

# Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art

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Ontology of Art



# In this lecture...

- ONTOLOGY is the philosophical discipline that studies what entities and kinds of entities exist.
- Artworks are likely to be ontologically varied, in that several different ontological categories are involved in their categorization.
- Two useful distinctions: SINGULAR vs. MULTIPLE artworks, and AUTOGRAPHIC vs. ALLOGRAPHIC artworks.
- The concept of ONTOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISM: an artwork's identifying properties are tied to its context of production.



# The ontological variety of art

- \* *Where is Leonardo's Mona Lisa?*
- \* *Where is Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony?*
- Questions like these can be used to get a sense of the ontological variety of artworks.
- Some have attempted to find a unitary ontological category that applies to all artworks (ontological MONISM).
- However, most philosophers accept that artworks in different art forms differ in their ontological status (ontological PLURALISM).
- \* *Which artworks are physical objects? Which ones aren't?*



# Singular vs. multiple

- Some artworks are SINGULAR. There is only one object that counts as that art work

EXAMPLE: There only one object in the world that is Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*.

- Other artworks are multiple. Several objects may be correctly considered instances of that artwork.

EXAMPLE: There are several existing copies of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*.

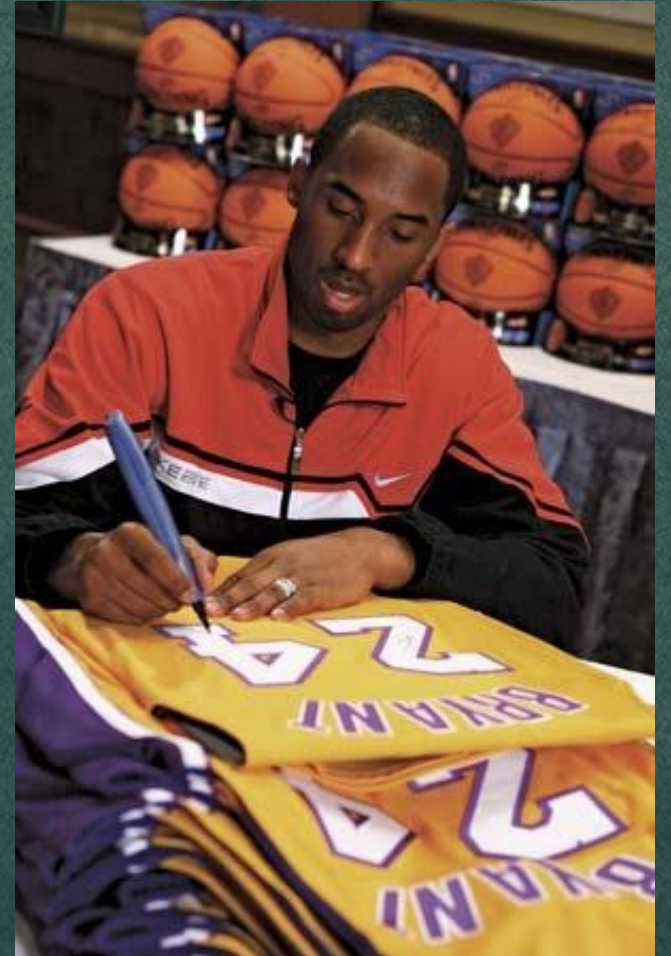
NOTE: The SINGULAR/MULTIPLE claim could be made of an *art form*. In this case, the claim is that all works belonging to that art form are SINGULAR/MULTIPLE.

EXAMPLE: Painting is ontologically singular.



# Autographic vs. allographic

- The philosopher Nelson Goodman (1906-1998) developed a distinction between AUTOGRAPHIC and ALLOGRAPHIC artworks/art forms.
- A work is autographic whenever its HISTORY OF PRODUCTION is relevant to the work's identity.
- HISTORY OF PRODUCTION is the past history of an object: when and where it was made, how, by whom, and what happened to it ever since.

