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Editor's Note:

This issue's emphasis is on art. Art exists in contradictions; almost universally, its importance is acknowledged, yet it is systemically underrepresented as a worthy school of study. This issue attempts to draw attention to some of the questions we should ask about the world, some of the topics that deserve more time and attention. In the philosophy section we deal with the autonomy of the artist within art, and the autonomy of the artwork itself.

The JWP is a periodical with a self-consciously academic purpose: to give a platform to the student voice, and by exploring disciplines beyond curriculum, the writers on the JWP hope to inspire the interest of their younger readers. In addition to this, super-curricular activities - so termed by Oxford and Cambridge - form an important part of developing and expressing a passion for these disciplines, and so a tripartite purpose exists. Each half-term, the JWP will feature articles by both regular and guest writers on the arts, sciences, and humanities, as well as an interdisciplinary philosophy section.

Creativity: a universal model

“I can’t draw” and “I am no good at art” are phrases that I generally hear at least 5-6 times a week. They are phrases which, on the whole, are used to rationalise some people’s understanding and perception of the arts and of creativity, and to give the arts some meaning in their everyday lives, despite them clearly having little understanding of the potential creativity can offer them. They are phrases which are often regurgitated through generations, due to the fact that the arts, and all aspects of creativity have not been part of their lives from an early age and that quite simply an appreciation of all things creative is not part of their background. Strangely, and rather unsurprisingly, everyone in society is exposed to the creative arts in their everyday life, without even realising it; from watching TV, to listening to music on the radio, to passing an advert on a billboard or on a means of public transport; all these things have a creative process attached and allow for some form of escapism to happen. They stimulate conversation and they allow the average person to make opinions on whether they think the design of the new Apple iPhone is as aesthetically pleasing as their previous designs, but still creativity and the arts are seen by people as something they don’t have much time for.

For a long time, society has been quick to diminish the relevance of creativity and creative subjects; furthermore, we are conditioned by the changes in education and by the media that arts jobs and places at university are diminishing in favour of science, maths, engineering and technology based subject areas, where it is more favourable to get employment than the “fluffy” creative jobs which people do for the love, not the money. However, studying a creative subject has many benefits. In recent findings by the Cultural Learning Alliance, they found that when learning is focused on and pupils study

L. J. Aylott

through the arts and culture, it improves attainment in Maths and English, as well as allowing them to develop skills and behaviour that lead children to do better at school. Structured arts activities can increase cognitive abilities by 17% and people who take part in the arts are 38% more likely to report good health. These findings should indicate the importance of creativity and how it can help develop rounded individuals, and enhance learning, understanding and quality of life, by this still is not the case. The days of when the arts were only for the privileged and talented few and considered non-academic by institutions and employers should be gone, but it will take a long time for those archaic stereotypes to be made thoroughly extinct, as old habits die-hard and people will always have their opinion! The introduction of the English Baccalaureate did not help arts-based subjects at all, as it only cemented the ridiculous ideas that arts subjects are not worth studying, and this has rippled through the education system and attached itself as the ideologies of a decent percentage of school children, parents and non-arts teachers of today. So what can we do? How can we, as a member of society, ensure that creativity, culture and the arts are accessible to all and given the recognition and respect they deserve in our world?

Firstly we should not be influenced by stereotypes and misconstrued ideas which the media and other individuals impart upon us, either consciously or unconsciously. We as a society need to be more aware of how versatile and holistic creativity is, and how creative thinking is a wonderful tool to be able to use in all areas of employment, education and society. We need to take the responsibility of educating ourselves about what creativity is, and how it impacts our

