

Dean Trisko, essays



I May Not Know Art, But ...

For most of us, responding to an artwork is intuitive, a gut response. We enjoy the look, we identify with its subject, we are enchanted by the artist's perception, we like it! Or we don't. We don't find the artwork to be "to our taste." Those less-enjoyed artworks may induce feelings of indifference, confusion, displeasure or even revulsion. For many of us, an old adage comes to mind—"I may not know art, but I know what I like." Liking or enjoying an artwork is part of what many of us expect from a satisfying art experience.

When starting out making art, many people begin with a similar assumption. The assumption seems logical, "I know what I like art to be," so if I make a type of art that I like, (most) other people will like it too. But there is a challenge in that assumption—do we all agree what art is for, what function art serves? Some people have a strong opinion as to what an artwork should be or do. Others will say art should have no purpose at all, it should just be.

Consider some reasons people give for making art:

- To record what you see or experience
- To communicate visually—by its self or combine with language
- As a way to make the intangible more tangible—dreams, memories, fantasy, etc.
- To entertain—to delight others with your visions or ideas
- To visually embellish and/or add beauty to the world
- To tell or retell fables, stories, or narratives
- To make money—a commercial interest
- To fill a need—art at times can be functional
- As a creative format—being inventive in a visual form
- To express yourself (ideas, feelings, beliefs, imagination, etc.)

- To promote—a group, a cause, activity etc.
- To engage viewers—get others to look or think
- To enjoy making things—the process of using our eyes, hands, and art materials (see *The Spaghetti Story*)
- A fulfilling activity—a hobby, pastime, etc.
- As a therapeutic activity, something to help the artist personally—to provide relaxation, tap into the subconscious, add dexterity, process internal issues, etc.
- As a way to maintain traditions—methods, crafts and skills, cultural-forms
- To create opportunities for reflection and relaxation (for the artist or the viewer)

The list could go on...

Does what we expect from our art effect how it ultimately looks? Will placing more expectations on our artwork make the production of the work more demanding? Is it possible that having expectations will change how we make the art? If an artwork must fill many expectations, will it be less effective at specific objectives? Answers to these questions will vary amongst artists. When I started making art, I wanted my artwork to be all that art could be. I wanted it to do everything that great artist have done. I wanted too many things at the same time. At times my art would be in conflict with itself.

It can be helpful to identify why you are making art, though I'll admit that's not easily put into words. I fell into art because making it gave me joy. A joy and fulfillment I found in few other activities. I wanted art to stay pure, to flow freely from my mind and heart to the canvas. I also know I was often confused about how to be an artist. Along the way, the implications of what art could or should be became more complicated. Making art is still a joy, only now I am aware of more options—and pitfalls. My essays are an effort to help those interested in navigating the many paths and vistas art presents.