

# STUDY UNIT 3

## AESTHETICS

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** In Study Unit 3 we will explain the meaning of aesthetics and develop your thinking about how you view art. We will consider if art needs to be beautiful and look at the differences between art, craft and design. There are 3 exercises to help you consider these points and 1 assignment which is a practice one and not to be sent not your tutor. The study unit concludes with a sample answer to the assignment.

This term was originally applied by the philosophers in Ancient Greece in an almost parallel sense to the word 'beauty'. It was taken up by later philosophers to extend this beyond a notion of superficial appearance or mere prettiness to include a wider range of experiences. These relate to the way that we regard objects that we enjoy, even though they have no direct practical use - i.e. art.

The term now covers a wide range of related activities and issues that surround the philosophy of art - e.g. what is art?, what form does it take?, what is its purpose or function?

It can also be taken to refer to the way that we perceive and respond to art and artefacts (the products or objects of art) both personally and collectively.



It is potentially a huge subject in itself as a branch of philosophy that deals with questions of beauty, taste and meaning. Within this topic we are going to confine ourselves to a few important questions.

**Do we look at art in a different way to other things?**

**Does Art have to be beautiful or enjoyable?**

**What is the difference between Art and Craft and Design etc.?**

The role of the artist and their position in relation to the patrons who commissioned the work or the people who purchased it has changed over the centuries and in different cultures. The subject of some early religious paintings may have been outside the control of the artist e.g. the Madonna and Child or the Crucifixion, may have been determined by the patrons. They may even have controlled who or what was included in the picture, sometimes even having their own portraits included within the characters portrayed. In the twentieth century we became more accustomed to artists determining their own subjects and expressing their own attitudes, views and emotions.



We might also consider that much of the art of the past is anonymous, produced as part of a cultural activity that did not identify the maker. Art was not always and still is, not just a professional activity. People produced beautiful objects and decorated the everyday objects they used simply because they enjoyed them. These objects were exchanged and sold and some people became associated with particular designs or the fine quality of the handiwork. Some people specialised in these activities and they became known as the professions we recognise today, e.g. potters, jewellery makers, fashion designers etc.

In the 19th and 20th centuries as mechanisation increased, the 'designers' became increasingly distinct from the actual makers or manufacturers. Today we commonly hear the term 'designer label' applied to clothing or even food products. It should be remembered that all clothes are designed by someone, as are the books we read, the furniture we sit on, the car we drive etc. We still tend to call some activities 'art' and set them aside from a whole range of activities that are equally creative but which do not have the same status - although the boundaries between them are constantly being redefined.

# STUDY UNIT 7

## SCULPTURE AND OTHER 3D ART

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:** Here we increase our scope to consider 3D art, such as sculpture. We will also discuss materials and production. There is 1 exercise and 1 assignment.

Although much of what is said about painting can also be held true for sculpture and other three dimensional forms, these also have their own characteristics. It is inevitable that shape will have a larger role to play in something that may be viewed from more



than one direction but most of the other elements of visual language discussed earlier are equally relevant. Texture again may play an increasing role, both in terms of its tactile (touch) qualities and the effect that it may have upon light and shade. Although some sculptural forms may exclude the use of colour in order to concentrate on the form (shape) there are others that will utilise colour as an important element.

Stone and timber have long been carved into shapes, either in one piece or in several pieces assembled together, with or without disguising the joins. There is also a tremendous variety of stone and timber types, all of which will have their special characteristics in terms of hardness or softness, grain or texture etc.

In these materials and others the form is generally created by 'reducing' the original block through carving or chipping away at the surface.

Alternatively, completed forms can be created by 'building up' the shape by adding clay or plaster or welding together lengths of metal etc. Shapes formed in this way may then be 'cast' in more resilient materials by forming a mould around the original and filling this mould with molten metal or a resin (liquid plastic) that sets hard. The mould can then be removed and the 'cast' finished by grinding or smoothing etc.

The materials used may be expensive, heavy or involve special processes, all of which would have to be considered by the artist.