BELL, Clive (September 16, 1881, Berkshire—September 18, 1964, London)

Clive Bell was an art critic who belonged to the intellectual coterie in London known as the Bloomsbury Group. He shared a strong commitment to the arts with Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Lytton Strachey, and John Maynard Keynes, among others in the Group. Bell married artist Vanessa Stephen, elder sister of Virginia Woolf. The couple had two sons; however, the marriage was open, and they both had extramarital liaisons. While a student at Cambridge, Bell learned much from moral philosopher G.E. Moore, who proposed that something could add value as part of a more complex whole. For instance, knowledge could add value to aesthetic appreciation. In *Art* (1914), Bell articulates his theory of significant form. He aimed to show that there are properties shared by artworks across all media, and he argued that pictorial representation is therefore irrelevant to aesthetic value. In the visual arts, the relationship among a work’s lines, colors, and shapes (its form) can move spectators aesthetically and constitutes its significance. A work can be classified as art only when its form produces an aesthetic emotion, akin to ecstasy, in the audience. Bell believed that only those gifted with heightened sensibility can experience aesthetic emotion, and the art critic helps others see the significant form of individual works of art.

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