

## Art of the Beautiful

*(Concept of Beauty applied to Art)*

Something is beautiful if it has all the perfections proper to its nature. This formal notion of beauty essentially means that the object possesses completeness, harmony and clarity. All these intrinsic properties make it pleasing to behold. When it is perceived by the intellect or senses, the beautiful causes a certain joy in the will or in the sensible appetites just by the mere fact of

being perceived. But, beauty is not the act of perception by the cognitive powers nor the pleasure produced in the appetitive faculties; it is neither a mental category nor a modification of the appetites. It is rather a property inherent in the object and absolutely independent from any mind or appetite that contemplates it.

These in summary are our findings during the last three articles wherein our inquiry gave a special focus on the subject matter of beauty. How are these aesthetic ideas applied to art?

### Beauty of an Artwork

As previously determined, art can be placed under three different categories depending on which aspect of the art creation is given emphasis on: ability, action or product. But since here the effect hasgnoseological priority over the cause, we concluded that art must refer principally to the result of the artistic process and secondarily to the transient action and special ability that gave rise to it. We emphasized, however, that for this product to be called art it must be beautiful. Beauty belongs to the essence of art; art without beauty is not art. It is on this concept of art as an aesthetic product that we are going to apply our most recent findings on beauty.

If art is a beautiful man-made object and beauty is what we have previously explained it to be, then the following should be true: a) **Art is a man-made product that is pleasing to behold.** b) **Art is any man-made product characterized by harmony, completeness and clarity.** c) **Art is a man-made product that possesses all the perfections proper to its nature.**

The first statement, "Art is a man-made product that is pleasing to behold," attributes to art the proper effect of beauty. It is self-explanatory. However, the word, *behold*, needs a little bit of translating when applied to the different art forms. To behold means to know and to know could refer to any of the different modes of sensible and intellectual knowledge. For the visual arts, for instance, to behold an art object primarily means **to look** at it. Thus, no matter how

simplistic this may sound, in the field of visual arts, a man-made product can be considered art in the strict sense of the word only if it meets the most basic condition that it is pleasant **to look at with the eyes**. For auditory or acoustic arts, to behold means primarily **to listen**. An aural work or creation is beautiful and, therefore, artistic, if the act of listening to it causes a certain degree of pleasure in the listener. For audio-visual arts such as cinema, theater, dancing and music videos, to know means both **to look and to listen**. Any work of this type must satisfy both visually and aurally. For culinary art, to behold means primarily **to taste**. Any dish that does not only appease hunger but also delights the heart is beautiful. For literature, to behold is mainly **to understand** or to grasp with the intellect. A



### Unfinished Business

*(Oil on Canvas, 60 cm x 50 cm)*

*I just finished applying the second layer of paint to this portrait when the ultrasound test on Carol revealed that our first baby would be a boy. For about four months before, I harbored the thought of having a baby girl named Maria Shania. Shania Twain's life story simply moves me. In anticipation of such eventuality, I started this painting modeled after Shania's picture in her DVD album. But, Josemaria came out instead and for one reason or another I never got to finish this painting which requires at least two more layers. Finishing this will be first in my agenda once Josemaria starts operating on his own or, maybe, just maybe, once a daughter comes along, whichever comes first.*

literary work, which satisfies the will and perhaps even the sensible appetites when apprehended intellectually, has all the rights to be categorized as art. For all the other fields of human production, to behold has different meanings which have to be considered when determining what is beautiful and what is art. But, in general, **any man-made object that causes a degree of joy or happiness in the appetitive faculties upon its perception by the cognitive powers may be considered beautiful and, therefore, may be called art.** This is subject, of course, to the condition that the appetites and knowing faculties are in their proper dispositions to receive such aesthetic properties.

The second statement, "Art is any man-made product characterized by harmony, completeness and clarity," ascribes to art the basic external manifestations of beauty. A human work must possess these three properties though in varying proportions. **Harmony**, which means unity in diversity, is a property that

emotions. **Integrity** is an aesthetic property that prevails mostly in works where being whole is of the essence. Songs must have an introduction, a couple of stanzas and a refrain repeated at least twice, and an ending for them to stand a chance of being played in the radio. A song with only a refrain in it, no matter how beautiful this refrain could be, is incomplete and cannot be classified as a beautiful song. Buildings also have basic requirements - roofs, windows, walls, doors, floors, etc. - that obviously must all be present. Short stories, novels, culinary dishes and others are works that must have integrity as requirement for beauty. **Clarity** is a property that takes priority in works where faithful transmission of data is of absolute importance. Clear enunciation of words is necessary in speeches, declamations and other types of recitations. Clarity of ideas and presentation of ideas is vital in literature, especially in theses and essays. More examples can be cited for each of these properties if we want to. But we must stress the fact that these three properties do not occur individually in the aesthetic



**Riverside**

(Oil on Canvas, 50 cm x 60 cm)

*This scenery is a concoction of mine although I tried to make it appear Dutch by putting the windmill in it. This was just an exercise in color balance and unity. One can easily notice that the color scheme of the house is the same as those of the boat, the pedestal, the shrubs and the ducks. Also, the statues balance each other.*

product but as a group even though one property may be more prominent than the others depending on the type of work they are materialized in. **Any human work possessing these three aesthetic properties may be said to be beautiful and therefore a thing of art.** The greater the degree of harmony, integrity and clarity the more beautiful and the greater art it is.

