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Controversial art

DOES CONTROVERSIAL ART SERVE A PURPOSE?

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“No object is so beautiful that, under certain conditions, it will not look ugly.”
- *Oscar Wilde*

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¹ Oscar Wilde (2015). “Essays and Lectures: Top Essays”, p.91.

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Introduction

Because of its subjective nature, art is a fascinating concept. When it comes to art, everyone appears to have an opinion to voice or a question to ask. Art is spoken about a lot, especially if it is controversial, which makes it intriguing to discover more about the piece. Art is very intuitive and exciting because you don't need to know anything about it to engage in these conversations. Art is also quite natural to humans, as anyone can create it - or can they?

With art, questions are raised: How do you feel about this painting? What do you believe this sculpture is meant to represent? What was the artist trying to accomplish here?

These are questions that I have asked myself, have asked others, and have been asked. These are some of the questions that this memoir attempts to explore.

This memoir acknowledges the subjective nature of art and realizes that there is no single correct answer to every question. This memoir will simply provide the reader with questions and present various perspectives in order to get the reader to think for themselves so that they can answer these questions for themselves and develop their own opinions.

This memoir will begin by defining some key concepts so that the rest of it is understandable to everyone. It then investigates what makes art good art, as well as how the worth of good art might be represented. Later, it discusses how art can be used to convey messages. It then dives into controversial art, asking what and why it is; In what situations is controversy good, and when is it not? Finally, the final point will be addressed: Is controversy essential for art?

What is art?

What is art? For ages, humanity has been pondering this subject. The nature of art has been heavily disputed for centuries, and despite the fact that there are several definitions of art, not one of them is universally acknowledged as the ultimate definition.

"one of the most elusive of the traditional problems of human culture [is] the nature of art"
- Richard Wollheim

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The Oxford dictionary of English defines "art" as the following: "the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power» The Oxford dictionary accepts art as strictly manmade, rejecting the idea of there being natural art, thus actively opposing the philosophical study of aesthetics. Aesthetics clearly accepts art as both manmade and natural, as it separates its studies into artificial art and natural art, which includes objects found in nature, such as flowers and animals.

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines art as "the making of objects, images, music, etc. that are beautiful or that express feelings" or as "an activity through which people express particular ideas." The Cambridge Dictionary also fails to recognize natural art and solely focuses on art being a human experience. The Cambridge Dictionary also defines art as: "the making or doing of something whose purpose is to bring pleasure to people through their enjoyment of what is beautiful and interesting.". The idea of art having a purpose is acknowledged, while also not being functional, but rather only beautiful.

To comprehend art, one must first acknowledge that there is no universally accepted definition, as it is directly linked to emotions. Some people feel that art should and can only be beautiful, as the aesthetic movement did in the nineteenth century. This, however, begs the question of how beauty is defined. The definition of beauty is a whole other intensely discussed matter in and of itself. Others feel that when attempting to transmit a message that is significant to the artist, art can simultaneously possess socio-political qualities.

"But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins"
- Oscar Wilde

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The study of beauty can be approached in a variety of ways. Aside from art and taste, beauty is one of the fundamental theories in the philosophical study of aesthetics. Beauty, according to the classical conception, is the relationship between the whole and its parts. Harmony, according to this notion, is what creates beauty. The parameters that define beauty include composition, proportions, and

² Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed, 1980) 1.

³ WILDE, OSCAR. *Picture of Dorian Gray: By Oscar Wilde*. INDEPENDENTLY PUBLISHED, 2020.

symmetry. In the hedonist conception, beauty is characterized by its ability to induce pleasure. Beauty is strongly linked to feelings, just as some describe art, but the hedonist perspective only accepts good sensations as those that can really define beauty. According to the idealist conception of beauty, only the whole can be considered as beauty. Its components can only be aesthetically pleasing in relation to the whole, never on their own. Unity is perfection and beauty, and its pieces may be beautiful, but they will never be considered as beauty the same way a whole does. Even the components must be beautiful, because a beautiful whole can never be created out of ugliness. It becomes apparent that beauty is once again a heavily discussed topic, and that the presence of these many different approaches demonstrate that one must decide for oneself what beauty is.⁴

“by beautiful we generally understand whatever, when seen, heard, or understood, delights, pleases, and ravishes us by causing within us agreeable sensations”

- Ludovico Antonio Muratori

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Art is a form of expression and communication. Art can be a material thing that has been created or modified, as well as an idea, a concept, or an experience. There will never be an ultimate definition of art, no matter how it is defined, because it is so subjective. As the saying goes, beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, and this is especially true in the case of art. However, it is widely understood that the art community, which has been forming for ages, is the one to decide if a piece is "art" or not. Of course, this community is not always on the same page when it comes to deciding whether a piece is art, and one subgroup may think something is art while another does not.

this memoire is limited to artificial art, such as paintings or sculptures. Furthermore, this memoire is limited to a very specific form of art, one that is heavily debated amongst the art community, and of which debate is the essence: controversial art.

“art is the Queen of all sciences communicating knowledge to all generations of the world”

- Leonardo da Vinci

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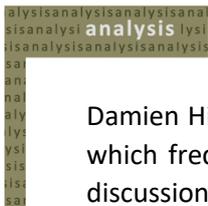
⁴ “Beauty.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 1 Apr. 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beauty>.

