



MACHE 2009 Annual Conference Friday Workshops

Workshop: The Role of "The Arts" in Society

Speaker: Frank Ludwig

Session: II **Time:** 1:30 p.m.

Below is further explanation of several terms and concepts important to an understanding of art and culture in modern society and throughout history. It is necessary to have some familiarity with these key terms in light of the energy expended by the artworld in the last 200 years to shape popular modern concept of art. What qualifies as art, what the public expects from art and the insulation from accountability that artists currently enjoy are the fruits of this concerted effort. If the Christian voice is to reassert itself in mainstream artistic practice it will require an effort that is equally energetic, calculated and disciplined as the effort which silenced it.

Definition of *ART*:

Ontological definition: What it is: *Art is an artist communicating an idea to an audience.* This is the definition I use in my classes and it serves very well as a basis for examining and understanding art in general and in regard to specific art forms.

Teleological definition: What Art does: Art as I see it serves two purposes that are equally important to consider if you are to understand art. The first purpose is that *art identifies and promotes that which is valued by a given culture.* The second is that *art provides a controllable aesthetic experience.* (see back for further explanation of aesthetic experience)

Definition of *SOCIETY*:

By society, I mean all individuals and cultural groups in voluntary and regular association; all individuals and groups participating in common intellectual and cultural activities and institutions. (see back for further explanation of culture)

How does *ART* function in *SOCIETY*?

Art, in all its various forms, represents the primary mechanism by which norms are established and consensus is built. Theology and philosophy no longer enjoy universal participation, areas of knowledge and manners only tend to reinforce or codify the established consensus.

Why *ART* matters:

Influence on behavior

Example: influence of pop music icons on fashion.

Influence on belief

Example: from Hamilton College Youth Polls. <http://www.hamilton.edu/news/polls/default.html>

Who are the artists?

The expectation for contemporary art is that it must stem from the individual artists personal view point. More than ever in the history of civilization the direction of art is dictated by the tastes and interests of the individual artist. Who the artist is, matters. Who is training the artist, matters even more. The audience has been trained to believe that this is the way it has always been and that this is the only way it can be.

Session II: “*The Role of ‘the Arts’ in Society*”

Definition of *CULTURE*:

What is *culture*? Culture is the totality of intellectual and creative pursuits. This definition is drawn from T.S. Eliot’s collected lectures on Christianity and Culture, where he explains the term in detail and identifies three senses in which the term *culture* might be used.

Divisions of Culture: Today the divisions of these pursuits coincide for the most part with the way we identify various academic disciplines. There are a number of valid ways to organize these pursuits but since I’m borrowing the idea from Mr. Eliot I may as well borrow his divisions as well.

Theology: what a culture believes

Knowledge: what a culture knows; this would include history and the sciences

Manners: how a culture behaves, this includes law as well as etiquette

Philosophy: what and how a culture thinks

The Arts: how a culture expresses what they believe, know, think and how they behave.

Sense of Culture: There are three different senses in which culture might be used in a discussion of art:

- **Culture of the individual:** Obviously no individual can exist in society without believing something (true or false), knowing something (right or wrong), thinking (clearly or muddled) and possessing manners (good or bad).
- **Culture of a group or sub group to which the individual belongs:** certain groups can be identified and even purposely form because of shared values and interests in one or more of the divisions of culture.
- **Culture of the society as a whole:** that which is generally characteristic of many or all of the various cultural groups or sub-groups.

Divisions of Art: today there are commonly drawn distinctions between different art forms and activities. Though these divisions are widely accepted I believe they all operate similarly in a societal context and can be understood as making a common contribution and what I am speaking about can equally be applied to all these divisions.

Fine Arts

Pop Arts

Applied Arts

Crafts

What is *AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE*?

Basically this refers to a pleasurable sensation and traditionally it includes an element of thought. The modern use of the term suggests that *any experience which combines in an inseparable way, physical sensation and intellectual activity* could be described as an aesthetic experience. This experience is regarded as an important element of artistic activities and objects but the aesthetic experience is obviously not exclusive to art. The actual word “aesthetic” was coined in relatively recent times but the concept has been discussed and debated from the earliest recorded philosophy.

Suggested Reading for a Christian perspective:

How Should We Then Live by Francis Schaefer

Notes Toward a Definition of Culture by T. S. Eliot

The Complete Works of Hans Rookmaaker, edited by **Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaaker**