

Philosophy of Art

taste, value and aesthetic judgement



Rembrandt: "Anatomy Lesson", 1632

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Philosophical questions about art



What is art anyway? All cultures have some form of artistic production but what is its function? Philosophers seek a theoretical understanding of art.



Are some art works better than others, or is the value of art strictly a matter of personal taste? Philosophers are interested in exploring the nature and validity of aesthetic judgment.



What is the nature of creativity in the arts? What's the relation between novelty and tradition, individuality and collaboration in the arts?

Art as Representation

Art is first of all a representation -- it captures some aspect of the artist's experience of reality and presents it in a particular medium.

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What do we represent in art and why do we do this?

Art as Representation



Lascaux caves, prehistory

The oldest surviving art dates back more than 20,000 years. The caves of Lascaux, France are filled with depictions of animals and their human hunters.

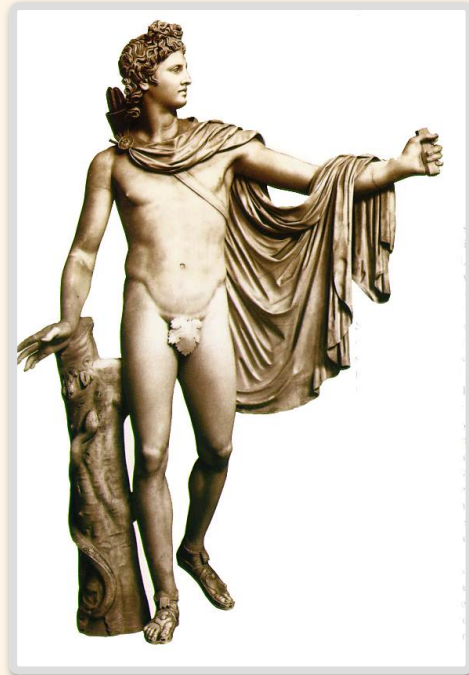
Art as Representation



Lascaux caves, prehistory

These representations seem to have had a ritual function, depicting human needs and desires as much as they depicted elements of the world of the artists.

Art as Representation



Apollo of Belvedere, 3rd century BCE

The Ancient Greeks depicted their gods in idealized human form, representing their vision of both divine and human perfection.

Art as Representation



Caryatids: Temple of Athena in Athens, 5th century BCE

Even the structural elements of architecture were used as ways of representing the humanistic ideals of ancient Athens.

Art as Representation



Roman mosaic from Pompeii: "Plato's Academy", 1st century

The Romans decorated their houses and palaces with depictions of Greek philosophers and heroes. This is ironic since Plato thought of art as a distraction from the quest for the truth about things.

Art as Representation



Raphael: The School of Athens, 1511

Artists of the Renaissance adopted the humanistic ideals of Greece and sought to represent them directly and realistically.

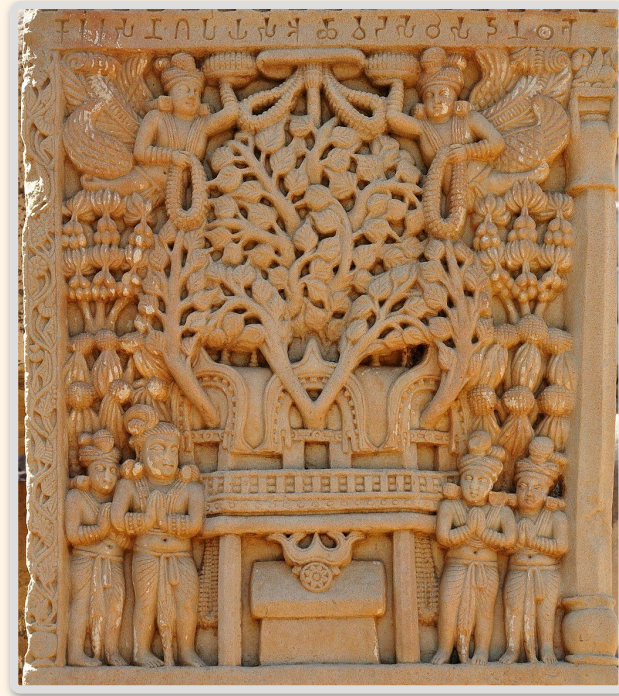
Art as Representation



Giotto: "The Lamentation", 1305

Artistic representation of religious stories and themes played a major role in religious devotion, especially in Catholicism.

Art as Representation



Temple at Bodhi Gaya, 3rd century BCE

Early Buddhism intentionally omitted representations of the Buddha -- the founder of the tradition, but instead depicted the location of important events.

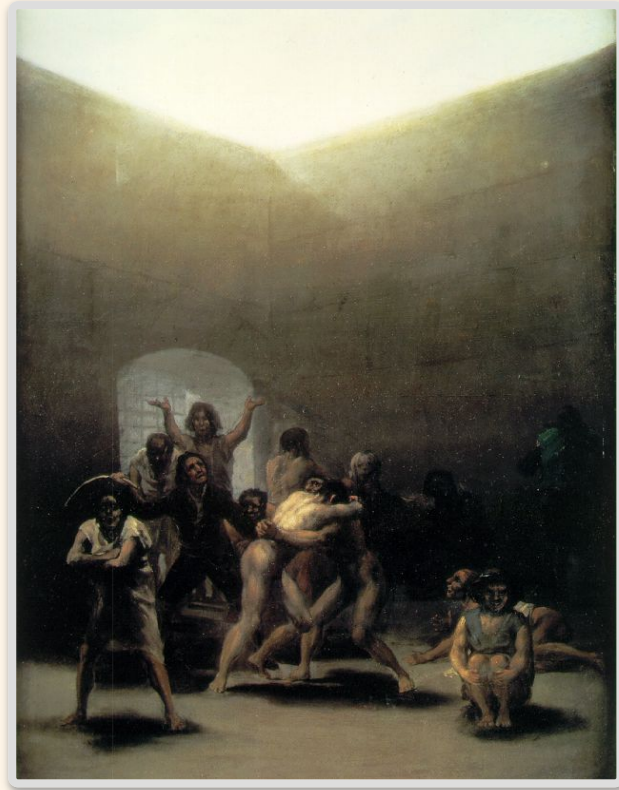
Art as Representation



Japanese Buddhist sculptures, Kyoto

That changed of course and Buddhism is known for its countless depictions of the Buddha seated in meditation.

Art as Representation



Francisco Goya: "The Lunatic Asylum", 1813

Some artists have used the representational power of art to show us things we wouldn't otherwise see.

Art as Representation



Francisco Goya: "The 3rd of May 1808", 1814

Francisco Goya

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