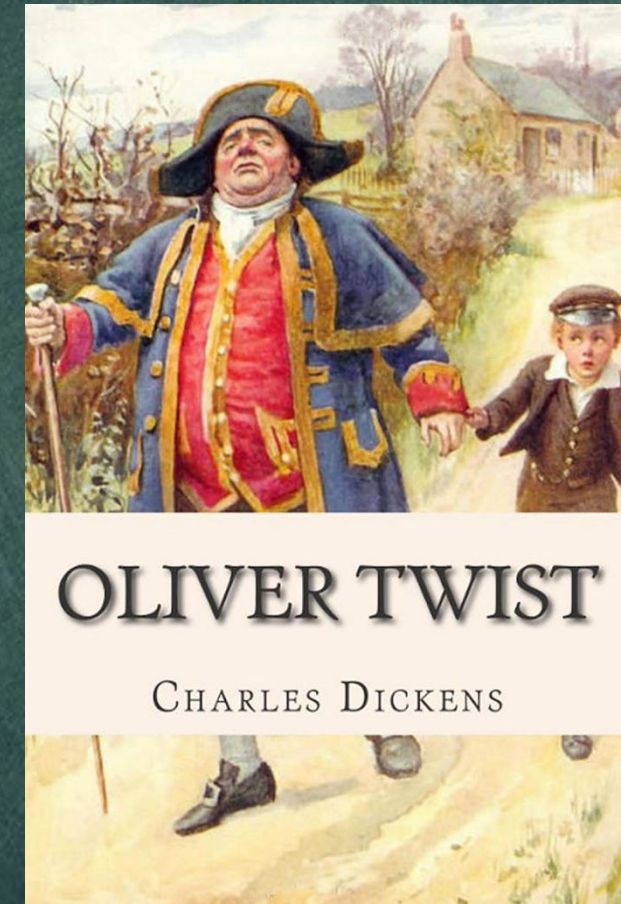
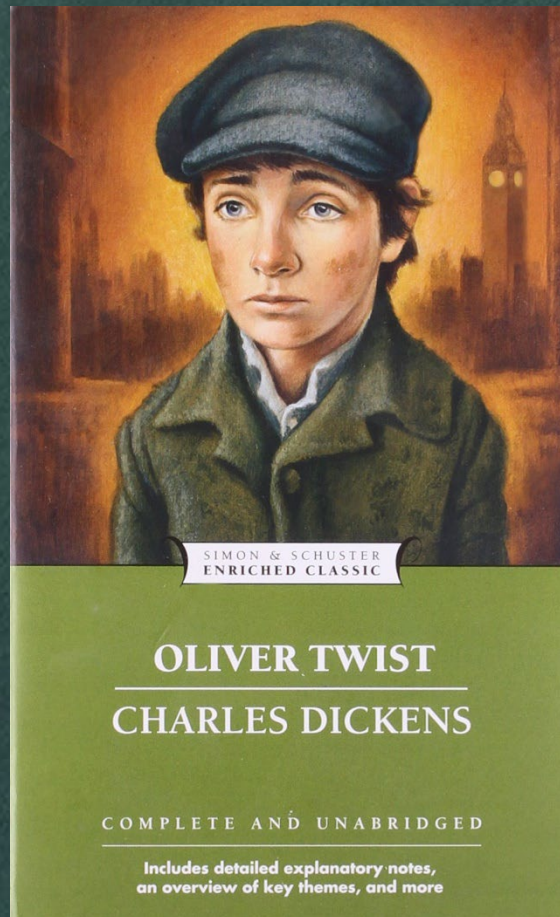






AUTOGRAPHIC ART. "The only way of ascertaining that the *Lucretia* before us is genuine is thus to establish the historical fact that it is the actual object made by Rembrandt. Accordingly, physical identification of the product of the artist's hand, and consequently the conception of forgery of a particular work, assume a significance in painting that they do not have in literature." (Goodman 1968, 116)





ALLOGRAPHIC ART. Different copies of a work of literature count as the same work, provided that the text they contain is the same.



AUTOGRAPHIC

Painting

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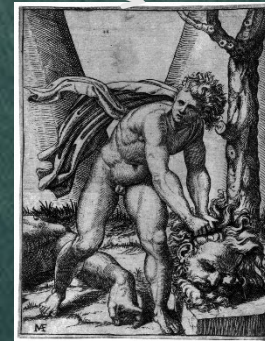
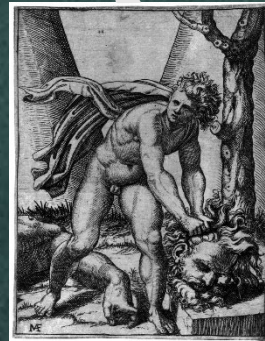
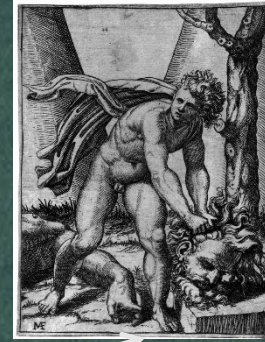
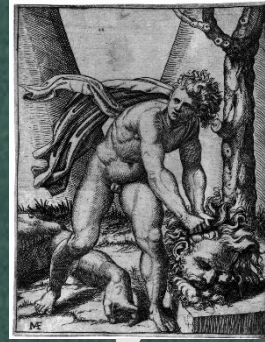
ALLOGRAPHIC

