**Alexa Baldon**

267-679-5551

alnbaldon@gmail.com

I, Alexa Baldon, am a sophomore at 21st Century Cyber Charter School. I live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I row with the crew team Philadelphia City Rowing, a sport that focuses on mental fortitude and development. I enjoy reading books on topics such as botany, philosophy, and social sciences. My favorite historical figures include Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, especially because of their relevance to my area.

**Mike Mistaken**

Around us always, is art. From the doodles of a student to the masterpieces of Bosch’s triptychs**.** Our ears are blessed with the art of music, our eyes with paintings, film, architecture and dance. People major in the arts, and study the intricate meaning of each masterpiece. Yet, we find it so hard to pin down a definition as to what it is that makes something art as we know it. We have yet to find a widely accepted definition that works for the art of today, the past, and will hold for the future.

In this situation, we face Mike’s skepticism about the definition and classification of art. The age-old inquiry, “What is art?” has always sparked a debate. Standard answers such as basing art on what is beautiful, or expressive can be too vague. Is every beautiful tree art, because it is aesthetically pleasing? Is a verbal confrontation art, because it is expressive and given life through words? Other definitions, such as those that have multiple requirements, like Mike’s definition, are too narrow. It excludes the modern art that many people accept. Others, still, argue that art shouldn’t be defined because that would limit it; as art is an abstract concept, it should be relative. However, if art were without definition, it could not exist. Sarah and Mike have differing views on art. Sarah’s idea relies wholly on others’ opinions. The most important factor for her throughout the situation is the judgement of those who she believes know better. If others have decided that the works present were art, they must be. This definition is very obscure. It takes the burden off of Sarah to define art, but does not help answer the question, so I will put my focus elsewhere. Consider the new question it reveals though: can one person’s opinion disprove or prove that something is art?

Let us take in Mike’s understanding of art. Mike appears to believe in a list of attributes that, when all are fulfilled, make a piece “art”. He believes that:

1. Art must be created by a single artist.
2. Art must be made using skill.
3. Art must be beautiful.
4. One person’s disbelief (himself, in this situation) in something’s being art revokes it of the title.

This set of attributes puts forth a definition that is reminiscent of Gaut’s cluster theory (Pappas). Gaut put forth a list of qualities that define something as art. These qualities are not sufficient individually, but they are not all required either. A set of some of the attributes is sufficient, and so is satisfying all of them. Though, unlike Gaut, Mike believes all things on this list must be fulfilled. We can see this in his reaction to LeWitt. It had met appeared to his standards before, but once he found that it was not created solely but LeWitt, but by his instruction and others' hands, it was no longer art.

Why is this so? Many murals, such as those created by the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program,are not only created by multiple artists and helpers. These people can be volunteers, children, and those who are hospitalized. These murals are generally accepted as art by the people in the city, and those who run the program. But, by Mike’s requirement that one person’s disbelief revokes something of being art, and that art must be made by a single artist, these works are not art.

By his second requirement, skill, the creations of anyone who is not a “master” are not art. Schools should alter the names of their classes from “Art Class” to “Drawing, Painting, and Media Class”, because under Mike’s ideas, their statement is incorrect. Mike, who goes to art class, should not accept the earlier portions of his own work as art. He should not think of his class as art class, because he is still a student of media without the utmost skill. This idea of skill being a requirement to make art is sanctimonious. It would be rare to hear someone call a piece of prose invalid because the writer had never tried to write that way before. Vincent Van Gogh is a famous artist who is now used in lesson plans for art.In Ever Yours: The Essential Letters, in one of his correspondences with his brother Theo**,** the now highly prized artist, described himself as grateful he was never taught to paint (Gogh). He was never taught to paint, which might lessen his amount of skill. If he hadn’t been taught, the art he made is something anyone could do, in theory, as well.