⁵ Jessop, T. (1932). *Philosophies of Beauty*. By E. F. Carritt. (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1931. Pp. 334. Price 15s.). *Philosophy*, 7(26), 244-245. doi:10.1017/S0031819100067565

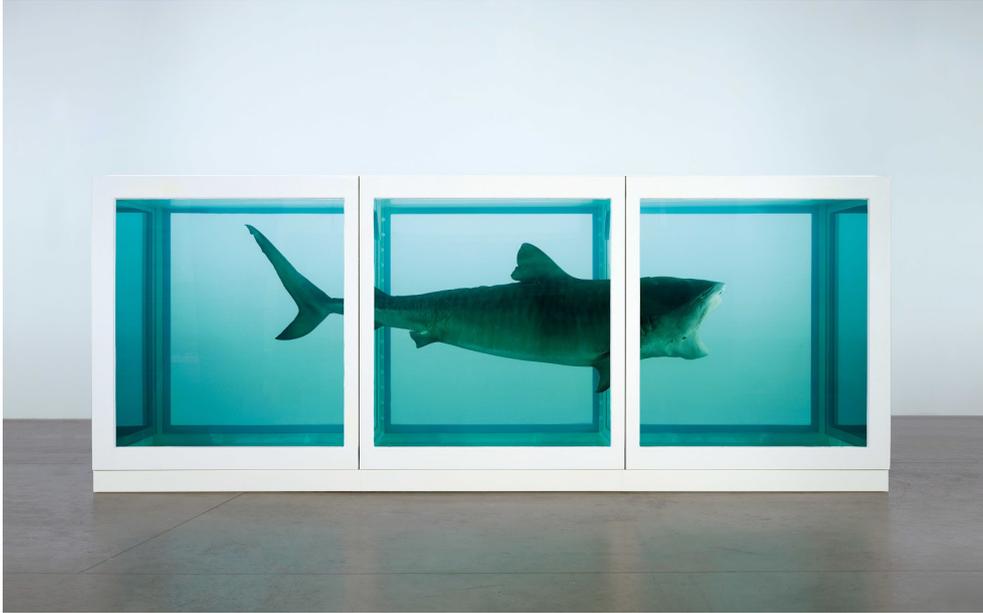
⁶ Nora Hamerman, “Leonardo da Vinci and The Scientific Revolution of Renaissance Visual Arts,” in *Fidelio*, Volume 2, Number 4, Winter 1993, pg. 30-42.

What is controversy?

Controversy is a, often public, disagreement involving different and opposing opinions and ideas about something, as defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary. Controversy is often the public reaction to something that is deemed shocking or bad by many, especially when figures of the public life are involved. Controversy isn't only about whether something is good or terrible; it's also about the multiple points of view. Controversy does not have to be black and white because people's perspectives differ in nuances. What makes something controversial is not only the significant difference in view, but also the multitude of opinions, which can differ in the smallest of ways. The essence of a controversy is that each opinion is passionately defended, and each member of the debate believes that they represent the correct opinion. An example of controversy that involves the definition of art is that, as mentioned above, there are a lot of different opinions concerning the subject of how to properly define art, which can lead to some heated discussions and debates. Another controversy that involves art is the ongoing discussion about whether certain pieces should be considered art.



Damien Hirst is a highly controversial artist. The artist is known for his sculptures around death, which frequently include living and dead animals preserved in formaldehyde. There is a lot of discussion over the ethics of Damien Hirst's art because it's not always evident how he got the materials for his pieces. His 1991 sculpture "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living," which was included in his exhibit Natural History alongside other controversial sculptures, is a great example of a contentious art piece. A tiger shark is submerged in formaldehyde in a glass and steel exhibit in this sculpture. A fisherman was tasked with catching the shark in Australian waters. This signifies that an animal that is "nearly threatened" to become extinct has been purposely murdered for the purpose of being turned into art. This piece has generated a wide range of responses, which make the piece controversial. Some claim that killing should never be included in art, while others argue that Damien Hirst's work isn't even art. Some argue that the artist's mission is to raise awareness about animals, particularly endangered ones, but that killing an animal to do so is unethical. Others believe this is the ideal method to depict mass extinction, and another group of people just think it is cool that there is a shark in a box. As one can see, there are a lot of different perspectives on Damien Hirst's work, which make it controversial.



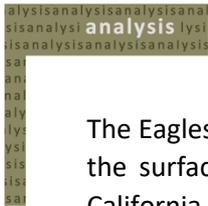
"The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" (1991) by Damien Hirst

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What does “meaning” mean?

Meaning signifies the “intend to convey, indicate, or refer to”⁷. In art, meaning indicates the purpose of the piece; questions like “Why was this piece created?” “Why was it created the way it was?” “What is this piece in reference to?” are raised. Sometimes these questions do not have a single right answer, if any. Most of the time they are open for anyone and everyone to interpret.



The Eagles' 1976 song "Hotel California" is one of the most heavily debated songs of all time. On the surface, it appears like the song is about the singer having sex with a woman in Hotel California. Some listeners believe that's all the song is about. Other theories dive far further into the song and its references.

Another theory claims that the Hotel is a metaphor for a mental hospital, to which the singer is admitted. The singer could be in a psychiatric facility for a variety of reasons, according to several theories. The mental hospital theory holds credibility since the singer "can never leave," just like the people who were admitted to the facility.

