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# The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Join us for a discussion of **WHAT IS ART?**

## DE-CON-STRUCT-ING ART

By Elizabeth Rhaney  
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I was 14 or 15 and had been in art school for only a couple of years. I was channel surfing and caught this movie, *High Art*. *High art* is another name for fine art- the kind of work that sells for thousands, if not millions, and cements an artist's name on millions of people's tongues. In the movie, a woman named Syd is an assistant editor at a photography magazine named *Frame*. The receptionist in the office is reading *Crime and Punishment* by Dostoyevsky and she asks Syd:

Receptionist: "How'd you get that job? I mean what did you have to do to get it?"

Syd: "What did I have to do to get my job?"

R: "No, I mean like what was your background? What was your major?"

S: "Uh, Critical Theory"

R: "Really? That's a major?"

S: "Yeah, it's like cultural studies, semiotics, philosophy, you know Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva, whatever"

R: "Pretty cerebral huh?"

S: "No, it's actually pretty interesting. You'll probably really like it. What are you reading? Dostoyevsky?! THAT is cerebral."

The first few times I saw this scene, I thought Syd just made up all of that. I had never heard those names before, so to me it sounded like she was speaking in another language. But then I decided to look up Critical Theory. I discovered Masters programs offering it that cross the boundaries between not only

disciplines of art, but philosophy, psychology, history, politics, sociology and God knows what else.

This was the first time I realized that art isn't just about making things. Art is also about the environment around the artists and what they make. It's 40% what you do and 60% what you think. When I took Contemporary Art History, it reaffirmed that idea. When we looked at Jackson Pollock's Autumn Rhythm No. 30, we talked about existentialism, the struggle to be an individual, Jean Paul Sartre and "existence precedes essence". All the artists in New York

### PHILOSOPHY NEWS YOU MAY USE

The PDG invites you to  
**DE-CON-STRUCT ART**

with us

Friday, May 1

**COFFEE BLUFF MARINA @ 2PM**

Fall Philosophy Courses

**Postmodernism**

Dr. Jack Simmons – MW 1:30

**Kant & 19th Century Philosophy**

Dr. Erik Nordenhaug –TTH 12:30

at the time, from writers to visual artists to musicians, knew about philosophy and social theories. Pollock's wife and fellow abstract expressionist painter, Lee Krasner, was undergoing Sullivanian therapy. Her art incorporated the Sullivanian idea of self awareness through "an ongoing discourse with others." Henry Stack Sullivan thought an individual's personality was fluid and encompassed all of the experiences around them. Krasner began working her signature into

her paintings with fluid lines, making them almost indistinguishable from the abstract lines in the paintings.

As I've studied philosophy more, I think more about how and why I make art. My past art feels careless now. I made them without focus. Now that I know a little about Derrida, Deconstruction and the Postmodern age we are living in, I want my art to deconstruct my environment, to break any assumptions that I might have and to question everything. I choose to study graphic design because design permeates all aspects of our lives. The world is saturated by images in many forms: posters, shirts, advertisements, packages, decor, signs, television, the internet, books, etc. Graphic design is basically a license to draw anything. If done in a certain way, design can change how we think and how we see the world.

But the how of art is much easier than the why. Thinking about why I make art creates more questions than answers. Honestly, I don't fully know why. I know that art is my air. I need it to survive. It gives me life. If I was ever prevented from making art or if art was ever taken out of my life, I would cease to exist. I would die. But I don't know why art is my air. I don't even know when it became my air. I just know that I need it and that being an artist is the most important part of my identity. Art defines me. Although art defines me, I can't define it. It's so abstract, like Love or Beauty, that trying to understand its nature is a challenge.

## Thoughts on Art

Art does not seek its own advantage. – **Plato**

The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance. – **Aristotle**

A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul.

-- **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

Art is a lie that makes us realize truth. – **Pablo Picasso**

We have art in order not to die of the truth. -- **Nietzsche**

Art is magic delivered from the lie of being truth.

-- **Theodor Adorno**

Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known. – **Oscar Wilde**

The transformation of an atomistic into a communitarian society depends on creating again the opportunity for people to sing together, walk together, dance together, admire together. – **Eric Fromm**

An artist is somebody who produces things that people don't need to have. – **Andy Warhol**

Advertising is the greatest art form of the 20th century.

--**Marshall McLuhan**

Art never responds to the wish to make it democratic; it is not for everybody; it is only for those who are willing to undergo the effort needed to understand it.

– **Flannery O'Connor**

...the value of literature is to be found not its institutionalized status within a sacrosanct literary tradition but in its ability to disturb the consciousness of the contemporary reader. – **Sartre**

(as cited by our recent keynote speaker, Dr. Thomas Flynn)

**ART =  
HUMAN BEING =  
MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING**

-- Faculty Advisor: Dr. Erik Nordenhaug