lives daily. Creativity is responsible for the most wonderful technological advances, the most innovative ideas and contributes to companies becoming successful and well-known to all. There is a place for creativity in every company, and employers are starting to look for these attributes in the people they employ to work for their company more now, than ever before. Therefore it is important to quash the ideas, that creative subjects are non-academic and only for those people who cannot access the academic curriculum. We should lose the term “academic” and understand that all subjects taught in schools are relevant to today’s society, but that some subjects use the left-side of the brain more and others use the right-side of the brain more. Either way, they all have their benefits in order to develop a rich experience of learning for every individual. Furthermore, the creative arts should not be viewed as an area of society that can only be enjoyed by the rich and affluent. Creativity should be embraced by and accessible to everyone and seen as a hub to a better understanding of the world around us as well as providing a holistic approach to better well-being as individuals. Museums, concerts, galleries and performances should be enjoyed by everyone from all walks of life, and companies providing these services are working hard to ensure that they are accessible to all. It is heartening that we are starting to see a shift towards promoting the arts as a reaction to a government who have allowed a rather prescribed curriculum to be delivered in schools, which filters into workplaces, companies and society, but we have a long way to go to ensure that people in power are able to positively influence the change in perception about creativity. Creativity embraces individuality, which is what will, in my opinion make our society even richer, and culturally affluent, and will provide even more opportunities for growth.

The art of dying

Society on life and death

R. L. Jackson

The *Ars Moriendi* ('The Art of Dying') are two related Latin texts dating back to the 15th century, giving advice on the procedures of a 'good death' and explaining how to 'die well'. Whilst these ideas were based on Christian precepts of the late Middle Ages, there are certainly elements within them which have helped to create our society's obsession with the idea of 'Death with Dignity'. There are a multitude of artworks that have contributed to shaping the way we view death, but there are two representations of death in art that are perhaps the most prominent; *Ars Moriendi* art, and Memento Mori art.

The *Ars Moriendi* and the general idea of a 'good death' became increasingly prevalent during the Victorian era, and arguably has been a recognised model for the 'ideal death' ever since. The idea of a 'good death' has been carried through the different eras and, though presented with somewhat different perceptions of what this means, all of the artworks that represent it share a romantic concept of death that is made to look almost 'pretty'. This can be seen particularly in some religious artwork on death; in a lot of religious artwork addressing death, there is often either a focus on heaven and a 'peaceful' afterlife, or a focus on some kind of tragic, heroic death. These ideas have been depicted in famous artworks for centuries and have influenced the way death is presented in all kinds of art forms. The famous painting *Ophelia* (1852), by Sir John Millais, depicts a drowning Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Although she has drowned, the painting portrays the woman looking soft, peaceful, beautiful. She is surrounded by flowers and weeds, and she looks very much human. This portrayal of the dead woman is pretty, pleasing to the eye – much less pleasing to the eye than the

reality of drowning, or the reality of death. While this depiction may be based on the story of Ophelia's suicide, it doesn't change anything; this representation of death is beautiful, and far from the truth. There is nothing categorically wrong with this; art is a means of freedom of expression. However, the way we as humans respond to artworks like this has, throughout time, helped to shape the way that death is viewed by individuals and our society as a whole. This societal obsession with a 'good death' – or as it is now often referred to as: 'death with dignity' – has evolved over time to become today's idea of what a 'good death' is; something peaceful. What does that really mean when our bodies fundamentally all shut down in the same way?

Memento Mori – Latin for, literally, 'Remember Death' - art is based on the theory itself; it is artwork intended to remind individuals of their own mortality and the shortness and fragility of human life. Artists of this genre – some well known being Tom French and Charles Gilbert – almost always include symbols of skulls as well as extinguished candles. The skull symbols in particular are designed to remind the viewer that earthly life is of a transient nature – that death is the only thing we are all guaranteed in life. Linked to the ideology of 'Memento Mori' is the widely known figure of the Grim Reaper; the skeleton depicted in a trademark black, hooded robe and axe is recognised by all, and the eerie figure immediately reminds the viewer that death is inevitable.

Vanitas art is closely linked to Memento Mori art, but is based on the opening lines of the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible: 'Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' Vanitas art includes skull symbols much like Memento Mori art, but also depicts objects like musical instruments, wine and books with the



intention to remind the viewer of the vanity of earthly pleasures as well as its innate ephemerality, so perhaps artworks like this have helped to shape another modern attitude towards death; the idea of 'living like there's no tomorrow'. Much like these art movements, this attitude acknowledges the idea that death is never far away – that life is temporary. This general attitude can be seen in many different forms of art in today's society; younger generations in particular have adopted a 'live fast, die young' attitude, perpetuated through art forms like music and film. This contrasting attitude is far from the *Ars Moriendi* ideas of a 'good death' and perhaps encourages viewers to focus less on the details and process of death, as it's simply inevitable.