The song contains lines that some believe are synonyms for various substances, such as "warm smell of colitas" for cannabis, "lighting up a candle" for smoking cigarettes, and "We haven't had that spirit up here since 1969" for liquor.

Other versions argue that the woman in the song represents numerous vices that are attempting to get the singer to consume, such as drugs, prostitution, their past, parties, self-destructive lifestyles, or terrible decisions in general.

Another hypothesis holds that the Hotel represents California's Hollywood lifestyle or the Californian music industry, which serves as a safe haven from the outside world. Again, drugs, sex, illegal activities, and excessive and self-destructive living define these lifestyles.⁸

As is clear, the song's concept, as well as individual lyrics, are heavily disputed. This could be due to the song's simplicity; on the surface, the song is clearly about a hotel room in which the singer is having sex with a woman. However, this does not satisfy the listeners, and upon closer investigation and interpretation, the song appears to be about a variety of topics, depending on who you ask. The Eagles' "Hotel California" is a fantastic example of how art can have many different meanings to many different people.

⁷ "Meaning." *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/meaning_1.

⁸ "Eagles – Hotel California." *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Eagles-hotel-california-lyrics>.



Listen to "Hotel California" by the Eagles:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2ELuHKWwTMUAd9HSvMa1j?si=fe5a12508b3847ca>

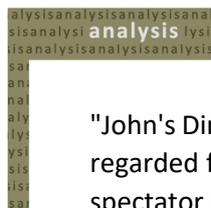
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What makes art successful?

From a purely theoretical standpoint Imitationalism, Formalism, Instrumentalism, and Emotionalism are four characteristics that can be used to decide whether a piece will be successful.

Imitationalism is concerned with creating art that appears to be as real as possible. Imitationalism equates realism with success, believing that only works of art that feature imitations of real-life objects can be successful; if an artwork does not appear real or credible, it has no value. According to the imitationalist theory, photorealism is the best of all art genres.⁹ This also implies that imitationalists judge artworks solely based on talent, rather than the meaning of the piece. Even though the imitationalist theory appears to be tied to visual art such as painting or sculpture, it can be applied to other forms of art that are experienced through other senses. A song, for example, can resemble real-life sounds, such as those made by animals.



"John's Diner with John's Chevelle" (2007) by John Baeder is an example of a piece that would be regarded flawless by an imitationalist. Despite the fact that the art is an oil painting, it fools the spectator into thinking it is a photograph for a split second. It imitates real life by attempting to make the painting appear as realistic as possible by painting shadows in the appropriate places and highlights where they are necessary. "Orange, Red, Yellow" (1961) by Mark Rothko is an example of a piece that would be judged unsuccessful. The modern painting is an acrylic on canvas painting that depicts a red painting with yellow and orange patches. The piece fails to impress an imitationalist since it does not resemble anything from real life. It appears to be a simple red painting with patches of orange and yellow.

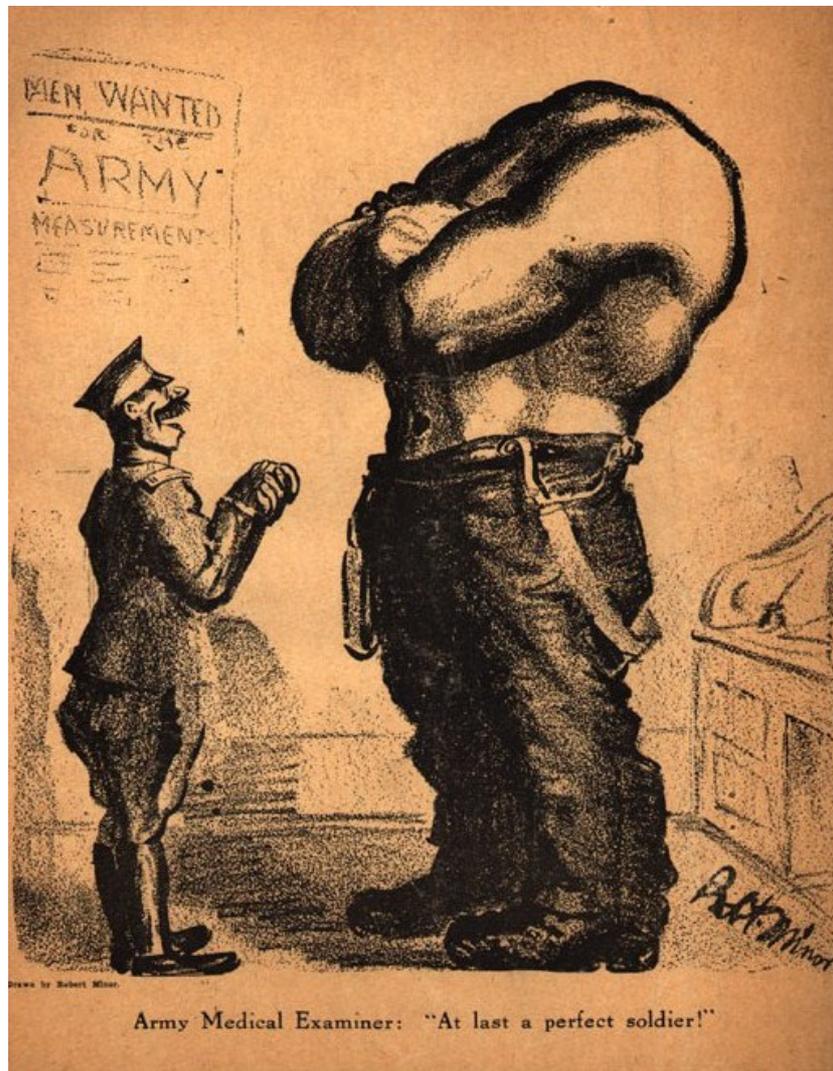


"John's Diner with John's Chevelle" (2007) by
John Baeder



⁹ Miewya, et al. "What Makes Art Good? A Lesson and Explanation of Art Theories." *Art Class Curator*, 23 June 2020, <https://artclasscurator.com/art-theories/>.

