



An Art laboratory with Danto



Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16073211-what-art-is>

The story is set in a secondary school art workshop in the 1980s. Art critic and philosopher Arthur C. Danto is there to engage with the students and answer their philosophical questions about art. Three students, the Philosopher and the teacher participate in the discussion. The students are divided into groups of four, and sit at 'work' tables, equipped with painting tools due to the nature of the art class.

Teacher: Please sit in your group. We will soon be joined by today's guest, with whom we will discuss art.

The children were already looking at the stranger with curiosity and high expectations.



Teacher: Our guest is called Arthur Danto, renowned as both a philosopher and art critic. He is particularly drawn to the art of engraving, and currently writes as an art critic for “The Nation magazine”. You will discover anything you want to know through the conversation with him. Feel free to ask him anything you would like. The discussion will be open.

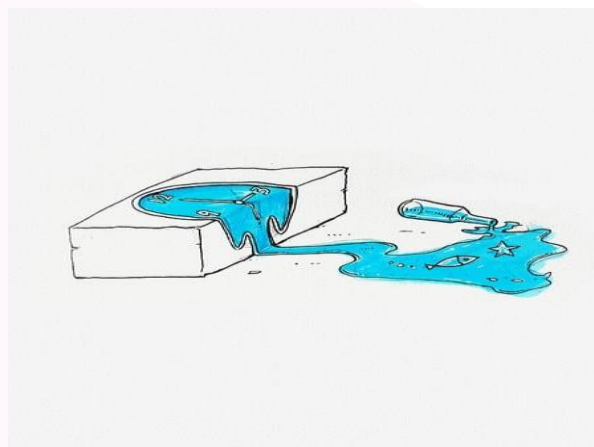
Philosopher: Good morning! I'm delighted to be here with you today, and I'm looking forward to a very creative dialogue. So, tell me, do any of you enjoy drawing?

The hand of a student who was usually the most courageous and impulsive in the class quickly shot up in the audience.

Maria: I've been drawing since I was little. My first drawings were very childish. As I grow older, I use more complex designs.

Philosopher: That is very natural. As people evolve, so does their art.

Peter: What I don't understand is the strange way some artists paint. In our last lesson, for example, we learned about surrealism. Trees with arms, elephants with long thin legs, and Dali's iconic long moustache. I am always puzzled by the surrealist painter's way of depicting reality.



Source: <https://pixabay.com/el/images/search/dali/>



Philosopher: Well, this can be explained. It is known that the Surrealists delve into the depths of the unconscious, retrieving images untouched by the constraints of logic. They capture the strange, the paradoxical or the impossible photographic realism, ensuring their paintings cannot be misinterpreted. Simultaneously, they unveil what is beyond and outside the realm of reality.

Anastasia: So, in simpler term, are they equating dreams with reality?

Philosopher: Exactly! For surrealists there is no distinction between dreams and reality.

Mary: And what about Yayoi Kusama's dots? We're also working on a project related to the technique she used "a cube and a sphere in the style of Yayoi Kusama dots" available at

<https://labs.openai.com/s/HmUkQkFh1A0cp4OtkLbd1MgK>

Philosopher: Interesting! According to this artist, the universe is composed of dots. Now, let us explore this concept through practical experimentation. Take the cardboard in front of you and the watercolours. Experiment with creating dots in any way you want, with your finger, with a brush, with a stencil, or with plasticine. This will help you become acquainted with the technique.

The students begin creating dots following Mr. Danto's instructions.

Anastasia: " I **believe** we can also create shapes or images using these dots".

Philosopher: My dear, as an artist you are free to use whatever technique, material or design you want.

Peter: Judging by our discussion, it seems that in the future we will have more surprises regarding the form and materials used by the artists.



Philosopher: This is exactly what Andy Warhol affirms through his work "Brillo Boxes". This particular work, which was presented as one of the Stable Gallery exhibits in New York, featured stacked Brillo cardboard boxes, typically used to dispense soap, thus creating a tower.

Would you like to learn more? Are you familiar with this artist and his artistic movement?

Teacher: Allow me to remind you, students, that in the corridor outside our workshop there is also a painting by Andy Warhol, depicting two Campbell's cans.

Anastasia: I'm not sure if using everyday objects to create something can be considered art.

Philosopher: that's precisely the question that crossed my mind, my young philosopher, when I saw the Brillo Boxes exhibition several years ago. I asked myself whether we should classify it as art, since boxes are simply everyday objects lacking any distinctive artistic elements.

Teacher: This is where the question of who holds the authority to determine whether something qualifies as work of art comes into play.

Peter:

In justice, significant matters are determined by the majority, a principle derived from our political education.

Philosopher: We're making progress. The audience will ultimately be the judge that evaluates the project.



Anastasia: So, for Brillo Boxes to be qualified as art, they would need to receive approval from the majority of the global population.

Philosopher: Exactly! If the public accepts the work as artistic then yes, then it can be classified as art.

Mary: And did the public immediately accept the Brillo Boxes?

Philosopher: Of course not! There was no immediate acceptance. There were debates about whether they should be classified as art.

Mary: If I understand correctly, the artist creates the work, and the public develops the concept of what qualifies as a work of art.

Philosopher: Exactly! Simultaneously, artists are raising philosophical topics and questions they would like to address through their art. This is why a piece of art consistently references something and holds inherent significance.

Peter: And how will the audience understand the meaning? Frequently, inside or outside the classroom, we ponder the meaning of things. It is typical to question the purpose of something, or find it nonsensical.

Philosopher: In order for people to understand the meaning, the artist must first find an astute way to present their work.

Teacher: For example, my dear students, you could incorporate a title, symbol, or combinations of colours.

Philosopher: They could also use patterns or repetitions.

Mary: It's obvious! Artists are now free to create their own art without limitations.



Philosopher: To understand this better, let us revisit the practical aspect. Please turn your cardboard to the white side and try to construct a project using different materials, for example paper, paper clips, plasticine. In other words, you have the liberty to create whatever you want without limitations.

Anastasia: On which topic?

Philosopher: Very good question. Pay attention to both the form and the meaning, the meaning and the content. Start by choosing the materials. Now choose the content and the meaning you wish to express, as your work needs to express something significant.

Peter: We have also seen empty paintings.

Philosopher: Even this emptiness can have a meaning.

Anastasia: Yes! But the meaning is not always obvious.

Philosopher: You are right. For example, a painting depicting a horse may not refer to horses, but to royalty, nature, or a host of other things.

Mary: I think the audience might need some help in order to understand this. In class, when we don't immediately understand something, the teacher explains it to us. Teachers try to guide us.

Philosopher: Absolutely, this can be achieved through the title or with the general atmosphere created by the work. For example, if you see a painting featuring computer-related images, it is likely referencing the present technological era, its challenges, or its favourable outcomes.

Mary: Is it really that straightforward?



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Philosopher: No, but this is also the beauty of art – its meaning can be hidden and isn't always readily apparent.

Mary: I have the impression that we need to study history, philosophy and art history to really figure out all of these aspects.

Philosopher: Precisely! To understand an artist's intention, you need to be well acquainted with their art. What matters, as we say, is the context in which the work of art exists. And let's not forget, the artist's intent is intertwined with their era.