Death art has certainly influenced the way society thinks about death; from the fifteenth century, ideas of a 'good death' as characterised by the *Ars Moriendi* have been portrayed in countless different art forms, impacting the way humans view death as a personal experience; theirs to shape and create in a dignified manner. These ideas, dating back centuries, were then challenged by the Memento Mori and Vanitas art movements, which emphasised the inevitability of death; ideas which, in recent years, have been carried forward by a multitude of art forms and have influenced many, particularly those of the younger generations, to almost let go of the idea of death as a protocol and instead embrace it as the inevitable future.

Capitalism has ruined art

A manifesto for modern creation

In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) (hang in there, I promise this is relevant), Marx and Engels discuss the ‘subjection of Nature’s forces to man.’ They meant in terms of the application of nature for people’s economic gain, referring to manipulation of industry and agriculture, but this can be applied to art too. Consumerism has restricted our ability to have thought outside of what we are being told or shown – a vicious cycle since the very nature of consumerism is to give us what we want and what we want can favour simplicity over truth. This affects art because it means complex ideas, beyond the superficial, are compromised for the sake of realistically earning a living. Through capitalism, there’s an emphasis on the economic value of art instead of its quality. The very structure of the industry is suffocating because of this - artists who break through are usually quite safe in terms of concepts - Andy Warhol wasn’t exactly on the level of Da Vinci in terms of his ideas – because of the need for accessibility to consumers, therefore the amount of money art makes has been taken as the most stand-out implication of its success in this capitalist world. This restricts artists at the bottom, who may have the most

A. L. Browne

innovative ideas, but cannot ever get the opportunity to express them to anyone; art cannot evolve. There seems to be a stagnancy in popular art, with no clear breakthrough movements like the romanticised Renaissance period offered, but it is not through a drought of ideas. Capitalism’s nature, in effect, has deprived us of depth.

But then is capitalism entirely responsible for this? Has art lost its purpose? Art used to be our way of recording things. Throughout history, information has been passed down through art. We gain knowledge of the Egyptians from hieroglyphics, we draw information from primitive societies through cave paintings – a time before we could record through writing, let alone by digital means. Up until the invention of the camera, art has been of vital importance in furthering our understanding of not only events in history but people’s mindsets throughout time. However, in terms of the purpose of pre-renaissance aesthetics, there’s no need to paint serene still life for inspiration anymore; you could just take a picture. And so the purpose of art has evolved as technology has. It did before with the renaiss-

sance and it has again, although not necessarily for the better. We adapt. We use new technology to be innovative with art - but it still feels as though art hasn’t quite caught up yet.

Not only this, but art have been neglected in our education. It’s an afterthought to other subjects, thrown on as a forgotten attachment to our ‘core’ subjects which focus on STEM - the only arts subject that’s a part of this ‘core’ is English. We should move away from this prospect and actually encourage the arts, which is why John Warner’s arts festival is so important. Art should be made more accessible; we should try to encourage people to engage with the art and to stop overlooking it as insignificance.

Though it may not seem it, art is more relevant than ever as the medium that can articulate what can’t be put into words about the human experience. This should not be deprived by the structure of industry capitalism has driven us into. We just need to be more honest as a collective and open our eyes and minds a bit more.

Art versus science

Examining the apparent divide between these domains

In an era of specialisation, it has become a popular practice to view science and art as two mutually exclusive, or even ‘opposite’, fields of study. Both the formal and natural sciences are seen as oriented around factual information. Scientists supposedly uncover the ‘ultimate truths’ of the universe through the objective analysis of empirical data, with no scope being left for human interpretation. Artists, on the other hand, are said to indulge in a purely creative venture— they use words, colour, and form to express the nature of subjective human experience. However, these conceptions of the sciences and arts are fundamentally flawed. In actuality, the two subject areas are substantially more interconnected.