for himself and make sound and reasoned decisions, or a man who is not psychologically prepared for battle. Soldiers are trained to either attack or defend our country. Robert Minor criticizes the military by asking the audience if we should entrust our future to soldiers who are all muscle and no brain. Robert Minor's art criticizes the military and engages the audience in the process by encouraging thought and raising questions, which make "At Last a Perfect Soldier" a great example of instrumentalist art.



"At Last A Perfect Soldier" (1916) by Robert Minor

<https://images.app.goo.gl/JnziQu4Ms1Jzd5ML8>



However, these factors alone cannot determine the value of a work of art. Gallerists, critics, artists, the piece's history, and media attention each have an influence in its success.

Furthermore, not everyone views success in the same way. Some compositions, for example, may be extremely popular in a specific country because they are relevant to the country's history.

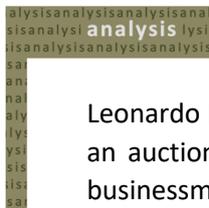
A piece can be judged from a theoretical perspective or based on additional factors. However, how a piece is judged is always dependent on the audience; most often, an art critic will focus on form and imitation; art enthusiasts may prefer to seek out a piece that speaks to them on an emotional level; and others may simply rate a piece's level of success based on what they consider to be aesthetically pleasing. Nonetheless, this begs the question of what success means for a work of art and how its worth is assessed and expressed.

How is value expressed in art?

Art, as previously stated, can be judged, and evaluated. But how is the worth of the pieces conveyed, and how does this affect the artwork?

The value art can be worth can be expressed in a variety of ways, and there are numerous methods to communicate how valuable this piece is.

Art can be valued in monetary terms, which means that the higher the price, the more valuable it is. Because its creator is a well-known or prominent artist, art might attract a greater price. It may also be more expensive due to its cultural or historical significance. In the case of historic art, a piece's preservation status can greatly increase its value. This, however, can be deceiving because the value of some pieces is artificially inflated for high society to use as a means of holding or generating wealth, as well as profiting from enormous tax write-offs.



Leonardo Da Vinci's "Salvator Mundi" (1499-1510) was the most expensive artwork ever sold at an auction in New York, earning US\$ 450.3 million, just over € 427 million. A Saudi Arabian businessman and government official named Badr bin Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Farhan Al Saud representing Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism was the highest bidder. The artwork depicts Christ in anachronistic blue Renaissance attire, holding a clear, non-refracting crystal orb in his left hand, and making the cross with his right hand. The fact that the artwork is so old is what most justifies the price. It is also still in excellent condition, and it is historically and culturally significant because it symbolizes a figure from the world's most popular religion, Christianity. Leonardo da Vinci, the artist who created it, also contributes to the cost. The fact that the item was sold at an auction, which is not uncommon for art, increased competition and, most likely, increased the price. "Salvator Mundi" (1499-1510) is the most valuable painting in the world in monetary terms. This does not, however, imply that everyone thinks the price is justified. Just because something is expensive does not indicate that it is as valuable as the price suggests.



"Salvator Mundi" (1499-1510) by Leonardo da Vinci

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Art can have sentimental value as well. The art has become valuable as a result of a personal and emotional attachment to it. A piece may be valuable just to a single individual or a group of people. The artwork may be valued in and of itself, but it is most typically valuable because it was given to or created by someone significant to the current owner. Images drawn by children and given to their parents, for example, are meaningful to them since they remind them of their child while also preserving memories for the future. However, the drawing will only be valuable to the parents, and no one else will consider it important or relevant.

Another approach to express worth is through media attention. Because of its recognizability and appeal, art that is being talked about more than the average piece of art, it becomes significantly more valuable. This type of worth, on the other hand, frequently translates into a higher monetary value.

Individual pieces of art that are displayed at art galleries, auctions, and museums have a chance of becoming worthy of the term of art. It becomes more desirable simply because it attracts the attention of those who are eager to acquire a lot more easily.

The significance of a piece of art is directly influenced by its worth. This component is crucial for compositions such as political caricatures because their success is measured in changes made as a

result of the piece's inspiration rather than in monetary value. Nonetheless, the level of success of a piece may often be measured on a surface level by the amount of money it is worth.



"Fountain" (1917) by Marcel Duchamp

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**"when a person sits quietly next to you,
your subconscious starts to create a message"
- Anita Louise**

¹⁴ Hummel, Anita Louise. "Can Art Have Absolutely No Meaning?" Anita Louise Art, Anita Louise Art, 8 Sept. 2021, <https://anitalouiseart.com/can-art-have-absolutely-no-meaning/>.

