Ukrainian identity. As the destruction goes on, however, the cultural affinity that remains between Russia and Ukraine is under threat as both become increasingly defined in opposition to one another. The Orthodox Church in Ukraine, for example, became autocephalous in 2019, meaning it split from the Moscow Patriarchate Church.

The display of burnt-out Russian armoured vehicles in cities across Ukraine, including Kyiv and Lviv, adds a modern twist to the conflict and heritage nexus. This material debris of combat is being transported from the battlefield and effectively converted into heritage for public consumption in almost real time. Together with viral memes on social media, most recognisably perhaps of Ukrainian

farmers towing Russian tanks with their tractors, this heritage embodies an emotional truth for Ukrainians.

This physical and digital debris resonates with, and further informs, cultural narratives of independence and warrior ancestry. Ukrainians at once immortalise and are immortalised by Volodymyr the Great, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Taras Shevchenko, and the Zaporizhian Cossacks riding horseback with sabres blazing through Gogol's legends of Taras Bulba.

Cultural heritage cannot be separated from people – it is people. When we protect one, we protect the other.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- The International Humanitarian Law necessitates the protection of cultural property in times of conflict and war, with the exception to such provisions being 'military necessity' (lines 20-25). How might 'military necessity' pose a contradiction or hurdle to our efforts in preserving cultural heritage?
- Irregular warfare actors may at times target cultural institutions that are deemed as impure, immoral or decadent (lines 37-38) and justify the destruction of such entities or values. Using examples from either the Russia-Ukraine war or the Israel-Hamas conflict, analyse how accurate/representative this statement is.
- How might cultural heritage be an effective tool for propaganda (line 43)? Analyse the features of such sites/spaces of heritage that make them particularly effective/ineffective as a platform for propaganda.
- Explain how the tension between Cultural Diversity vs Homogeneity (Unit Concept for Culture) can be witnessed in modern warfare (line 66). Use relevant examples, where applicable, to support your analysis.

Related essay questions:

1. 'We shape our buildings, but then our buildings shape us.' To what extent is this true of your society? (Cambridge 2020)
2. Assess the view that traditional buildings have no future in your society. (Cambridge 2016)
3. Consider the view that the globalisation of culture is to be embraced and not feared. (RI 2022 Y6 Common Test)
4. Should countries spend resources on preserving historical monuments when they are struggling to meet the basic needs of their own people? (RI 2016 Y6 CT2)
5. How important are memories? (RI 2013 Y6 Prelim)

Reading 27: Why do protesters destroy art? **EUs 1, 3, 9, 10**

Natalie Dawson | Book An Artist | Not dated

This article will help you to understand:

- The motivations and ideologies that drive protesters to destroy art
- The adverse consequences that may result from such destruction, including the loss of cultural heritage

Watching protesters destroy art is a rather troubling trend that's been making headlines more frequently in 2023. Art vandalism raises some interesting questions about why people choose to vandalism art to help aid their message. We question where the line is and what the motivations are behind these destructive actions.

Art has been a powerful tool for protest and activism for quite some time. It's not just about pretty pictures; it can hit you in the gut, make you think deep thoughts, and even shout for change. Whether it's graffiti on a wall, funky sculptures, or good old-fashioned paintings, artists have used their creative chops to tackle big issues, poke holes in the status quo, and shine a spotlight on all sorts of injustices.

The Power of Art in Protest

Protesters have often hitched their wagon to art, using it to crank up the volume on their messages. They create these iconic images that become the face of whole movements. These artworks become symbols of standing up to the powers that be and act like beacons for folks who believe in the same cause. But then, there's the flip side – the not-so-pretty one – where people destroy art in the name of protest. And that raises a whole bunch of knotty questions about how far you can go when expressing yourself, keeping the art world's honour intact, and dealing with the consequences when things go south.

The Toppling of Confederate Statues

In the United States, the toppling of Confederate statues during protests against racial injustice and police brutality in the wake of George Floyd's death in 2020 was a notable example of art destruction. Demonstrators argued that these monuments celebrated a painful history of slavery and oppression. Some saw the statues as relics of white supremacy, prompting their removal or destruction.