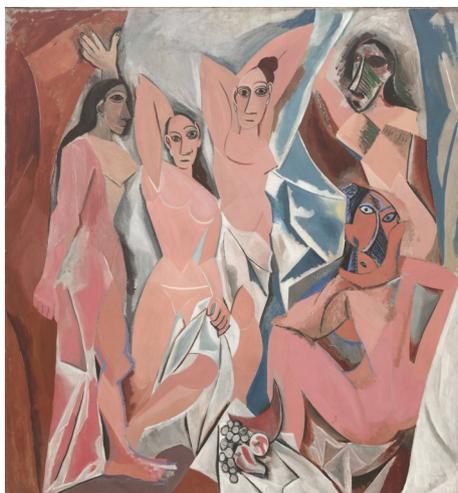
Scientists and artists experience a very similar process when achieving breakthroughs. The formation of complex interpretations from fundamentally abstract data requires an immense amount of creativity in the same way that producing a powerful piece of artwork does. Creativity is a necessity for scientific development, especially in a post-Einsteinian world where quantum physics is demanding new modes of thought to be conceived. Scientists and artists also share similar objectives. They both aspire to view the world in new ways, then to communicate these visions with the rest of society. Their works are in turn applied practically in the forms of technology and design, respectively. These applications improve the lives of the masses but do not alter consensus concerning the way in which the world is perceived. Only in their rawest forms do both the arts and the sciences achieve this.

It is a common misconception that art can not influence science due to its subjective nature. The direction of scientific development is actually heavily influenced by aesthetic theory. Albert Einstein (1879-1955) himself, on the first page of his 1905 relativity paper, stated: ‘It is known that Maxwell’s electrodynamics—as usually understood at the present time— when applied to moving bodies, leads to asymmetries which do not appear to be inherent in the phenomena’. In developing his ideas on relativity, Einstein used a minimalist aesthetic to pare away inessential concepts and redundant explanations. Further, the entire concept of the Grand Unified Theory is founded by the aesthetic discontent of particle physicists as

A. A. Amoo-Gottfried

they attempt to describe all fundamental forces and the relationships between elementary particles in terms of a single theoretical framework.

Historically, the formal sciences have always greatly influenced artists. Cubism was an art movement of the early 20th-century that entailed the use of geometry to simultaneously implement different viewpoints into paintings whilst also emphasizing the two-dimensional flatness of the canvas. The approach was championed by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) who predominantly led the idea after becoming inspired by the non-naturalistic and heavily-stylised nature of African tribal masks. His famous painting, *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* (1911-1914), is a notable example of this. Picasso implemented cubist techniques to present the featured



women as a projection from the 4th spatial dimension.

Mathematics is also deeply intertwined with musical composition. As Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) once noted: ‘Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting’. *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps* (1940) is a piece of chamber music, composed by Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), that successfully demonstrates this concept. Messiaen utilised primes to create a sense of perpetual time. Within the piano part, a 17-note rhythmic sequence is paired with a chord sequence that consists of 29 chords.

The effect of the primes is that the overall piano sequence does not repeat itself until 493 notes through the piece (the lowest common multiple of 17 and 29) by which time the movement has already finished.

Art is also enormously influenced by developments within the natural sciences. One of Salvador Dali’s (1904-1989) most renowned pieces is *Persistence of Memory* (1931). From melting watches to the decay implied by swarming ants, time is certainly the theme of this work. Many believe the work was influenced by Einstein’s theory of relativity, which was a new, revolutionary idea within the culture of the 1930s. Melting clocks are contrasted with the realistic background to accentuate the impotence of time-keeping machines when compared to the stark reality of the universe—in keeping with Einstein’s perplexing and abstract perception of time as relative, not objective.