However, this poses certain questions. Who decides what a piece's meaning is if dadaist artists created art that was meant to have no purpose and yet their pieces have been assigned a purpose without their consent? Is it the artist themselves, or is it the audience that assigns a piece a purpose?

As previously stated, the artist gives a piece a purpose by simply acting on their need to create. As a result, every artist gives each item a meaning, even if that meaning is no meaning. Of course, any viewer can interpret any piece, even if the artist does not approve. This can also happen inadvertently and without the viewer's consent because pieces can evoke strong emotions that are difficult to control.

The relation between the viewers interpretation and the artist's initial given meaning can be used to categorize how a viewer interprets a painting. All interpretations of a piece that are formed while ignoring the assigned meaning are considered to be intentionalist. This is not to suggest that the message cannot be the same as the one which it was given; it just indicates that the viewer arrived at this conclusion without being aware of or being influenced by the original meaning assigned by the creator.

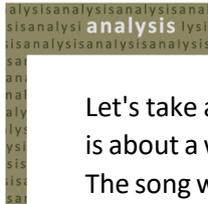
Anti-Intentionalism is the complete opposite: Art is viewed the way it is "intended" to be seen, according to the artist. The viewer aligns themselves with the artist's whole intent without taking the freedom to develop or find meaning in the piece on their own.

Meaning is the most significant component of the artwork for people who do not perceive art solely for the talent required to create it. Of course, the piece must satisfy the viewers aesthetically in order to be regarded successful, but without a message that is meaningful to the viewer, the piece is meaningless to said individual.

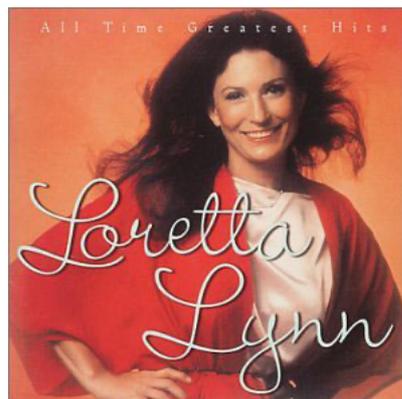
That is precisely what makes certain works of art so polarizing. Brushwork, colors, and other elements can be criticized, but they can never be controversial in the ways that a piece's narrative can be.

How can art be controversial?

What causes art to be divisive? This question has a lot of possible responses. Starting with the reality that some pieces challenge the norms of the public. The piece depicts something that isn't regarded normal in today's society. The piece may provoke feelings of displeasure, but it can also stimulate feelings of anger to the point that the viewers want the piece censored.



Let's take a look at Loretta Lynn's 1975 song "The Pill" to see how controversy is created. The song is about a woman who takes the pill to prevent her husband from repeatedly getting her pregnant. The song was intended to highlight the singer's desire for freedom, as she sees her husband having fun and doing what he wants while she is constantly being a mother, but this message was overshadowed by Loretta Lynn singing about using a contraceptive. Songs about contraception, especially from women, were unheard of at the time, and the idea of a woman refusing to fulfill her husband's wish of having many children was frowned upon by some.

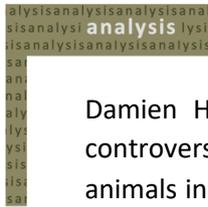


Listen to "The Pill" by Loretta Lynn:
<https://open.spotify.com/track/7ytzJQs2dMr3n8rjbhO7ZY?si=c4e7b5091ed54423>

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Because of the materials utilized in some of the artworks, they become contentious. When debatable items are used, or the process used to make the piece is controversial, the ethics of the piece's creation are sometimes questioned. The use of animal material, such as leather or feathers, can cause controversy, especially when these materials were sourced unethically.



Damien Hirst and his work, once again, serve as a perfect example of how art utilizing controversial materials may provoke debate. Damien Hirst is well-known for his use of dead animals in his works, including over 913,450 in nine of his series¹⁵. Although the usage of dead animals is highly discussed, the example to be examined is unique in that it did not begin with dead animals. "A Thousand Years," which appeared in 1990, is a sculpture/performance piece that includes a box that houses a rotting cow head and a white box that serves as a breeding and hatching area for flies. The box contains maggots, which transform into flies eating from the cow head and eventually die inside the box. This artwork is an excellent illustration of Damien Hirst's fascination with life and death, but it is distinct in that it is not stationary, but has movement, making it more engaging to watch for a longer period of time. Generally, when one visits a Damien Hirst exhibition, one expects to see dead animals, but "A Thousand Years" depicts the birth and death of generations of flies. Damien Hirst claims that he does not use this sculpture to kill flies, but rather to demonstrate the natural cycle of life and death. The sculpture was displayed for a total of 111 weeks, on ten occasions, resulting in a death toll equivalent to about 111 generations of flies, making this piece his most deadly to date, while insisting that he did not kill a single one of the flies.¹⁶



"A Thousand Years" (1990) by Damien Hirst

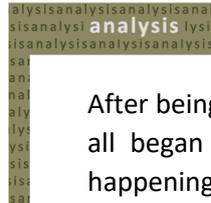
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¹⁵ Goldstein, Caroline. "How Many Animals Have Died for Damien Hirst's Art to Live? We Counted." *Artnet News*, Artnet News, 16 Aug. 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097>.

