



MACHE 2009 Annual Conference Saturday Workshops

Workshop: The Role of "the Arts" in Home School Education

Speaker: Frank Ludwig

Session: IV **Time:** 9:00 a.m.

Models of understanding art

Art as Communication

What is art?

Art is an artist communicating an idea to an audience. This definition serves very well as a basis for examining and understanding art in general or in regard to specific art forms. For any form you can begin to explore a work of art by asking the questions implied in the definition. Who is the artist? What is the means of communication? Who is the intended audience? What is the primary idea? And also what are the supporting ideas?

(discussion of art as analogous to language)

Art as Synthesis

What art does?

Art 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.* In accomplishing that purpose art illustrates the connections between the various divisions of cultural activity. The subject matter as well as the forms of art from any time period reflects the beliefs, knowledge and behavior, philosophy and theology of the culture that produced the art.

(see next page for further explanation of the divisions of culture)

Art as Skill

We paint pictures as much because we value the activity of painting as much or even more than because we value the painting itself. Many of the benefits are self evident though some have been undermined by contemporary views of art. Art is a great way to build skills; not only the skills directly related to artistic practice but also observation skills, analysis skills, motor skills and more. It also encourages creative thinking and attention to detail. Artists paint what they appreciate and their appreciation for the things they paint increases as they work.

(discussion of historic foundations and the "WOW" factor of art)

Art as Expression

The expression model of art is probably the most prevalent today. The concept is that all art is deeply personal and originates from the artist's experience, feelings and emotions. Many supporters of this model even go so far as to say that this is the primary if not the only valid purpose of art and that art must be created this way. While no artist leaves themselves out of their work, making it solely about the artist creates some interesting problems and encourages self indulgence.

(brief historic perspective provided)

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 or in regard to specific art forms. For any form you can begin to explore a work of art by asking the questions implied in the definition. Who is the artist? What is the means of communication? Who is the intended audience? What is the primary idea? And also what are the supporting ideas?

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.*

Definition of CULTURE

What is *culture*? Culture is defined as the totality of intellectual and creative pursuits. This definition is adapted from T.S. Eliot’s collected lectures on Christianity and Culture, where he defines the term itself 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. While there are a number of valid ways to organize these pursuits; the list below reflects Mr. Eliot’s divisions.

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

Culture of a group or sub group to which the individual belongs

Culture of the society as a whole

What is *aesthetic experience*? Basically this refers to a pleasurable sensation and traditionally 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.