

Name: _____

Year and Course: _____

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this lesson, the students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between directly functional and indirectly functional art,
2. Explain and discuss the basic philosophical perspectives on the art,
3. Realize the function of some art forms in daily life, and
4. Apply concepts and theories on beauty and aesthetics in real life scenarios

LESSON 3

FUNCTIONS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ART

INTRODUCTION

Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that every particular substance in the world has an end, or telos in Greek, which translates into "purpose." Every substance, defined as a formed matter, moves according to a fixed path toward its aim. A seed is bound to become a full-grown plant. A cocoon can look forward to flying high when it morphs into a butterfly. A baby will eventually turn into a grown man or woman.

This telos, according to Aristotle, is intrinsically linked with function. For a thing to reach its purpose, it also has to fulfil its function. Man, in Aristotle's view of reality, is bound to achieve a life of fulfillment and happiness, or in Greek, *eudaimonia*. All men move toward this final end. However, happiness, the supposed end of man, is linked with his function, which is being rational. One can only be happy when he is rational. This means that to Aristotle, plants can never be happy because they are not



rational, as well as tables and chairs. Man's natural end, *telos*, is connected with his function, which is his rationality.

Moreover, the telos and function of a thing are both related to a thing's identity. What makes a table a table is the fact that it does perform its function and thereby reaching its telos. If a table does not have a surface on which we can put on our books or our plates and glasses, then it ceases to be a table. The same goes for the human being. What makes a human being a human being, according to some schools of thought, is his capacity for thinking, his supposed function. Without this function, the human being ceases to be a human being. The telos, the function, and the "whiteness" of a thing are all interconnected.

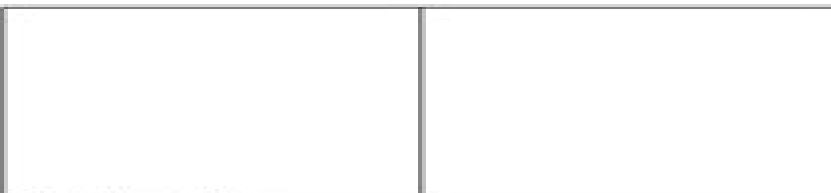
In contemporary life, the connection between the end, the function, and the "whiteness" of a thing has become closer and more interlaced, suggesting sometimes that the end is the function, and vice versa, and that they determine what kind of thing a thing is. When one sees a new kitchen appliance in the department store, one tries to know first what functions the appliance has. After knowing these functions, then one can claim to know the purpose of the appliance and then begins to realize what appliance one is looking at in his store.

Does art necessarily have an end? When an artist creates a work of art, does he have an end in mind? What function does an artwork perform? Does it have any purpose? Do all artworks have a function? Does the function make an object a work of art? This lesson is an attempt to clarify these questions.

Let's Get Started

Visit your school or city/town museum. Using the table below, list down as many different artworks that you have witnessed. On the second column, identify what it is for. You can either research this or observe intelligently. Write them down on the corresponding column.

Artwork	What is it for?
---------	-----------------



Let's Get Down to Business: Functions of Art

When one speaks of function, one is practically talking about the use of the object whose function is in question. An inquiry on the function of art is an inquiry on what art is for. Alternatively, the answer to the question "what is it for" is the function of whatever "it" in the question refers to. Suppose one asks, what is the Rizal monument for? Why was it erected in Rizal Park or what then was called Luneta or Bagumbayan? Is it for pure sentimental value? Is it for its aesthetic value? Or does it send a message to those who witness it? In this string of questions, the inquirer is hoping to get the function of the piece of art in Rizal Park.

When it comes to function, different art forms come with distinctive functions. There is no one-to-one correspondence between an art and its function. Some art forms are more functional than others. Architecture, for example, as an art is highly functional just like most applied arts. A building as a work of art is obviously made for a specific purpose. The Taj Mahal, a massive mausoleum of white marble built in Agra was constructed in memory of the favorite wife of the then emperor, Shah Jahan. On the other hand, jewelry-making as an art is known by its product. The name of the art in these applied arts is basically denoted by its specified function. In this and other such functional arts, "function is so important that it has usurped the name of the art on the identification of individual works" (Doddley et al., 1966). Other examples are paintings, poems, and statues. The name of the art basically points toward the direction of the product or its function.

On the other end of the spectrum, one can only think of painting and literature as forms of art that have the least to do with purely practical values. When one examines and thinks of a painting or a work of literature such as a poem or a novel, one looks at the value of the art in itself and not because of what it can do and benefit

us. Unlike practical where the value of the art (in pottery, jewelry-making, architecture, among others) in question lies in the practical benefits one gains from it (a pot, a jewelry, or a house or building), with painting and literature, one can only look at the value of the product of art in and for itself. A poem is beautiful regardless of its possible ramifications in the society. Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" has maintained its popularity through the years regardless of its application or practical benefit. This definitely is not to say that paintings and literary works can never have any function. The two masterpieces of our national hero, Dr. Jose P. Rizal, the *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* served as a catalyst for Filipino revolutionaries to gather strength in rejecting the oppressive forces of the Spaniards in the Philippines in the nineteenth century. The novels accrued value and as a consequence, function. This function, as it turns out, may be over and beyond its literary worth. They are functional "in so far as they are designed to accomplish some definite end" (Doddley et al., 1966). In the case of Rizal's novels, they spelled out a country's independence. They continue to be treasured even a hundred years after the supposed functions.

Broadly and broadly, the functions of art are classified into three: personal (public display or expression), social (celebration or to affect collective behavior), and physical (utilitarian). Let us try to understand each of these three.

Personal Functions of Art

The personal functions of art are varied and highly subjective. This means that its functions depend on the person—the artist who created the art. An artist may create an art out of the need for self-expression. This is the case for an artist who needs to communicate an idea to his audience. It can also be mere entertainment for his intended audience. Often, the artist may not even intend to use as anything with his work.

An art may also be therapeutic. In some orphanages and homes for abandoned children, art is used to help residents process their emotions or while away their time. Recently, the use of adult coloring books to de-stress has been apparent too, now with a lot of designs being sold in bookstores nationwide. These all fall under personal functions of art.

Social Functions of Art

Art is considered to have a social function if and when it addresses a particular collective interest as opposed to a personal interest. Political art is a very common example of an art with a social function. Art may convey message of protest, contestation, or whatever message the artist intends his work to carry. Often, art can also depict social conditions. Photography, as an art form, delivers this kind of function by taking photos of



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