Literature

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1. How would you classify literature, sculpture, architecture, dance?
2. Painting is autographic and *singular*. Can you think of an autographic *multiple* art form?





MULTIPLE AUTOGRAPHIC ART. From a plate, various impressions are produced. An impression counts as original (authentic) only if it is produced from the original plate.



## CONCERTO No. 2

in E major, S. 1042  
for Violin and Piano\*

*Edited by IVAN GALAMIAN*

**VIOLIN**

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH  
(1685-1750)

**Allegro.**

*Tutti*



performance 1

performance 2

performance 3

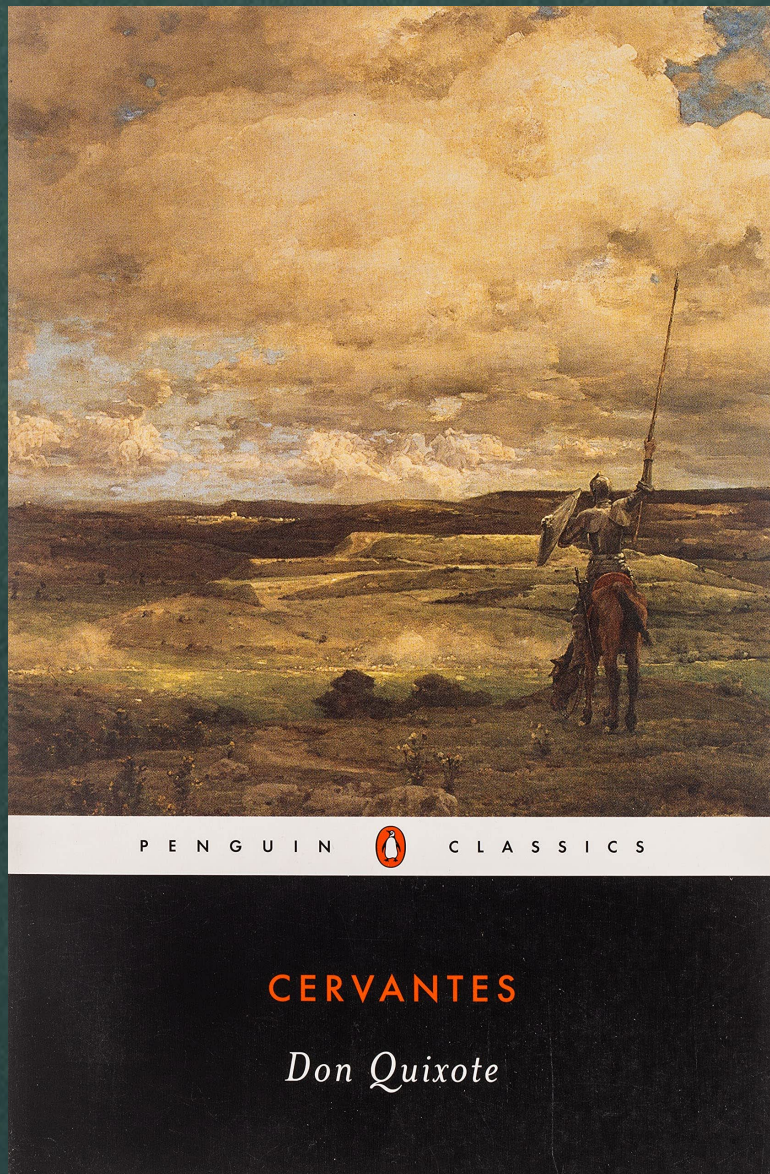


# Allographic arts and notation

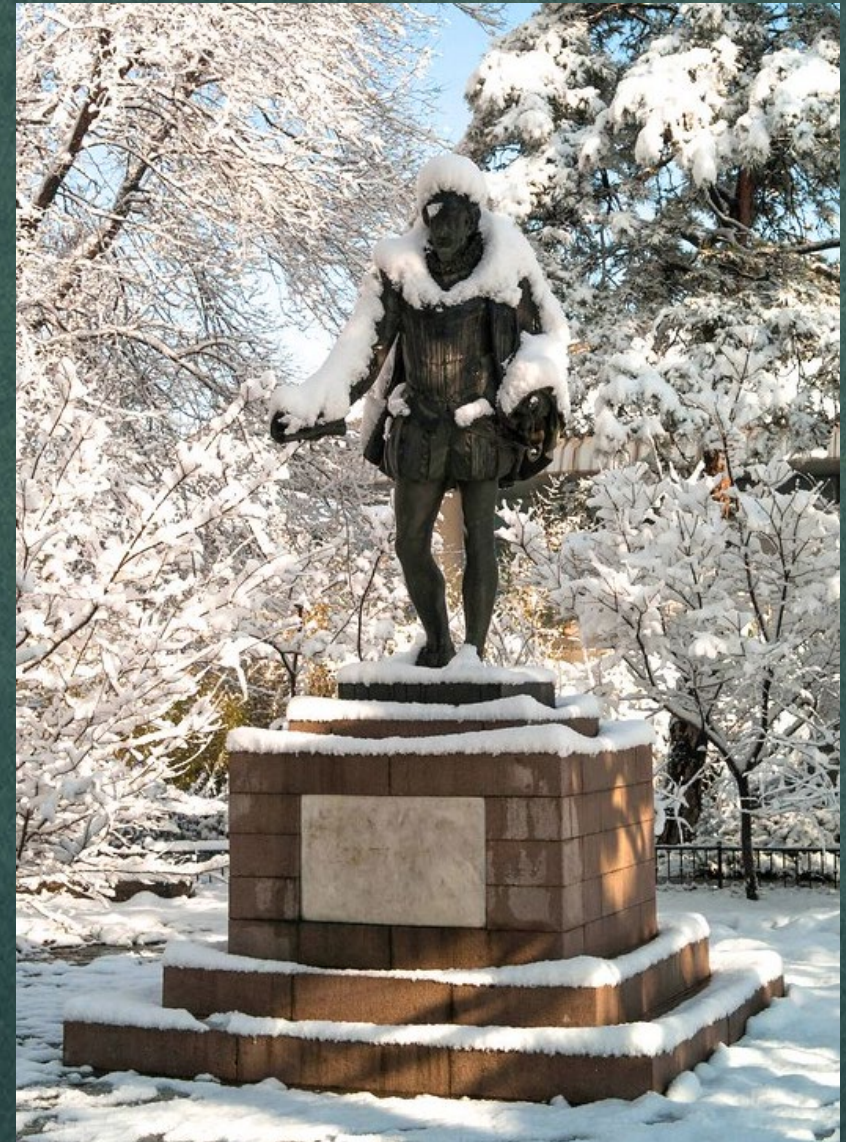
- Identity of autographic works depends on history of production.
- Identity of allographic works depends on specifiable properties that an object needs to possess to count as that work. The instructions that specify these properties are a work's NOTATION (notes and other elements of a score, words of a text, etc.).







*Don Quixote* (first published in 1605-1615)



Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616)



"It is a revelation to compare Menard's Don Quixote with Cervantes'. The latter, for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

Written in the seventeenth century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

History, the mother of truth: the idea is astounding. Menard, a contemporary of William James, does not define history as an inquiry into reality but as its origin. Historical truth, for him, is not what has happened; it is what we judge to have happened. The final phrases – exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor – are brazenly pragmatic.

The contrast in style is also vivid. The archaic style of Menard—quite foreign, after all – suffers from a certain affectation. Not so that of his forerunner, who handles with ease the current Spanish of his time."

(J. L. Borges, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*)



# Ontological contextualism

- ONTOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISM is the holds that “an artwork’s identity and contents are generated in part by the relations it holds to aspects of the socio-historical setting in which it was created” (Davies 2006, 81).

EXAMPLE: Menard’s *Quixote* and Cervantes’s *Quixote*. Notationally (structurally) identical (same sequence of words), but: different properties because of different context of creation.