The practice of representing scientific information visually has been adopted for centuries, with Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) arguably being two of history’s greatest data artists. Since entering an age of digitalization, however, a revolution in the nature of data visualization art has become evident. Modern data visualization artists use algorithms to bind data in order to represent the information aesthetically. The higher the information content of a representation, the more aesthetic value it is deemed to have. Aaron Koblin is one of our most famous 21st-century digital media artists. His animation, *Flight Patterns* (2005), captures the rhythms and spatial patterns of North American travel over a 24-hour period by representing the information with colour and form.

Today’s art-science divide is not a necessary distinction but a product of post-war emphasis on intellectual specialisation. As means of opposing this division, many institutions are adopting the recently established STEAM movement, which aims to integrate the arts with STEM disciplines. By reforming the strong connections between the scientific and artistic communities, as well as embracing the creativity involved with both fields of study, society would be able to better experience the academic and cultural benefits of interdisciplinarity.

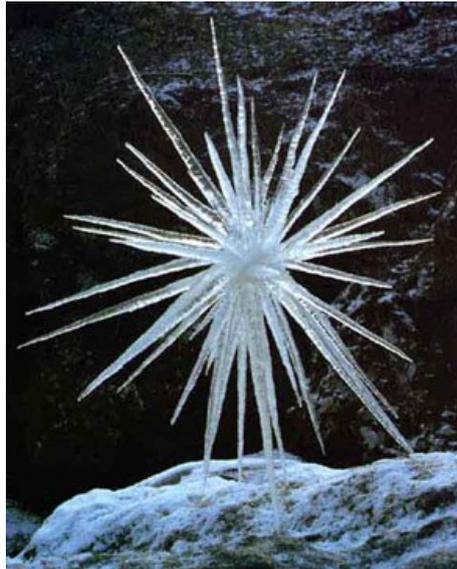
Natural art

An appreciation of beauty through the natural world

Art is something that can be appreciated primarily for its beauty or emotional power. There is nothing that expresses this more than the wonderful planet we live on. There are Artists that study nature and some of the prettiest, most fascinating aspects of the Earth. One example is Brad Hill who wrote: 'it's about striving to find and expose the art inherent in nature. It's about increasing the awareness of the beauty, fragility and ephemerality of the natural world. It's about using the proceeds of the sale of my images to help support worthy conservation organizations.' Hill takes wonderful pictures from all around the world and captures its elegance.

A popular natural phenomenon that demonstrates the beauty of earth is aurora, referred to as northern lights, polar lights or southern lights. These are natural light shows that occur in the sky periodically in high latitude regions. They appear due to solar particles colliding with particles in our atmosphere at high altitudes. Depending on the particle collided with, and at what altitude they collide, a different colour will be emitted. A mixture of green, yellow, pink and blue all being emitted at different points at the same time displays a wonderful image that most people won't get to experience with their own eyes. It truly demonstrates art within nature and science. More fascinatingly, due to our eyes being able to absorb green light

R. S. Coleman



more readily, photographs never give this phenomenon justice.

There is another natural occurrence that you've probably never appreciated for its gracefulness, possibly even something that previously disgusted you - a sign for many people that there's an unwanted creature nearby. A spider web is honestly one of the most amazing creations and what makes it more intriguing is the fact that it is made so nonchalantly by what's considered a scary creature despite its innocence and harmlessness. A spider web is made by the strongest fibre in the world. Stronger than steel and Kevlar, spider silk can withstand impressive amounts of force comparative to its fine size. Furthermore, intricate and complicated shapes are constructed by the spiders. Made for

structural integrity, a web becomes a strong, beautiful house for the creature which acts both as a trap for prey and a dinner plate. And, on average, it only takes them an hour to make.

Andy Goldsworthy is an artist from Scotland, obsessed with nature and art. He combines the two in a unique way. He is a sculptor, photographer and environmentalist producing site-specific art sculptures in urban areas by manipulating nature and capturing his surroundings in a sculpture whilst making sure not to effect the land in any negative way. He tries to use only his bare hands for his creations, to get involved with his surroundings. Often, his amazing art pieces will be left to be destroyed by natural circumstances. One of his popular pieces is an ice sculpture he called "ice star" which, after photographed, was left to melt without interference. It's inspiring how Goldsworthy manages to connect with nature using his art in such a marvellous, non-pretentious way.