The last point I shall argue against that Mike makes is that all art should be beautiful. First we must ask: what is beauty? Beauty, according to the teaching of Plato is a Form, an ideal (Clowney). Everything we call beautiful in nature is simply an imitation of true Beauty, as it doesn’t last. Since art is ‘beautiful’ it is actually an imitation of beauty. It is never truly beautiful. If no art, and nothing we can see, is truly beautiful, Mike’s definition of art cannot include even pieces such as those by Monet.

Lastly, he believes that if he doesn’t think something is art, it must not be art. This varies from Sarah’s opinion that it might still be art even if she is unsure. We can see that Mike’s definition of art is flawed, and is too narrow to include any type of art at all. What definition can encompass all art, past, present, and future, then? The word art comes from the word ars or artem, from Latin. It means a skill or business. Art, by definition of Giorgio Varsari and Platois an imitation of reality, which is an imitation of what is genuine (Varsari, Clowney). Since Beauty is an idea, we can think of art more generally as the following: It is not a true abstract idea, but it is a work that strives to be a copy of it. This definition includes realism, wherein for example a portrait may be drawn, painted, or sculpted. A portrait is not its subject, but it is an imitation of the subject, thus producing an idea in the mind of the viewer of the subject. A picture of something beautiful is not Beauty, but it is the essence of mimicry. “The Art of…” is a common phrase followed by any craft or action, and typically means the nature or spirit of that craft or action. Calling art an imitation of the abstract also includes more modern art. Abstracts that try to capture feelings, emotion, and the quintessence of a scene all fall under imitation. Even the paintings of Jackson Pollockare created from his interpretation of harmony (Emmerling).

This idea of art for the most part solves the issue of functionality. Functional objects are not necessarily imitations of ideas, but rather tools. They have utility, and are not made to, or perceived as imitations of ideas. Thus, they are not art. A plain wrench is not likely art. Architecture, on the other hand, may be an ordinary building. It may also be an imitation of Beauty, harmony, chaos, or any other idea, joined with utility. All artworks, though, are progeny of an abstract idea. Though we are not aware of it, the arrangement of sticks, the video of a person in a chair both have the possibility of being art.

While this definition completes the job of including entities that are considered art, one may argue that it is too inclusive. Should design and advertisements be considered art? They are meant to elicit positive ideas of a company. They produce money, though, and can be considered manipulative. Rhetoric, the art of persuasion and word usage, is considered by Aristotle to be art (Aristotle, p. 3).

If this is true, then it again brings us to a new question. For if all of these things are art, then why are people, such as Mike and Sarah, adverse to these forms of art? What if, though, it is not that the art the two are unsure of is non-art, but rather art that fails to evoke an idea in their minds? This art would still be art, but its ineffective nature causes one to believe it is not so. It is possible that many things are art, but are not believed to be so. Art’s possible existence is less variable than its possible effectiveness. Ineffective art can be perceived to be non-art, and thus would explain lack of belief. Effectiveness of one’s art can be increased just like with any other type of work. Practice tends to increase effectiveness, as does further explanation, research, and observation. If the art is not taken as what it imitates, such as the beauty of LeWitt’s composition being diminished by Mike’s knowledge that it is not what he thought it was, effectiveness is decreased. This applies in a similar way to how in a hypothetical situation an adult may view a child’s composition of a fish. To the child, belief that it is just like a fish makes it easily understood as art to him. To the adult, who may see the fish as nothing but a triangle and a haphazard oval, the imitation does not evoke the idea. It is still an imitation, but it is ineffective. Therefore, it may be believed to not be art.

Mike and Sarah must consider the importance of their own viewpoint on what counts as art. Mike’s own definition of art denounces even the possibility of him being involved in an art class. So in conclusion, we return now to the original question: How do we define art or determine what things count as art objects? It is important to note the “or” in this question. It differentiates what is art and what is perceived as art, which is essential to this explanation of art. Art is an imitation of an idea, an abstract concept such as Beauty or harmony. Art is not always believed to be art. The trait that causes it to be misconstrued is its effectiveness. A great multitude of objects can be considered art, it is simply our belief of which is good enough and true enough, rather than its nonexistence, that halts us from embracing all art there is to appreciate.

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