

Name: _____

Directions: Read and annotate the following article about art history. Answer the two questions at the end of the article in complete sentences.

Introduction: What is Art History?

Except when referring to the modern college class, people do not often put the words “art” and “history” together. They tend to think of history as the record and interpretation of past human actions, particularly social and political actions. Most think of art, quite correctly, as part of the present -- as something people can see and touch. Of course, people cannot see or touch history’s past human events, but a visible, touchable artwork is a kind of lasting “event”. One or more artists made it at a certain time and in a specific place, even if no one today knows just who, when, where, or why. Although created in the past, an artwork continues to exist today, living longer than its creators. The first painters and sculptors died 30,000 years ago, but their works remain, some of them exhibited in glass cases in museums built only a few years ago.

Modern museum visitors can admire these objects from the remote past -- and countless others humankind has produced throughout time -- without any knowledge of the reasons that led to the creation of those works. The beauty or sheer size of an object can impress people, the artist’s use of ordinary or costly materials can dazzle them, or the subject depicted can more them. Viewers can react to what they see, interpret the work in the light of their own experience, and judge it “good” or “bad”. These are all reasonable responses to a work of art. But the enjoyment and appreciation of artworks in museum settings are relatively recent phenomena, as is the creation of artworks solely for museum-going audiences to view.

Today, it is common for artists to work in private studios and to create paintings, sculptures, and other objects **commercial** art

Questions/Comments/Vocab

← When did people start sharing art in museums?

Commercial: means modern art galleries that will sell art.

galleries will offer for sale. Usually, someone the artist has never met will purchase the artwork and display it in a setting the artist has never seen. This practice is not a new phenomenon in the history of art -- an ancient potter decorating a vase for sale at a village market stall probably did not know who would buy the pot or where it would be housed -- but it is not at all typical. In fact, it is **exceptional**. Throughout history, most artists created paintings, sculptures, and other objects for specific patrons and settings and to fulfill a specific purpose, even if today no one knows the original contexts of most of those works. Museum visitors can appreciate the visual and tactile qualities of these objects, but they cannot understand why they were made or why they appear as they do without knowing the circumstances of their creation. Art *appreciation* does not require knowledge of the historical context of an artwork (or building). Art *history* does.

Thus, a central aim of art history is to determine the original context of artworks. Art historians seek to achieve a full understanding not only of why these events in art look the way they do, but why the event happened in the first place. The study of history is therefore vital to art history. And art history is often very important to the study of history. Art objects and buildings are historical documents that can shed light on the people who made them and on the times of their creation. Furthermore, artists and architects can affect history by reinforcing or challenging cultural values and practices through the objects they create. Thus, the history of art and architecture is inseparable from the study of history, although the two classes are not the same.

Questions:

What is the main goal of art history?

Where do you think art was kept before museums?

Exceptional: not normal

Do you have to understand a piece of art to say whether or not you think it is good or bad? Why?

How do you think art can affect a culture?

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