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What is Art?

*I am, therefore I create.*

*I create, therefore I think.*

*I do not think first, because first there is nothing.*

*First, I am. Second is creation. Next is observation.*

*I am, therefore I think.*

"Is this Art?" is a pseudo-intellectual question posed by those who do not understand the meaning of the word. Art is not the ink on paper or the paint on a canvas. It is not a carving in stone or a finely crafted wooden chair. It is not the object itself, but the act of creating it. Art is not the finished product, it is the process of creating.

Art, as we commonly define it, is the product of our creativity. Paintings, sculptures, films, recorded music, these are all only *things*. They are sensory stimulation that we receive as personal experience. They are objects in space that we process with our senses and extract meaning from. It is not the physical image that has meaning, it is how we use. It is how we use it to change things or how the object itself changes the

way we feel. Meaning is not inherent to the object, we decide the meaning through observation.

"Is this Art?" is a question posed by those who take the dissection of created works to be a pursuit unto itself (critics). They are usually the least creative among us. The dissection and deconstruction of the works of others is a subconscious attempt to compensate for personal lack of creativity.

The critique of individual creative works is not wrong, it is subjective to the context. When viewing an object, we should be observing it with the same curiosity as with we approach any new object or experience that we encounter at any instance of our life. Some level of critical observation is necessary to determine if any creative work is a truly unique expression of the individual, or a simulacrum of a previous idea.

The reason we pay attention to any object more than another is the novelty that we perceive in the object. If it is new, fresh, and novel, we will approach the object or idea with much more detailed scrutiny than we would in observing the commonplace scenery of our own environment. Everything looks the same to us in those such instances because we have observed the same scenes so many times that they have become a part of our consciousness. The experiences become more of programmed functions than observational experiences.

Though many small things obviously change in our day to day lives, it is undeniably new and extreme circumstances that draw our attentions. Our hair gets longer, dust collects, we all grow older, but at any given moment we are completely unaware of the constant change. Only when we look at an old photograph does our current appearance temporarily become a novelty again. Time

moves slowly, and unless we have a significant gap between observations of a given object, we may not notice gradual changes.

Novelty, as all things, is temporary. Our interest in an old photograph, while amusing at first, begins to fade into our next search for novelty. We may spend hours programming and fiddling about with a new cell phone, but after a short while the novelty of each app wears off. We always seek another, new experience. The same is such with Art.

If something another individual has created is perceived to be unique and/or useful to us, then we will obviously give it more attention than something that serves no purpose. If the work is beautiful on many layers and has deep symbolism to be unlocked, it will resonate as new for every generation that discovers it.

It is in seeking these new and novel experiences that we are instilled with the desire to create our own unique expressions of ourselves through our creativity. It is through this process that we attempt to discover what makes us unique and separate from others, what can only be defined as our individual selves. This is how we discover who and what we truly are.

At birth, it is assumed that we are individual and unique. We are given a name and a place in society, and throughout the average life, this is sufficient to secure enough autonomy to function in the world.

Our family and friends know exactly who we are by our appearance, the sound of our voice, or through other means. The society in which we operate knows us at least by a name and number on the many records and files kept to manage our debts,

credits and census information. For some people, this is enough to convince them that they are unique.

To those of us whose uniqueness lies only on the surface, Art is a noun. For those of us that choose to individuate from the herd, Art is a verb.

Art is a process. It may seem archaic in modern times, but the original use of the word was as such. Painting, music, sculpture, woodwork, cooking, any process done with the care of dedicated human hands is an art form. An *artist* practices their *art*, so to speak. The moment this definition of Art began its descent into obscurity was the moment that mass production became a reality.

Mass production has its benefits, no one doubts the fact that artisan toilet paper would be no more useful than factory produced toilet paper. The problem lies within the item being replicated. If the item is a chair, then all chairs created from the original design are merely a simulacrum of the creator's expression. The original chair was unique unto itself, not just a chair, but an object imbued with the unique aspects of its creator and their talent. Each copy is only a chair.

An artisan not only creates things of beauty, but also creates useful things that serve a purpose. A sculpture or a painting can be beautiful, but it also serves a purpose in eliciting an emotional response from its observer that can lead to profound changes in the way we think about something. A chair can also be beautiful, while serving a very specific use. Any created work is imparted with meaning by its creator. Any simulacrum of a hand-made object, while it may be useful, has no meaning deeper than its surface.

There is no usefulness in discussing the absence of meaning or the lack of desire for meaning in a consumer driven society. It has always been true that only a fraction of any population desires truth and profundity. The vast majority is satisfied with mundane existence and seeks no answers to the fundamental questions of life.

If we ask ourselves, "who am I?", then the way we answer is by observing our own creativity. Individual self-expression creates objects that are unique to their creator. Through observing these created objects we naturally discover what makes ourselves and others unique. Is it mere happenstance that the creative process brings human beings such deep feelings of purpose?

