

Art Theory: A Very Short Introduction  
By Cynthia Freeland

In today's art world many strange, even shocking things qualify as art. In this *Very Short Introduction* Cynthia Freeland explains why innovation and controversy are valued in the arts, weaving together philosophy and art theory with many fascinating examples.

Questions for thought and discussion

- Is art always beautiful? Should it be? Is everything that is beautiful art?
- Why do artists sometimes show things that seem grotesque and very difficult to look at?
- Can you identify examples of artworks that deal with religion? Is it possible to enjoy art from a religious perspective, even though you might disagree with that religion?
- Why is Kant's view of art sometimes called "Formalist"? What does this mean in regard to specific examples?
- Discuss some similarities between Plato and Aristotle's debates about whether a society should show tragedies, versus our contemporary debates about violence in the media.
- Do you think that a garden can be a work of art? When and why? What sort of garden would or would not be a work of art?
- Is it possible for something to be art in one era but then not art in another era?
- Why was Arthur Danto so perplexed and preoccupied by Andy Warhol's Brillo Box artworks?
- What is the best way to understand art from another culture? If you don't understand the background to a culture, can you still appreciate something from it (such as a basket or totem pole) as a work of art?
- If you know that a work of art is by a famous artist and hear that it's worth lots of money, does that make you pay more attention to it? Should it? Why is art sometimes valued so highly as to be almost literally "priceless"? Does this seem right to you?
- Why are art museums so popular today? Is it true that they are more about entertainment (eating, shopping, etc.) than about art? What has your own experience of museums been like?
- Do you believe that an artist's gender or sexual preference makes a difference, either for (a) the kind of art they produce or (b) the reactions of an audience? Should it?
- How is the cognitive theory of art different from the expression theory? Do you think one view is correct?
- If you can view a work of art in great detail on a website—such as some of the works of the Prado that are visible using Google Earth—then would you still want to go to see it in a museum, where the crowds might keep you from getting very close?
- Can you think of examples of artworks created in new media: film, television, video, computer imagery, and gaming? Are such artworks inevitably driven more by commercial aims than by any creative desires of the artists?

Other books by Cynthia Freeland

Co-edited with Thomas Wartenberg, *Philosophy and Film*, (Routledge, 1997)

*Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle* (edited), (Penn State Press, 1998)

*The Naked and the Undead: Evil and the Appeal of Horror*, (Westview, 1999)

*Portraits and Persons*, (Oxford University Press, 2010)