Art is subject to perspective, but to many the beautiful nature of our beloved Earth is a representation of art at its finest. Whilst it can be overlooked or taken for granted, our surroundings can become greatly enchanting when you, like Andy Goldsworthy, stop for a second to appreciate the land around us.

Material shifts

Walter Benjamin's commentary on art

Walter Benjamin was a characteristically modernist figure – both brilliant and radical. Being both Jewish and Marxist in early-20th century Germany, he was persecuted throughout his life. This persecution became much more severe under the Nazis; his Marxist contributions to literature, art, and philosophy made him a target to the militant government. His death – also characteristic of a modernist – was a suicide, occurring under tragic conditions. Having been refused passage to America by Spanish officials and thinking that the Gestapo was about to capture him, he overdosed on morphine tablets. The others in his party were allowed safe passage the next day. Ironically, whilst his death occurred as a result of an intellectually suppressive force, it helped to elevate him to posthumous recognition; his legacy of undermining oppression survives him. It recognises art as a political entity, one that may be utilised to emancipate or to repress, and pioneered an illuminated study of historically materialist aesthetic theory.

Modernism was a period in-between: society was changing with an unprecedented rapidity, wars and ideologies tearing apart the world that had preceded, technology and new thinkers fundamentally altering the way we engaged with the world – even the way human beings thought. Nietzsche's proclamation that 'God is dead' brought into question the divine meaning of life that had previously been taken as a given. Freud's theories about the unconscious brought into question whether human beings were actually as rational as Enlightenment thinking had asserted. The psychological damage of global warfare – the threat of complete disintegration of society as it had been known – was that of a perpetual memento mori. The modernists had to find an identity for themselves and for their art when the identity of the world was in a state of social, political, economic and even intellectual upheaval.

Just like society, art was changing too. Part of the reason for this change can be attributed to the work the modernists produced – Ezra Pound's call to 'Make it New' did not go

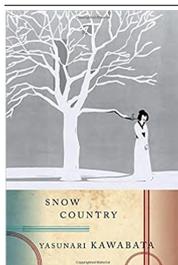
T. E. Dunthorne

unheeded – but it wasn't just the content of art that had changed; the physical means of production had changed too. Walter Benjamin's contributions to the public sphere were more significantly his insight into the cultural condition, rather than his works of fiction. He was one of the developmental figures of Marxist aesthetic theory, a tradition that has continued importance in the interpretation of art – even if Marxism as a political ideology has diminished in significance over the past decades. One of his most famous works, *the Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, addresses this shift in the technological production of art with the examination of photography. Photography was a young art at this point, establishing rather than developing its prestige, but its invention raised questions about the nature of art: what did this mean for traditional visual artforms, like paintings? Does art have the same value if it can be mechanically reproduced? And what are the political ramifications of mass reproduction?

His argument, somewhat obfuscated by his notoriously esoteric style of writing, is that traditional visual arts – paintings especially – possess what he terms an 'aura'. This is an immaterial property that shapes individual perception of the artwork. Paintings like *the Birth of Venus* don't just possess physical properties – they possess a unique place in space and time, an authenticity that reproducible art doesn't have. That inspires the 'aura', the experience of distance between the observer and the work of art. In modern art forms, the aura doesn't exist; consider the feelings you get when watching a TV show as opposed to looking at a famous painting in the Tate. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* isn't a reactionary polemic, however; the death of aura isn't, he argues, a totally bad thing. Before, the contemplation of art was a bourgeois, asocial experience where the artist absorbs the observer. In the modern period art was no longer contemplated so much as *consumed*. This

is a social experience, where the observer absorbs the art as it becomes severed from tradition and ritual, its historic motivators. To Benjamin, tradition and ritual represent further means of domination by the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. It is only through the destruction of the aura that art is emancipated.

