

The artist's intention is extremely important when discussing how artwork is perceived by the viewer. The appeal of artwork is subjective, and thus the artist's intention may not always be clear to the viewer. Perception is not the same from one viewer to the next, and beyond that, each viewer's perception of a work is a step removed from the artist's intention.

When the artist's intention is humor, there is an additional aspect of subjectivity which takes into account not only the artwork's visual appeal, but also its humorous appeal. Due to subjectivity, any definitions or explanations pertaining to art cannot be viewed as universal, but rather as extremely personal and situational working definitions. It's inevitable with humorous art, as with watching a comedian perform, that not everyone will get the joke. Thus, the issue with discussing art or humor is the problem with discussing a vast number of things: terms need to be defined in order for discussion to take place; but how can broad definitions accurately be assigned to reflect an experience which is highly personal?

When discussing art we define its "real" meaning as how the artist intended for it to be perceived. Accordingly, when referring to art as "funny", we are referencing the artist's intention which *does not* describe how it is perceived or the personal experience between the art and the viewer.

The language that we use to describe art and the language of art criticism reflect the artist's intention at greater value than the viewer's perception. This sort of terminology is perhaps counter-advantageous to art, as the language stresses the correctness of the artist over the viewer, which is also to say that the language we use to describe art stresses that the meaning of art is how it's *intended* rather than how it is *perceived*. Therefore, art with an intention which is unclear to the viewer is often considered to be "unsuccessful".

This language has the potential to be harmful to art, creating a greater disposition toward close-mindedness while making the art world appear "exclusive" in the sense that the language which affirms the rightness and wrongness of the viewer can also turn the viewer off.

Although humorous art is incredibly subjective, usually appealing to a very specific audience, it warrants greater accessibility to the viewer. Funny art often interacts with the viewer on a subconscious level because it doesn't necessarily *require* intellectual engagement to be understood—there is immediacy to humor.

That being said, immediacy isn't specific to humor. When an artist presents viewers with something that angers or shocks them in order to convey an opinion, the viewer is immediately aware and affected by the confrontation. The initial impression is so strong that underlying messages are often absorbed without being observed. Likewise, artists which work with humor often use confrontation as a way to convey an opinion.

Confrontational art relies on gut reactions. Gut reactions are crucial to humor as well, but scholarship often works to distance us from our own gut reactions. Analysis is important, but is it important in *everything*? E. B. White once wrote, "Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it." Due to the heavily analytic characteristics of art criticism, immediate reactions are often void by "the larger picture." Likewise, humorous art is often disregarded by critics who dispel the importance of gut reactions and commend highly "conceptual" art.

However, funny art doesn't lack a concept or deliberate thought from the artist. Neither the immediate response nor the analytical response place higher in terms of importance;

reaction time does not determine the depth of conceptual thinking that goes into a given piece.

Humor can in fact carry hefty critique, and it often does. For humor to be impactful in art, it must hold meaning. Meaning often comes through by use of irony or sarcasm, in which the artist uses humor to discuss serious topics.

It can be said that the language used to describe art can weigh heavily on the viewer's perception; to what extent will viewers come to their own conclusions if the intent of the artwork is already known?

An artist may intend for a work to be funny or for a work to be taken seriously. Due to the subjectivity of humor and, more generally speaking, artwork, the intention is not always grasped in the same way by the viewer as by the artist. When looking to differentiate "funny" and "non-funny" artwork, it's impossible to form definitions that appeal to everyone. An artwork with serious intention may be looked at with humor; an artwork with humorous intention may be regarded as serious.

The difficulty with these definitions, and attempting to explain humor in general, is that discussion of humor requires terminology that is *broadly* useful, while the experience of humor cannot be broadly defined. There is no simple answer when trying to define humor's significance because there is no single way to define humor's experience.

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