The third statement, "Art is a man-made product that possesses all the perfections proper to its nature," applies to art the formal definition of beauty. Concretizing this general assertion in each field of art should be straightforward. A sculpture is art if it possesses all the perfections proper to the essence of a sculpture. An edifice is art if it has all the essential properties required by the nature of a building. In literature, the nature of a short story demands that this literary form should have a beginning, some suspenseful in-betweens, a climax and an ending. When any of these basic perfections is missing

predominates more among works of art where composition or design is essential. In music, for instance, the arrangement of the notes and harmonization of the different types of sounds clearly spell the difference between melody and noise. Harmony is likewise the most important element in interior design where diverse objects like sofas, curtains, paintings, tables, chairs, etc. have to be put together in such way that a cozy atmosphere is created. Poetry consists in putting together words following a certain pattern or form in order to express one's ideas and

the story cannot be art. A song is art not only if it is a good composition but also if it is performed flawlessly by a capable singer with an equally perfect instrumental accompaniment. In short, **any work emanating from man's exercise of his talents or special abilities is said to be beautiful and is thus considered art if it possesses all the perfections corresponding to its nature.**

There seems to be no problem in applying to art this formal definition of beauty. But, this is true only as long as we



### Blue Vase and Fruits

(Oil on Canvas, 60 cm x 80 cm)

*A friend of ours in Germany wanted to buy a painting very similar to this as a gift to her husband on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Unfortunately, Carol had already declared ownership over it so this copy had to be made. But, I made some substantial changes. The fruits were rearranged, the white drapes got different folds, the birthday celebrant's favorite glass of beer was added and the names of the couple were sort of embroidered all over the rug. As a final touch, I added a birthday card with some dedications on it.*

remain at the level of general ideas. The picture changes, however, when we go down to specifics. It is so easy to say, for instance, that a dance is art if it possesses all the perfections proper to the essence of a dance. But what exactly is the essence of a dance and what exactly are the perfections flowing from it? The same questions can be asked of a sculpture, a musical piece, an architectural building, a chef's creation, a wardrobe, a literary work, or a painting. Answering these questions requires immersing ourselves in each of these art forms, making a detailed study of their proper objects and methods and eventually separating the essentials from the accidentals. Unfortunately, we do not have the chance to do this here because such inquiry demands a long period of time. Determining the nature of painting and the perfections proper to a painting already took us a year and a half and we are just starting.

The scenario gets more complicated if we bear in mind that an artwork is a man-made product and, therefore, its nature or essence is also dependent on him. If so, it is man who determines what perfections should belong to the nature of his product. This seems to be the case with human inventions which never existed before like a DVD or MP3 player. The implication would be that, even though the beauty of a natural thing is something intrinsic to it, the beauty of an artwork, on the other hand, is something created by the intellect or by taste, which would be in absolute contradiction to the idea we have been trying to affirm all the while that beauty is an objective quality of things. I just stumbled upon this conceptual complication as I try to close this article and I

have run out of time to really give it a serious thought, let alone a serious judgment. But, I will certainly deal with it in the future. (Your thoughts on this would surely be appreciated.) All we can do right now is to state some truths which can serve as guidelines in our effort to grapple with this difficulty. First, man is never the complete cause of his creations. He may be the cause of their *becoming* but never of their *being*. Thus, it is inaccurate to say that he causes the essence or nature of his products. Second, the nature of an artificial object is largely determined by its objective purpose or final end. The form of a knife or the structure of a car is dependent on the basic function they have to carry. In designing his product, therefore, man cannot ignore this objective purpose and must work in conjunction with it and not independent from it. His arbitrariness can only be applied on the inessentials.

Third, even if man is the principal cause of his products, their beauty is still an objective quality that inheres in them and not in man. Finally, the greatest perfection anything can have, be it natural or artificial, consists in it achieving its basic purpose. This final end and the consecution of this end are largely independent from man.

### Reaffirming the Obvious

Anything made by man may be called art in the most general sense of the word by the mere fact that it is made by man. But, in the formal sense, a man-made product is art only if it embodies all the properties of beauty: it must be pleasing to behold; it must be characterized by harmony, integrity and clarity; it must possess all the perfections proper to its nature. Art is always art of the beautiful.

Our conclusions are not spectacular assertions but belong rather to the category of common knowledge. We seemed to have gone through such length in order to prove what is obvious. This is quite true but we have to bear in mind that the philosophy on which the whole of modern art is based consists in stubbornly denying what is evident. Thus, there is a need to reaffirm the obvious and to show that it is never contrary to reason. Truth seldom goes against common sense.

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