¹⁶ Goldstein, Caroline. "How Many Animals Have Died for Damien Hirst's Art to Live? We Counted." *Artnet News*, Artnet News, 16 Aug. 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097>.

Another possibility for a piece to offend the audience is if it was created by a particular artist. If the artist is contentious on their own, the chances that the item will be controversial are substantially higher. This could be because the artist has a history of creating art that has been poorly received by some individuals. Most of the time, the pieces are indeed contentious, but because the artist is known for provoking controversy, the audience picks up on the controversy attached to the art faster, or the piece becomes even more controversial than if it were created by a non-controversial artist.



After being accused of sexual harassment, actor Kevin Spacey lost a lot of money and respect. It all began in 2017, when actor Anthony Rapp accused Kevin Spacey of sexual misconduct happening back in 1986, when Anthony Rapp was only 14 years old. Since then, at least 13 more victims have come forward to accuse the actor of sexual misconduct. Kevin Spacey was fired from the Netflix show "House of Cards", the film "All the Money in the World", and the film "Gore," which was already in post-production at the time, following the allegations. In addition to filmmakers and media outlets distancing themselves from Kevin Spacey, his publicist and talent agency cut ties with the actor. Despite the fact that none of his projects sparked criticism as a result of his alleged behavior, he was fired from them to prevent this from happening. Being connected with such a celebrity, even if they are only accused of sexual misconduct, is immensely damaging to the filmmakers' and media outlets' reputations. If Kevin Spacey had stayed on set, the film or series would have risked garnering controversy, which could have cost a lot of money, either to better their image or if production has to shut down if it performs poorly at the box office. Directors would rather have a single actor miss out on an opportunity and money than have an entire production fail.



Kevin Spacey

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How can controversy be important?

Controversial art considers art to be more utilitarian than just aesthetically pleasing. That is not to suggest that artwork that is just attractive to the eye can never be provocative. Controversial art promotes the idea that art is a medium for communication, with the added benefit of being able to transcend language barriers. Controversial art is essential for a well-functioning society because it questions standards, encourages introspection, and communicates beliefs. It also demonstrates how society can still establish its own distinct perspectives about regarding something as subjective as art, and how artists remain free to create whatever they chose to.

“the growth of knowledge depends entirely upon disagreement”
- Karl Raimund Popper

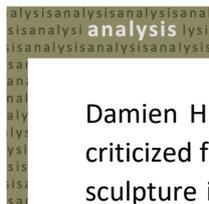
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¹⁷ Karl Popper, M.A. Notturmo (2014). “The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality”, p.10, Routledge

How far is too far?

The thought of irritating and even hurting people is at the heart of controversy. Some argue, however, that even problematic art and artists can cross the threshold from mere disagreement to excess. One could argue that where this boundary is drawn is as subjective as art itself, because one person may find something offensive while another sees it as acceptable.

Even though freedom of expression protects artists and their work in most countries, artists must nonetheless work within their country's legal framework. Artists are limited in what and how they can create art since they are not immune to the law. The degree to which a country interferes with artists' work definitely differs from country to country. The fact that artists cannot engage in unlawful activities appears to be acknowledged, therefore the question of art and censorship has focused more on the immaterial aspect of art: are artists free to convey their messages through artworks, whatever those messages may be and regardless of how offensive they may be? Because these messages do not exist on an objective level, this is a difficult question to address. Artists, like everyone else, must create in accordance with the law. It is impossible to design the ultimate interpretation of a work of art because it can be interpreted in so many different ways. There is no way a piece could be objectively offensive when sentiments are involved. This means that if some organizations were to decide whether an artwork was offensive or not, the decision-making process would undoubtedly be skewed by biases.



Damien Hirst is a well-known name in the world of contentious art. Damien Hirst has been criticized for a number of sculptures, prompting the public to question his ethics. This particular sculpture is one of his less controversial works, but it has also been one of his most unlawful.

Humbrol Limited, a toy manufacturer, has accused Damien Hirst of copyright infringement for allegedly replicating one of their toys in his work "Hymn" (1996). The sculpture is a 20-foot copy of a Humbrol Limited anatomy set. The artist and the toy company reached an out-of-court settlement as a result of the charges.¹⁸ This example demonstrates how, even in a time where free speech exists, artists may not be as free as people may believe. However, it is important to remember that Damien Hirst is a wealthy artist who could easily afford an out-of-court settlement. Furthermore, this circumstance has drawn a lot of attention to Damien Hirst and the sculpture, both from the general public and from critics. His admission to illegal action has aided him and his work, while avoiding further legal repercussions because he swiftly paid for his mistake.

¹⁸ "Hirst Pays up for Hymn That Wasn't His." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 19 May 2000, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/may/19/claredyer1>.

Furthermore, while everyone has the freedom to reject and criticize a piece, no one should be entitled to remove a piece from public view simply because it made them uncomfortable. Every artist has the right to create their works, and they should also have the right to display them. A work may not have the intended impact if it is not presented properly.

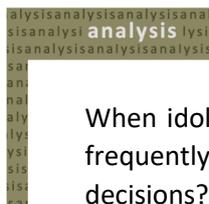
Is there an unbreakable connection between the artist and their work?

Can a piece be judged by itself after it has been created by the artist? Or does the artist always have a role to play? Is it possible for an item to be controversial just because it was created by a certain artist?

