

20th century Rwandan bottle. Artistic works may serve practical functions, in addition to their decorative value.

Few modern scholars have been more divided than Plato and Aristotle on the question concerning the importance of art, with Aristotle strongly supporting art in general

and Plato generally being opposed to its relative importance. Several dialogues in Plato tackle questions about art: Socrates says that poetry is inspired by the muses, and

is not rational. He speaks approvingly of this, and other forms of divine madness (drunkenness, eroticism, and dreaming) in the *Phaedrus* (265a,c), and yet in the

*Republic* wants to outlaw Homer's great poetic art, and laughter as well. In *Ion*, Socrates gives no hint of the disapproval of Homer that he expresses in the *Republic*. The

dialogue *Ion* suggests that Homer's *Iliad* functioned in the ancient Greek world as the Bible does today in the modern Christian world: as divinely inspired literary art that

can provide moral guidance, if only it can be properly interpreted. With regards to the literary art and the musical arts, Aristotle considered epic poetry, tragedy, comedy,

dithyrambic poetry and music to be mimetic or imitative art, each varying in imitation by medium, object, and manner.[12] For example, music imitates with the media of

rhythm and harmony, whereas dance imitates with rhythm alone, and poetry with language. The forms also differ in their object of imitation. Comedy, for instance, is a

dramatic imitation of men worse than average; whereas tragedy imitates men slightly better than average. Lastly, the forms differ in their manner of imitation, through

narrative or character, through change or no change, and through drama or no drama.[13] Aristotle believed that imitation is natural to mankind and constitutes one of mankind's advantages over animals.[14]

The second, and more recent, sense of the word art as an abbreviation for creative art or fine art emerged in the early 17th century.[15] Fine art refers to a skill used to express the artist's creativity, or to engage the audience's aesthetic sensibilities, or to draw the audience towards consideration of more refined or finer work of art.

Within this latter sense, the word art may refer to several things: (i) a study of a creative skill, (ii) a process of using the creative skill, (iii) a product of the creative skill, or (iv) the audience's experience with the creative skill. The creative arts (art as discipline) are a collection of disciplines which produce artworks (art as objects) that are compelled by a personal drive (art as activity) and convey a message, mood, or symbolism for the perceiver to interpret (art as experience). Art is something that stimulates an individual's thoughts, emotions, beliefs, or ideas through the senses. Works of art can be explicitly made for this purpose or interpreted on the basis of images or objects. For some scholars, such as Kant, the sciences and the arts could be distinguished by taking science as representing the domain of knowledge and the arts as representing the domain of the freedom of artistic expression.

Often, if the skill is being used in a common or practical way, people will consider it a craft instead of art. Likewise, if the skill is being used in a commercial or industrial way, it may be considered commercial art instead of fine art. On the other hand, crafts and design are sometimes considered applied art. Some art followers have argued that the difference between fine art and applied art has more to do with value judgments made about the art than any clear definitional difference. [16] However, even fine art often has goals beyond pure creativity and self expression. The purpose of works of art may be to communicate ideas, such as in politically, spiritually, or philosophically motivated art; to create a sense of beauty (see aesthetics); to explore the nature of perception; for pleasure; or to generate strong emotions. The purpose may also be seemingly nonexistent.

The nature of art has been described by philosopher Richard Wollheim as "one of the most elusive of the traditional problems of human culture".[17] Art has been defined as a vehicle for the expression or communication of emotions and ideas, a means for exploring and appreciating formal elements for their own sake, and as mimesis or representation. Art as mimesis has deep roots in the philosophy of Aristotle. [18] Leo Tolstoy identified art as a use of indirect means to communicate from one person to another.[18] Benedetto Croce and R.G. Collingwood advanced the idealist view that art expresses emotions, and that the work of art therefore essentially exists in the mind

of the creator.[19][20] The theory of art as form has its roots in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, and was developed in the early twentieth century by Roger Fry and Clive Bell. More recently, thinkers influenced by Martin Heidegger have interpreted art as the means by which a community develops for itself a medium for self expression and interpretation.[21] George Dickie has offered an institutional theory of art that defines a work of art as any artifact upon which a qualified person or persons acting on behalf of the social institution commonly referred to as "the art world" has conferred "the status of candidate for appreciation".[22] Larry Shiner has described fine art as "not an essence or a fate but something we have made. Art as we have generally understood it is a European invention barely two hundred years old. [23] Sculptures, cave paintings, rock paintings and petroglyphs from the Upper Paleolithic dating to roughly 40,000 years ago have been found,[24] but the precise meaning of such art is often disputed because so little is known about the cultures that produced them. The oldest art objects in the world,a series of tiny, drilled snail shells about 75,000 years old,were discovered in a South African cave.[25] Containers that may have been used to hold paints have been found dating as far back as 100,000 years.[26] Etched shells by Homo erectus from 430,000 and 540,000 years ago were discovered in 2014.[27]

Cave painting of a horse from the Lascaux caves, circa 16,000 BP

Many great traditions in art have a foundation in the art of one of the great ancient civilizations: Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, China, Ancient Greece, Rome, as well as Inca, Maya, and Olmec. Each of these centers of early civilization developed a unique and characteristic style in its art. Because of the size and duration of these civilizations, more of their art works have survived and more of their influence has been transmitted to other cultures and later times. Some also have provided the first records of how artists worked. For example, this period of Greek art saw a veneration of the human physical form and the development of equivalent skills to show musculature, poise, beauty, and anatomically correct proportions.

In Byzantine and Medieval art of the Western Middle Ages, much art focused on the expression of subjects about Biblical and religious culture, and used styles that showed the higher glory of a heavenly world, such as the use of gold in the background of paintings, or glass in mosaics or windows, which also presented figures in idealized, patterned (flat) forms. Nevertheless, a classical realist tradition persisted in small Byzantine works, and realism steadily grew in the art of Catholic Europe.

Renaissance art had a greatly increased emphasis on the realistic depiction of the material world, and the place of humans in it, reflected in the corporeality of the human body, and development of a systematic method of graphical perspective to depict recession in a three dimensional picture space.

The stylized signature of Sultan Mahmud II of the Ottoman Empire was written in Islamic calligraphy. It reads Mahmud Khan son of Abdulhamid is forever victorious.