

Democracy Of Art

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Many people today, both artists and laymen, believe that art is essentially aristocratic. Some artists admit readily that their work is not for the "masses." The "masses," on the other hand, often regard art as something strange and dull, reserved for eccentrics who live in an imaginative half-world of their own. Usually the artists who boast that their work is for the upper two percent will also add that "the common man" is incapable of appreciating "real art." This gives rise to the question of what "real art" is.

In this theme, I shall consider as art that which is beautiful. Apparently, this definition leaves much to be desired. First, beauty is a purely relative quality, for what is beautiful to one person is not necessarily beautiful to another. Yet the same thing is true of art. Many cultured persons condemn the work of Moussorgsky, and their condemnations usually include the statement that his compositions are not art. Yet other equally cultured people defend and enjoy his music; to them it is art. Another complaint which might be raised against my definition is that no mention is made of messages or great truths or ethical themes. It is true that many indeed most

great works of art contain at least one fundamental truth. Yet so do most scientific, philosophical and theological treatises. To the extent that art expresses truth, it becomes science, philosophy or theology, but there is undeniably a difference between these studies and art, however slight that difference might sometimes be. That fundamental characteristic which separates art from other academic pursuits is beauty.

This concept extends art beyond its traditional though ill-defined boundaries, for there are many kinds of beauty: sensuous, emotional, imaginative and intellectual. The enjoyment of cool sheets on a hot summer night, delight in the delicate scent of a violet, the pleasure of a tasteful meal—all of these are on a primitive, physical plane, the appreciation of art. Similarly, the joy one might find in reading a beautiful thought beautifully expressed in Aristotle's *Poetics* would also be the appreciation of art. In a sense, then, art is extremely exclusive, for everyone has a slightly different concept of it. However, everyone who enjoys a good meal or a walk in the sun has some concept of art. Therefore, we might well say that art is so exclusive it is democratic.