Because the artist created the piece, it will always be connected with the artist. Some pieces may even have created a lasting impression only because of their creator. The impact of a piece is frequently linked to the artist, as a well-known artist is more likely to create a well-known piece than a lesser known one.

Money is the most evident link between an artist and their work. Royalties are paid to artists such as musicians, authors, and actors, while others earn one-time payments for works such as paintings or sculptures. Others think that artists are connected to their work because of the ideas it conveys. Artists frequently use their art to express their own personal viewpoints. This is only apparent when the art is obviously about the individual's point of view. This raises the question if artists always portray their every view and belief in their every work of art. This argument has reverted to the concept of money as a link. Even if a piece does not reflect the artist's views, the consumer nevertheless supports the artist financially or by paying attention to the artist. Consider a company that sells both meat and vegan options. Does a vegan still support the harvesting of meat when they give money to a firm, even if it is in exchange for vegan food?

When you consume non-controversial pieces of art created by problematic individuals, you may be ignoring the artist's problematic ideals, but you are still indirectly supporting them. This is comparable to how a consumer may express their preference for vegan food by exclusively purchasing vegan options, but they continue to support the firm financially.



When idols, usually singers or actors, do anything questionable, these types of questions are frequently addressed. Is it still acceptable to consume their work if you disagree with their decisions? Chris Brown assaulting his then-girlfriend Rihanna during an argument in 2009 is a perfect example. Fans threatened to stop streaming his music with the intent to make him pay by cutting off his source of revenue. Since he makes his career as a musician, many of his fans stopping to stream his music must make him lose a lot of money, right? Not really! The majority of musical artists' earnings come from sources other than streaming services, such as tours and advertisement. Despite streaming growing in popularity in recent years, the earnings it generates are not making a huge difference in the accounts of the artists, especially ones like Chris Brown that can easily make money outside of streaming, and even outside of music. It would have a greater impact if fans stopped attending his concerts and paying for tickets. Additionally, brands will be hesitant to cooperate with Chris Brown due to public outrage over his behavior. Because fan support is so vital to particular artists, who rely on it to make a living, they must avoid any controversy that would compromise that support. Controversy can definitely cause artists to feel their fans' outrage through their bank account.



Chris Brown (left) and Rihanna (right)

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One must also assess the following: did the artist express regret for their actions and art in relation to the issue? Was the public and the individual pleased with the apology? Is it safe to presume that the artist still believes in their own work and comments, especially if the proof for their problematic viewpoints has become outdated? What is the artist's relationship to the subject? What is the viewer's relationship to the matter at hand?...

Because of all of these distinctive and subjective aspects, it is impossible to evaluate every scenario using the same procedure, and each situation must be evaluated independently of the others.

Because of its subjective character, deciding whether to continue consuming art or continue supporting the artist is a very personal decision that differs from person to person.

Is controversy in art necessary?

To establish if dispute aids in the success of a piece, one must first define success. As previously stated, success can imply a variety of things and can be measured in a variety of ways. Because controversial art frequently aims to shock, and hence seeks to send a message, the success of such works is rarely measured in monetary terms. A piece that has sparked controversy as a result of its attempt to quickly transmit a message, it is safe to conclude that it would like to acquire wealth in terms of audience reach. As a result, a controversial work of art is considered successful after it has reached its target audience and/or the largest potential audience.

Shock, outrage, passion, debate, and competing viewpoints define the essence of provocative pieces. These feelings and reactions to any piece are often that intense that one feels compelled to express them. This means that works of art, that cause controversy, will be more likely to be discussed than works that are not. The following rule applies: the more shocking a piece is, the more it will be talked about. Controversial art, as previously stated, challenges society by making people examine their own choices and behavior. Controversial pieces produce an indelible impression, since people are more likely to recall something that deviates from the norm than something that follows it. Therefore, yes, controversy can absolutely aid an artist in communicating their message through their work.

“art can definitely be used as a strong weapon against power structures in society, if used as a statement to arouse public sentiment or as battle cry against social injustice”

- Peter Birch

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Controversy, on the other hand, elicits strong emotions, which are not always positive. Is it a really necessary to irritate the audience in order to make your point? Is it absolutely necessary for artists to stir up controversy in order to communicate? Absolutely! One must ask themselves the following questions: Why is it necessary to have these powerful negative emotions present in order to leave a lasting impression? Why do we only pay attention when we are being attacked personally? Only when a viewer feels personally addressed can their attention be captured. If a piece is attempting to explain a concern that does not resonate with the majority of the audience, it must grab their attention otherwise. By having the piece produce uncomfortable feelings, a whole audience is made aware of the work and is thus provoked to think about the problem at hand, no matter their relation to said issue.

To be successful, one will not need controversy to transmit a simple idea, a notion, or a thought that does not intend to generate a debate. The same goes for aesthetic pieces, which solely intent to be beautiful. An aesthetically pleasing piece can attract attention solely based on the fact that it is beautiful. That is not to say that a piece created solely to be admired for its beauty can never be controversial; as we have seen, every work of art can spark debate, whether it is because of its provocative message or simply because some people do not think that it is worthy of the label of art.

²⁰ Birch, Peter. “Controversial Art... Does It Get to You?” *Artland Magazine*, 21 Oct. 2021, <https://magazine.artland.com/controversial-art-get/>.

