

Getting to the Art of the Matter

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Course: English 101

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Assignment: Descriptive

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Who came up with that idea? With regards to art, does the idea refer to the artist who created it, those viewers that enjoy it, or both? If this is the case, then it leaves out a whole segment of the populace; those that behold it but see no beauty in it at all. Of course, not all art is meant to be beautiful or beheld by others, but sometimes one can look at a piece of art and wonder “just what the hell is this person thinking?” Not because it may or may not be aesthetically pleasing but because the concept of the piece is beyond the viewer’s grasp. Given an assignment to pick and describe a piece from the Department of Visual Arts Faculty Exhibition at the Contemporary Art Gallery I was having a difficult time; I must admit, I am not a fine arts connoisseur. As I strolled through the gallery I realized that I could easily make my own assumptions about any given piece; however, I am certain that I would fall short of the artist’s intentions. This is especially true with *Oasis*, a multi-media piece, Computer Aided Design (CAD) and audio, by Edward Ramsey Morin, an associate professor of Graphic Design in the Visual Arts Department at Southeastern. If one has no personal affiliation with the artist nor is there an artist’s explanation accompanying the piece, in most cases it can be impossible to know truly the rhyme or reason behind a work of fine art. This is the feeling about *Oasis*,

as it simultaneously illustrates both a utopian and a dystopian society.

The piece is a series of three computers showing a graphic design of a futuristic city sans foliage or human presence. The two monitors on either side scroll through various scenes of the city while the middle monitor allows viewers to use a joystick to view this metropolis from all angles, both inside and outside buildings and to scenic water vistas. The display is accompanied by eerie and almost disturbing music which sets a most uncomfortable mood. *Oasis*, is by art standards, full of form and function; the lines of the buildings, walkways, and machinery are clean, and it contains a variety of muted colors, purples, greens, reds, and earth tones, except for the striking blue used for the bodies of water. There is balance to the design as it is apparent that all structures are meant to resemble one another. This is brought together beautifully by using multi-media as its medium. Showing the relevance of technology in such futuristic design, *Oasis* commands attention and is visually amazing.

Is it depicting a futuristic Utopia where everything is beautiful to the eye, where there is no litter blighting the streets and where the waterways are so clean the sun bounces off their placid veneers in a storm of azure? Considering the state of the cities of this world, one could only dream of living in such a place; except, I fear, as the pieces of the puzzle fall together, this piece is portraying a more ominous future. The sense of it being a Dystopia is overwhelming, a *Logan's Run* feeling, where humans have a crystal implanted in the palm of their hand and when they turn thirty-years-old they are deemed no longer useful to society and go through a ceremony that essentially kills them. Maybe it's a Big Brother omen; the mechanization of society coupled with extreme advances in technology have rendered the human race insignificant or even non-existent: that what is built is more important than the builders and that who or what is in charge is omnipresent. There is no sign of human life: no people walking around, no signs directing

them where to go or what any particular building houses, no garbage receptacles and no apparent means of transportation. It is both beautiful and disconcerting at the same time. The music accompanying the piece gives a sense of impending doom, reminding me of the march of the hammers from Pink Floyd's "The Wall," dark and foreboding, as though evil is lurking all around. In the description of this piece I spoke of a joystick controlling the center monitor. One can only imagine who or what may be controlling that joystick and in what direction humanity is being taken. I then looked at this piece in a different way and thought that maybe Professor Morin is just trying to show the amazing things that can be done with computer graphics these days. Maybe he is saying "look at this beautiful, clean city that can be designed and built because of the technological advances we have at our fingertips." Possibly he is just making something beautiful to look at, nothing more, but that music still gets to me. If his intention is just a pleasing vision of our architectural future, then why play such imposing music with the piece?

I wondered if the artist is making a political statement, the shrinking of the world through technology—computers in every home and coffee house linked with one another through a world wide web, the reduction in the need for business travel due to video conferencing and the ability to buy stock in multiple markets around the world with a click of a mouse. The expansion of the European Union, America's dwindling power base and the planet-wide economic freefall is driving us towards this one, cold, impersonal mechanized society where everyone and everything looks and acts identically.

Begrudgingly, I am left with the feeling that *Oasis* depicts both a utopian and a dystopian society. I stand by my earlier comment that without personal knowledge of the artist or having an explanation of the work to accompany the piece, in most cases, it is truly impossible to know the rhyme or reason behind a piece of art. We experience art every day of our lives and most of it is

clear cut: the architecture of a building, the design of a car, a sculpture in the park, ceramic vases on display in our homes, and the finger painting of a child. The meaning behind these is generally self-evident, but when it comes to “fine art,” the “area” is more difficult to define. I am sure many artists create pieces with the intention of the work being subjective; however, in her article “What is Art?” author Shelley Esaak cautions against taking that approach. She says it would require billions of references to back that stance, but I respectfully disagree. If I, or anyone else, states that a piece of art is subjective, then it is, simply because that is one’s opinion; therefore, by having one person say it is, it then becomes subjective. Perhaps people “much more cultured” than I will read this and say I am a Neanderthal, unappreciative of fine art; I may be the former, but, it is not that I don’t appreciate fine art, rather, there are times when I just don’t get it or can’t make up my mind. Maybe there is something to the saying that beauty is in the eye of the beholder line after all.

Work Cited

Esaak, Shelley. “What Is Art?” *About.com*. The New York Times Company, 2009. Web. 20 Feb. 2009.

Ms. Acosta’s Comments: Timothy’s casual tone, indeed, gets to the “art” of the matter, allowing for an easy-to-read, yet sophisticated, analysis of complicated art. And, hey, what a clever title: worth the price of admission.