Yet absent in this essay, frustratingly, is any address of the *artist* in the age of mechanical reproduction. Art has historically been the domain of the bourgeoisie: take out the working class writers, said Woolf, and English literature would remain intact; take out the middle class writers and there wouldn't be English literature. Has mass distribution and the undermining of the strictly bourgeois aura brought the artist down from the ivory tower, or just the art? It's true, certainly, that the economic obstacles to artistic production, of limited leisure time and material costs, have been reduced by degrees. The ostensible removal of those barriers are not all that's sufficient for the production of art, however. The erasure of non-conventional artists, especially those of a minority or working-class background, has been a historic, damaging symptom of the relative homogeneity of the canon-shaping intelligentsia – the well-educated bourgeoisie. A Marxist may argue that this canonical authority is another way in which the bourgeoisie class maintains its power over the workers, a class that's consistently refused entry into the world of art. Despite a revived interest into the work of artists outside those conventions, a prime example being the post-humous attention to Frida Kahlo, the working class are systematically underrepresented within the art domain. There are some canonical exceptions who have managed to penetrate that sphere from outside that privileged cross-section of society, but that serves only to illuminate the broader problem. Art can be mass produced and mass possessed; that doesn't mean it belongs to the people.



July Book Recommendation: Snow Country - Yasunari Kawabata

The best description for this book is a subtle, portraying reality more as a watercolour than with the more obvious—at times blatant—vividness of contemporary Western literature. *Snow Country* takes simple images, often natural, and renders them in a way that manages to capture their beauty without the sacrifice of flowery, burdensome writing. Kawabata has few contemporaries in this skill, and is even more difficult to emulate in that his expression seems effortless, writing with great regard towards the haiku tradition.

Cognitive states

How the artist's mental state is expressed in their art

From authors to painters, songwriters to poets - many express their thoughts, feelings and ideas in contrasting forms. In creating an individual theory and style, each artist projects their inner traits onto their media. There is no idealistic format that the stereotypical artist can produce to impress the masses; that is where the variation originates. What happens when underneath the paint and underneath the ink, there are underlying meanings that the first glance the examiner didn't encounter?

There are innumerable examples capable of study when alluding to mental health amongst the creative arts. In music, the swift motion of rhythmic lyrics being played can almost normalise the view of mental health, the same as fashioned in the plots of television shows and other visual media. Being adept at forming a convincing connection with their fans, musical artists find it comfortable to project their mentality. Musicians such as Logic, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez and Kid Cudi are well known for relating less recognized portrayals of mental health - this is evident in their creations. This is a more modern approach to witnessing artists conveying atypical cognitive states, as it is only recently that this has been apparent in music.

Tracing back hundreds of years if observed in the correct manner, other crea-

E. A. Hunt

tive individuals have depicted their struggles through their work. Having periods of time predominantly dedicated to different forms of art, a plethora of artists have expressed their motivation of what drives them to construct and create. Some of the most famous examples of troubled artists include Van Gogh, Edvard Munch and Georgia O'Keeffe. All struggled with anxiety and/or depression. In Munch's case, he believed he could not be parted with his illness, otherwise he would be parted with his work, his inventions. 'Without anxiety and illness, I am a ship without a rudder...my sufferings are part of my self and my art'. Vincent Van Gogh had a particular admiration for Absinthe and his dependency took a toll - he later committed suicide. It is evident that their emotions and experiences have embedded themselves within their work, even if you examine some examples of the titles: it is clear from *the Scream* and *At Eternity's Gate* that the darkness within them prevailed.

In literature there are certain pieces written primarily to expose the psychological mind-set of a mentally ill individual. There are also poets and authors who themselves struggle with mental health, and who cannot help but imbue their creations with their contentious ideas. Sylvia Plath is arguably the most

referenced poet when the theme of mental health arises. Being coherent and open about her suffering, she told her story in her novel, *the Bell Jar*, and in her poems. Having survived her first suicide attempt, she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital where she was exposed to barbaric procedures such as electro-shock therapy. Once discharged, she left her children in the hands of her carers' and famously committed suicide by putting her head into an oven. Existing in her unremorseful environment, her work depicted her overwhelming level of mental instability, and confidently flourished when her inner fire spewed onto the page. Anne Sexton and David Foster Wallace are other major writers that instilled their text with their inner demons. These now deceased prodigies are estranged from other tragic artists, as they have experienced the rain, and not observed it from a distance.