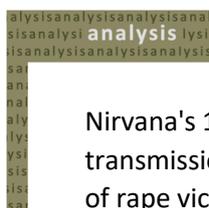
A piece that is merely aesthetic cannot provoke controversy without losing its original intent: to be beautiful.

Even works that are not eager to reach an audience in order to raise awareness about an issue can benefit from controversy. Controversy can be a powerful tool for achieving more self-serving objectives, such as garnering attention. Whether the attention is positive or negative, a controversial piece is usually very popular, as it becomes a rather interesting topic of conversation. Controversy causes the piece to be discussed, which then causes the artist to be spoken about. Controversy can be exploited in this way to make an artist and/or their work exceptionally recognizable. As a result, the item is frequently valued highly in monetary terms. This demonstrates why controversy is not always used for the greater good of spreading information, and it also demonstrates that controversy may absolutely be used for personal gains, such as fame and wealth.

The unsettling element may provide the essential reach for pieces that are clearly attempting to communicate a concept, as well as ensure that the piece and its theme are questioned. The piece's success is demonstrated by public discourse, which is sparked by conflicting viewpoints. The debate over a contentious piece of art, like any debate, is crucial because it demonstrates that there are perspectives other than our own. It makes us consider the other side's arguments and viewpoints, even if we do not agree with them in the least. This is essential for a good argument that leads to an agreement or agreement to disagree, as not every disagreement should result in compromise. Exposure to conflict causes us to rethink our own beliefs and may lead to the acceptance of alternative ideas that would not have been considered otherwise.

Controversy, particularly in the context of art, which represents freedom of speech and has communication at its core, is not only necessary for the success of some works of art, but also a vital part of a well-functioning society. Controversy and its consequences keep us grounded, reminding us that ours is not the only absolutely correct viewpoint. It teaches us to be more accepting of others who think differently than we do, as well as forcing us to consider the negative aspects of life, which is paradoxical given that many people feel beauty is the essence of art.

To answer the question of whether controversy is required for an artwork's success, the answer is yes, and no. Controversy will undoubtedly aid in the goal of generating thoughts and attracting a large audience. However, controversy can also help you with accomplishing more egotistical goals like accumulating fame or fortune. Controversy is not always utilized for the greater good of raising public awareness about a pressing issue or keeping society accepting.



Nirvana's 1993 song "Rape Me" is an excellent illustration of how controversy may benefit in the transmission of a message. Kurt Cobain, the singer, planned to write a series of songs in support of rape victims and even put on a charity event called "Rock Against Rape." Initially, he intended to promote his 1991 song "Polly" as his flagship but grew frustrated when the audience didn't understand what the song was about. The song is largely figurative, with no mention of the word "rape" at all. Also, because the song wasn't getting enough attention, Nirvana released the song "Rape Me," which was written at the same time as "Polly". "Rape Me" is evidently about rape; the lyrics are far more explicit and blunter. However, the title itself raises questions, as begging to be raped does not appear to be about raising awareness for rape victims. At first glance, it appears to advocate the

exact opposite; it appears to minimize rape while implying that rape victims desired the intercourse. The confusion arises when it is realized that Kurt Cobain held an anti-rape concert, which makes the song's promotion of rape seem quite incongruous. Despite the fact that both "Polly" and "Rape Me" had the same purpose, the contents of the songs caused only one of them to perform as well as expected. "Rape Me" sparked a lot of controversy since it faced people directly and forcefully with the issue of rape. With "Polly," it's much simpler to ignore the message and just enjoy the song, but with "Rape Me," it's nearly impossible to listen to without thinking about rape. That was the entire point of "Rape Me"'s explicitness and directness. So, in this instance, controversy unquestionably served Kurt Cobain in his purpose of raising awareness for rape victims.



Listen to "Rape Me" by Nirvana:

<https://open.spotify.com/track/5Rizj5FLb2AyNKu9esiYY6?si=a61921f95cca468d>

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Conclusion

This memoire demonstrated how not every concept has a single correct definition, including the ones at the heart of this memoire: art and controversy. This memoire has researched a variety of art-related topics, such as the theories that can be used to judge art or the relationships between a piece, the intended meaning, and the personal interpretation. This memoire also looked at the more philosophical aspects of contentious art, such as whether it is necessary and how it might help achieve certain aims. The memoire also successfully addressed the question I had at the beginning of this research: Is contentious art necessary in modern society? This memoire, as expected, could and should not include a question-and-answer system, not even when talking about the most important question of this paper, since it is simply impossible. Art cannot be reduced to a single correct response to a question or a single correct view about art. However, I believe that this memoire was successful in giving a number of different viewpoints and responses, allowing the reader to reach their own conclusions. I hope that this memoire has left the reader with many more questions than they had before, while also providing them with the necessary tools to address them.

The purpose of this paper was to inspire thought, which I feel it accomplished. I've learnt a lot, not only about art theory and the philosophical study of art, but also about how to think about these concepts by myself.

Art can be a very simple and easy-to-understand topic, yet it can also be extremely complex. It is impossible to tell when one has acquired enough knowledge to fulfill one's appetite for learning because there is always a new art movement, concept, or philosophical theory to learn and explore. But, in my opinion, that is what makes art so fascinating, and why art will continue to be a major element of not only our personal lives, but also of humankind itself.

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