When we use the term *creative process*, we intend for it to be understood in the broadest of senses. At the most basic physical level, the creative process produces life. It is surely obvious (even for those of us who have no children) how creating and sustaining life can make us feel purpose. While looking through this lens, it is easy to understand why a farmer or hobbyist gardener would feel purpose in their work as well.

On a deeper, more subtle level, the creative process can formulate unique ideas in our minds. These unique ideas give an individual the conscious map for creating their dreams in reality. Our physical contribution to the world is the creation of children, our non-physical contribution is that of our ideas. These are our mental offspring which we manifest into the world in order to change reality (just as we intend our children to do).

If we expect our ideas to have impact on others in the world, then we must translate them into a physical medium. Art,

when properly used as a verb, is our ability to translate these ideas into form. When we appreciate art in this way, we celebrate the dedication of an individual to their chosen craft.

When we use the word art as a noun, we are judging the ability of an individual to translate their unique ideas into a physical medium (also known as *talent*). This is different than appreciation, because in judging we compare the object to other objects we view as similar. In reality, the objects we compare it to have no bearing on the value of the original object we are experiencing. What does have bearing is the intention of the artist.

Art as a noun is related to what we consider beautiful, which is directly related to the perceived value of something. The beauty, or value of a created work is closely related to the ability (talent) of the artist. It could be considered the meaning of the object, but nothing has meaning without purpose.

The purpose of creation is self-expression, and the meaning we interpret through created works are discoveries about the artist as well as ourselves. If we choose to only critique the meaning of art, it is because we are unable to understand its purpose.

Through observation, we can understand the purpose of an object. We can understand whether or not it is unique or a simulacrum. Whether or not an object is itself the uniquely created intellectual property of its creator. We can see whether or not the object is one of true expression, or something that is entirely for profit. In observing these things, we can formulate our own opinion on the intentions of the creator. If we feel these intentions are pure, then the object has no need for critique and only for interpretation.

If an individual makes a pure attempt at self-expression, then there is no utility in criticism. If a human being translates their ideas into form, the value of these ideas (if made public) will develop into recognition and respect, but the purpose is without question. The purpose of art is universal.

Every day of our lives, we translate our ideas into form. Some individuals hone their talents and spend years acquiring desired abilities in which to translate these ideas at much higher levels. This increases the beauty and value of the created works, and it is not only confined to paintings, movies, music, literature, and other mediums bundled into the category of The Arts.

Any unique idea translated into form is a product of art. A cook practices their art in the way they prepare food. A lawyer practices their art in the unique way they litigate a case. A construction worker builds homes and buildings, the beauty and value of which increases according to the abilities of the builder. We do not critique the ability of the builders of a simple and inexpensive home, it was never their intention to create more than was required by the consumer. Provided they are working to the best of their abilities, we are able to appreciate the finished product.

The intent of an artist is never to meet the demand of any consumer however, it is only to facilitate the need of the individual to express themselves creatively. What use is there to critique something that was never intended for your own acceptance? Are you judging the art, the artist, or your own lack of contribution in the process?

The talent of an artist does not relate with the value of the process. Whether we are 6 years old or 60, the creative

process is the baseline mode of being for self-aware humans. When our minds are quiet, ideas flow, and when ideas flow they must be translated into physical mediums. This is the process, and only our egos and thinking minds get in its way.

As we take the role of artist, we see that all work begins with ideas. If we pay attention while our ideas flow, we observe that there is no filter between the idea and the medium of creation. Only when the thinking mind steps between them does the process begin to break down.

With nothing to observe, there is no thought. Without creation, there is nothing to observe. Observing this natural progression, perhaps we should realign our thinking minds. If a thing must first exist before any thought can be given to it, maybe it is time to throw away the Cartesian model of "I think, therefore I am," in favor of a new one: I am, therefore I think.

If thinking makes us who we are, then we should have no trouble asserting our autonomy in the world. The problem here lies in the fact that the thoughts we think are caused solely by our observation of what we call reality. If we strip away all societal structures and place a human being alone in nature, it becomes much harder to define who that person is. If thinking makes us who we are, then we are simply a construct of the society we live in and the culture accepted within it.

If "I am" becomes the first part of our equation, then it is impossible to define an individual in terms of the society they live in. This is quite inconvenient for the established order of society, which is the cause for their most spectacular of noble lies. Simply stated, the idiom, "I think, therefore I am" is the bedrock below all the structures of modern civilization. It is the predicate for autonomy in our society,



it is a fundamental agreement that we make as soon as we are able to recognize our thoughts, and it is our contract with the devil.

To be, or not to be. *That* is the question! "To be" is to be present in the moment, ideas flowing. "Not to be" is to be outside the present, with ego driven thoughts about the past and worries about the future. To be creating in the present moment is the ideal and intended functioning state of the enlightened human being.

