

The Art of Living

Masters of Art

Chagall's fiddlers dance on roofs and his women float above villages; Picasso's women on occasion are three dots, a triangle, a few curves, and five daubs of pink; Matisse in front of an open window painted a square of Tangier; Millet believed in the existence of God and eternity, which the observer might sense when looking at Millet's "Sower."

Vincent VanGogh looked at Millet's work and asked if the painter is *duty-bound* to put an idea into his art. A lesser known work of VanGogh's is a lithograph of an old man with his head in his hands entitled "Worn Out: At Eternity's Gate." The work of a master's hand may take on a life of its own; art might even be called life distilled. Yet it is the still life, not the life; it is the representation.



The Thing Itself

Picasso saw it this way: Art is like a perpetual non-tranquility, a swarming mass of ideas, and every one a wombful of canvases. And by the time one canvas is completed, the painter has already gone. He is ever looking, but for what? "A truth that flashes forth, a spontaneous, natural way of expressing, in a single stroke, the reality at which the artist aims: the thing itself." The form. The perfect example. Maybe life itself.

A Philosophy of Art is a Philosophy of Life

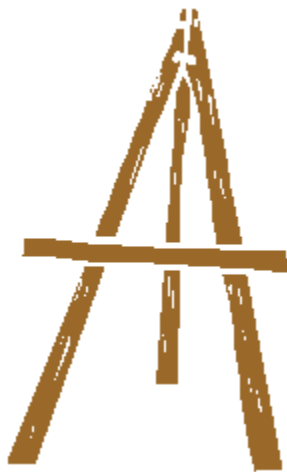
"If you ask what I came to do in this world, I, an artist, will answer you: I am here to live out loud." This is what Emile Zola said, and this is what Matisse did in the face of his wife and daughter's arrest for their work in the French Resistance. "Into the ashcan with Matisse"

was the cry of the Nazis, calling the works of the then frail Matisse “degenerate art.” Throughout the war, he extolled through his art the pleasure and well-being of life embedded in the French notion of *gloire*. In Michelangelo’s high view, the true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection. C. S. Lewis would agree, for he noted that “Nothing is yet in its true form.” Andre Malraux’s view, however, is decidedly dim: “All art is a revolt against man’s fate.”

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But enough of art! We want life! The message on Keats’s Grecian urn is “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” and apparently in life that’s all we need to know. As nice as that sounds, it is not, however, very instructive. To live remains an art which everyone must learn, and which no one, it appears, can adequately teach. There is one who can teach us, however, and the essence of this Jewish Master born in Bethlehem is captured in art.

Among the great artists, Rembrandt is one of the few who in their representation of the Incarnation of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, expressed its paradoxical harshness. Here was a king born on straw! Rembrandt allowed the gospel text to speak for itself; rather than paint a magnificent poetic legend, he captured the reality of the event, its concrete, human, and yet divine character. He portrays Jesus the Jewish Messiah as fully divine and fully human, that is, Son of God and Son of Man. Bethlehem means that God himself intervenes and that this can only be comprehended by faith.



Get the picture?

The art of living can best be taught by the Master, who was himself the subject of paintings for centuries. But the Jewish Jesus is not mere representation: He is *The Thing Itself*; He is the way, the truth, and the life.