

Expectations of Art

What is a work of art?

Art is a very extensive topic, and expectations of art are subjective. Artwork at its core is free and subject to all ideas and opinions. Art, in its broadest meaning, is the expression of one's creativity or imagination. Most non-contemporary art conforms to ancient standards - either colour on a canvas or a sculpture.



Starry Night, Van Gogh

In both cases most in the Western World expect materials such as paint or modelling material. An aboriginal person, however, may view art in a different way to someone from our world. Most would expect paintings to depict either a scene or attempt to convey a message. Art can be a way of presenting ideas in a form that is understandable for everyone across language barriers, using the universally understandable language of imagery.

If the artwork is physical, one will probably expect well considered and refined materials. Every work of art is well thought through with craft and care and uses high quality materials, be it painting, sculpture, drawing, ink, printing or photography.



An example of Roman Art—a mosaic representing a pair of Centaurs fighting cats of prey, c.130AD



An example of aboriginal art, even though not from the Western World it still strives to represent an idea or object(s)

The Fountain—Marcel Duchamp

How does Duchamp challenge our expectations of art?

Marcel Duchamp submitted *The Fountain* anonymously to exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York. The work was not rejected, since the fee was paid, but it was “suppressed” and was never placed in the show area. Unlike most art, which represents something, *The Fountain* was what it represented—the most ordinary urinal bought from a hardware store rotated on its back, signed and dated “R. Mutt 1917”. This so-called work of art is a mass-produced unoriginal everyday object; it takes away the skill, hand-work, impression, style, craft and refinement that one would



The Fountain 1917 ~ Marcel Duchamp
(replica of the original from 1964)



expect a usual work of art to have. The fact that the original was lost (only one photograph remains) but instead we have several replicas points to how mass-produced and easily replaceable this item was. Duchamp was only able to achieve this meaning behind *because* he was an artist. Art has a very strong sense of individuality and uniqueness and this did not conform to it. One may expect a work of art to portray a message or a meaning, but this did not, it was “made” solely to

question social norms and attack the restrictive nature of “traditional” art. Duchamp submitted the work anonymously and did not sign it with his own name, thus questioning authorship and the relationship between the artist and their work of art. On the other hand, there may be some more thought behind this work. Firstly, the urinal is the wrong way up, changing its use and meaning. The name “Fountain” suggests something more elegant, romantic, poetic and mythological than a urinal might. Duchamp managed to convert his chosen piece of readymade plumbing from an ordinary object to something with worth and appeal. This work is regarded by art historians as a major and one of the most influential works in 20th century art, and that through this work Duchamp “invented” conceptual art.

