

Art History vs. Art Appreciation

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the difference between art history and art appreciation. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Purpose of Art Appreciation
2. Purpose of Art History

1. Purpose of Art Appreciation

Art appreciation is the process of applying basic tools of visual literacy to understand and appreciate works of art. The advantage to this approach is that a person or art appreciator can understand something about the work of art while understanding very little, or maybe nothing at all, about its history.

IN CONTEXT

As an art appreciator, you could look at a picture like this piece of cover art from the *Book of Kells*:



Monks of St. Columba's order of Iona, Scotland

Book of Kells, cover

Dublin, Ireland

c. 800

Ink and paint on vellum

Being an art appreciator, you could use different concepts to understand and appreciate this work of art, such as:

- Composition
- Knowledge of color
- Geometry

The disadvantage to this approach is that you'd lose a broader sense of meaning associated with the work of art. What ends up happening is that the work of art sort of stands alone without context.

Thus, when evaluating a piece of art strictly through art appreciation, you get the sense that the work, while it can be appreciated, is really standing alone. The meaning or story behind the work of art is completely lost unless you're able to expand upon what's represented by fitting it into a broader social context.



TERM TO KNOW

Art Appreciation

The application of basic tools of visual literacy in order to understand and appreciate works of art.

2. Purpose of Art History

Art history, as you know, is the academic study of the history and development of the visual arts; its purpose is to place art in a social and historical context. This approach ultimately has the advantage over art appreciation when evaluating works of art, because the more information you have, the better an evaluation you can make.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** If you had more context when looking at something such as that piece of cover art from the *Book of Kells*, you could better understand the story behind that particular work of art.

Thus, if you can take a look at art and fit it within a broader social context using art history, you can see how things such as war, religion, politics, and changes in technology have had an effect on not only the artist, but on the artwork that was produced as well.

Another aspect that distinguishes art history from art appreciation is research and the use of primary sources, which might include religious texts, interviews with or essays written by the artist, or newspaper articles published at the time the work was made. Art historians and other scholars work hard to avoid introducing their own personal biases and making assumptions about the meaning of works of art produced in other times and places.



TERM TO KNOW

Art History

The academic study of the history and development of the visual arts.



SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned that there is a difference between art appreciation and art history. While the **purpose of art appreciation** is to apply the basic tools of visual literacy in order to understand and appreciate works of art, the approach does not include the understanding of the works' larger context.

On the other hand, the **purpose of art history** is to learn the history and development of visual art in order to understand it as part of a larger social and historical context. This approach ultimately has the advantage over art appreciation when evaluating works of art, because the more information you have, the better your evaluation will be.

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