

Why Study Art?

On the development of applied philosophers

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Abstract:

Perhaps a better question than *why study art* might be *how might we study art better and what do we mean by study?* Indeed, to “study” art harbors a significant conflation of terms I would like to take up. Are we referring to various ways we seek to understand the art of other people, or the practice of making and establishing personal standing in our own art?. In this sense, “study” would seem to refer to at least two distinct though related disciplines and mental processes that graduate and undergraduate curriculum tends to alternately conflate and then separate to the detriment of a comprehensive, i.e. *knowledge* of art inside out.

Proposal:

Do we need a better model of what studying art should be? (Yes.) Study in this sense obscures profound epistemological, operational and psychological differences. Is an *integrated* model of intellectual and creative aspects of art, as a whole, presented to liberal arts students, art majors and graduate students alike? (No.) Undergraduate liberal arts core curriculum usually offers a choice between intellectual methods of attending to other people’s art (art history, theory and visual culture studies), and, for the brave (or those ignorant about what it really entails), the practice of one’s own art in the studio. Few do both unless they are studio art majors or minors. MFA students do both, insofar as they have been required to study art history and theory since such programs were invented, but surprisingly—though with notable exceptions—many, if not most PhD programs in art history and visual studies, including highly prestigious programs, actually discourage budding scholars from simultaneously practicing studio art.

Why, we might ask, are we so conflicted about a unified approach to the full education of the artist-scholar? In what sense may the two disciplines inform one another while making both roles more robust and more deeply human? How might we better encourage, foster and aid in the development of artist-scholars or as I like to call them applied philosophers?

Discussion:

Notes:

- Eikens'
- Pink's entrepreneurship argument (comparing MFA and MBA programs)
- Character development; establishing personal *standing*
- Intellectual and critical development
- Spiritual development, psychological wellbeing

We will look at structural barriers young artist-scholars confront in seeking graduate study.

Is the intellectual, historical and critical study of historical periods in art, and its attendant theories, not just intellectually but developmentally the same as the sustained practice of one's own art? Clearly not, and yet liberal arts curricula often blurs the difference, or allows scholars to bypass their own artistic risk-taking by offering *one or the other* in the fulfillment of an arts requirement in the humanities. Is that a good thing?

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got a graduate degree in painting, and then switched to Art History, got another graduate degree, and went on to do the PhD in Art History, which he finished in 1989. (All from the University of Chicago.)