Statues of Confederate generals and leaders were being covered in paint, graffitied or pulled down. The toppling of these statues was a symbol of protest, a way of saying, "We're done with this history being glorified."

As with anything that involves public art and history, the toppling of Confederate statues didn't happen without its fair share of controversies. Some people believed that removing these statues was erasing history or that it should be done through official channels, like city governments. Others argued that these statues didn't belong in public spaces in the first place.

Mona Lisa five different occasions (1956 – 2022)

In 1995, a man attacked Leonardo da Vinci's iconic portrait, the "Mona Lisa," at the Louvre Museum in Paris. He threw acid at the painting, damaging it before security intervened. The attacker later claimed that his act was a protest against the museum's policies. In December of 1956 it was smashed with a rock, chipping some of the paint off her elbow. Sadly, the man responsible did the damage due to allegedly wanting to go to prison for somewhere to sleep. In April 1974 it was attempted spray

painted by a woman in a wheelchair protesting the accessibility of the museum. In 2009 a Russian woman threw a ceramic mug at the Mona Lisa which bounced off the glass. Allegedly she was frustrated about not being granted French nationality.

Finally, in May 2022 a man disguised as an old woman tried to damage the painting with cake. He smeared cake across the glass after failing to break it. He was escorted out screaming: "There are people who are destroying the Earth, think about it. All the artists tell you think about the Earth, all artists think about the Earth, that's why I did this. Think about the planet."

Just Stop Oil protestors destroying art with soup, oil and paint (2022)

Members of Just Stop Oil have been responsible for a handful of art vandalism across 2022. In October, two members tossed tomato soup onto Vincent van Gogh's iconic "Sunflowers" painting on display at the National Gallery in London. Later in the month another member glued his hand to Vermeer's *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, and the other poured tomato soup over him.

For some, it was an inspired shock tactic aimed at raising awareness, while others viewed it as an act of vandalism, dismissing the connection between climate change and a masterpiece of art. One of the activists explained their methods with a simple quote: "We are in a climate catastrophe, and all you are afraid of is tomato soup or mashed potatoes on a painting." Just Stop Oil continued to send shockwaves across the globe with new and inventive ways to spread their message through their forced addition to infamous artworks.

Intentions of Protestors

Art destruction can be interpreted as a direct challenge to authority and the status quo, serving as a bold statement that the current system is unjust and in need of change. In this way, the act of destroying art becomes a radical form of dissent, challenging the norms and structures that protesters believe perpetuate injustice.

The destruction of art as a form of protest raises complex ethical and moral questions. While it can be a powerful means of challenging oppressive systems and amplifying voices that have long been marginalised, it also carries significant consequences, including the potential loss of cultural heritage and the escalation of conflicts.

Understanding why protesters destroy art involves examining the motivations and ideologies that drive such actions. For many protesters, the act of destroying art serves as a symbolic gesture aimed at challenging oppressive systems or institutions. Confederate statues, for instance, symbolise a history of racism and slavery, and by tearing them down, protesters send a clear message that they will not tolerate the glorification of such a past.

In addition to expressing their anger, protesters destroy art to draw attention to injustice. Targeting prominent works of art or cultural landmarks ensures that their actions gain widespread media attention. This exposure helps protesters shed light on the issues they are protesting, sparking discussions and putting pressure on authorities to address these concerns.

For Discussion/Reflection:

- The writer cites 3 examples of why art has been destroyed and cites briefly the reasons for their destruction
  a. Examine and research on these reasons for these acts of destruction or vandalism and construct counter-arguments or rebuttals for these reasons
  b. Weigh the persuasiveness of the arguments and rebuttals

- How does one reconcile one's own interpretation of events against interpretations depicted in art or held by others in society?
- Has art's ability to highlight social issues had a positive or negative impact on the social and political issues themselves?

Related essay questions:

1. 'Censorship of the arts is necessary to maintain social cohesion.' To what extent is this view still relevant to your society? (RI 2023 Y6 Timed Practice)
2. Examine the extent to which graffiti can be considered art. (RI 2016 Y6 CT1)
3. 'Real art is something that makes us uncomfortable.' Do you agree? (RI 2014 Y6 CT2)