When an artist's cognitive state is diminishing, their creations usually are the informative signs of that spiral. Whether the suffering artists are publishing novels, poems, songs, art or any other creative expression, they are assured to embed their entire mental state. To reinvoke Edvard Munch: they are one and cannot be separated; their sufferings are a part of themselves and their art.

Can we separate art from its creator?

A collaborative piece on the role of artist and observer

T. E. Dunthorne

To begin to answer this question, we must first consider the nature of art itself. The work of art exists on three planes. The first is the work of art in relation to the artist: the meaning the artist intends to imbue it with, the purpose of the art's creation, the skill of the artist, the way in which the art is informed by their psychological and physical context. The second is the work of art's independent existence: its absolute nature, as a collection and interaction of material things - and, some have argued, immaterial things, like Walter Benjamin's theory of the aura and its place in time, space, and artistic tradition. The third is the work of art's existence in relation to the observer, as an individual or a collective. This one is the most dynamic; it depends on factors like the meaning the individual gains from the art, how this meaning is informed by their psychological and physical context, other art they've observed, the information supplied to them about the art, the context they're viewing it within - consider how you'd observe a painting at the Met in comparison to one hung on the wall of your aunt's house. There is also the issue of collective meaning to grapple with; this can distort or augment how the individual views the work of art, whether it's an opinion about it from a friend, or the consciousness of the art's influence on tradition and society. From there, we can begin to assign significance to the different ways in which art operates; the Romantics would argue that art's importance, as a spontaneous overflow of emotion, lies in the first realm; an absolutist and a relativist may argue that it is the second and third planes, respectively, that truly matter. It would be a mistake to assume that there isn't interaction between them, however, and it would be just as reductive to try and separate the artist from the art as it would be to give the artist undue authority.

A. L. Browne

In a more literal sense, is context required in art?

Context in art can be a blessing and a curse - in some cases, context makes the work. For example, Tracey Emin's 'My Bed' (1998) received criticism for 'just being someone's unmade bed', but with the autobiographical context of her four-day depressive state, suddenly it's much more than someone's bed; it captures Emin's period of self-destruction. Yet context can also make us ruin an artist's work, as we try to make assumptions based on the small amount of knowledge we have on the artist - we perceive the work differently by proxy of that knowledge. Can the serial killer John Wayne Gacy's paintings ever be considered by their own virtue with the knowledge of his private life?

Art, whichever way you look at it, is an expression of someone's individual consciousness. It requires thought and decisions being made in order to create the outcome, so how *could* art be separated from its creator?

But then this cannot apply to all art. For example, propaganda is created from the influence of politics and society as opposed to an individual, so the specific artist is removed - it's less human so loses the connection. With this in mind, does art need a figure attached to it in order to connect with the observer? Art, fundamentally, makes us feel human. Perhaps, subconsciously, the awareness of an individual behind the feelings provoked by their art is comforting - also necessary at times to fully understand the work, though art is always open to personal interpretation.

E. A. Hunt

While there may be any number of reasons that a person may want to separate art from its creator, it simply comes down to how the creations are observed. Art may drive inspiration and courage into the individual who interprets it. Is this to be ruined if the artist was, for example, charged with murder or another serious crime? As many creators imbue their work with their own personal experiences, it would be hard as a collective to detach the significance of the talent from where it originated - whether it be driven by anxiety or another mental health problem, or if it originates from the artist's bringing-up, or as a protest against society or inequality, as some examples. The illustrations, novels, poems and songs will definitely take a toll if the reputation of the artist has been tainted in a negative light. The shadow of guilt will always follow those who still admire their work, some say. It would be disgracing what the art represents if one were to completely disengage the artist from their creation, as it would distort their true meaning.