

Why We Need Art

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Our society's concentration on *the useful*, a bench mark by which the university is increasingly measured, and our focus on finding solutions to what are believed to be our most pressing problems, can often make art seem not only useless but immoral. And whenever there's a crunch, artists are asked to defend themselves, or interpret their endeavors by the standard of utility. Art doesn't try to do everything for society, yet its purported uselessness is precisely its power, and why we will always seek it out. Here are some reasons for art:

- 1) It is there waiting for us when we've finished doing the merely necessary or useful.
- 2) It prevents us from thinking too well of ourselves.
- 3) It makes us aware of our imperfections, rather than trying to perfect us.
- 4) It reminds us that human nature cannot be mastered—that it is not a problem to be solved, but rather recognized.
- 5) It doesn't just reflect the world, but resists it and contradicts it—just like people do.
- 6) It doesn't generalize.
- 7) It is irreducible. It will still be here in spite of whatever is heaped on it by sociology, psychoanalysis, economics, ideology, and political or philosophical thought.
- 8) It resists systems of thought, and in so doing, stimulates and engenders the thought of others.
- 9) It pays attention to experience.
- 10) It possesses the ability to see where there is only darkness.
- 11) It restores risk, danger, particularity, anomalousness, and the disallowed—in other words, vitality and honesty—to the things we most care or worry about: love, living, death, sex, meaning, purpose, and sometimes even God.
- 12) It honors life by asking the questions one cannot shy away from if one is to live seriously.
- 13) It allows us to take a walk on a necessary bridge between dream and reality, between the conscious and unconscious, between sensibility and intelligence.
- 14) It embraces the radical incomprehensibility of the human being.
- 15) It apprehends man's actual situation, is not afraid to admit of the tragic or absurd or even senseless sense of life, and in spite of a million good reasons not to—including its own inutility—it participates in the creative forming of culture against the sometimes terrifying nature of existence.

ART IN ACADEMIA

In a world where the relevance of great works of art, indeed even the idea of greatness itself, is increasingly being questioned, students are well served by having access to actual artists, and by having the chance to *become one* in an encouraging and challenging university setting. Art programs in the university condescend neither to works of art nor the students, but rather bring them both into the same dialog.