December 24, 2012

An Appeal to Aesthetics

Dorothy M Hong
An Appeal to Aesthetics
by Dorothy M. Hong, December 2012

Beauty surrounds us every day. While some people search, own, appreciate, imitate and are overwhelmed and humbled by beauty others want to chase it away and destroy it because of human foibles which render mortals imperfect because of our twisted notion of self, pride and envy. As a painter and a lawyer painting for me is not just a plea for vindication to higher beings\(^1\) and the God. Rather it celebrates life in an attempt to make whole relief of broken world thankfully for those who have the artistic skill and talent. Painters can show appreciation for visual pleasure they enjoy whether visceral, intuitive or sublime, the beauty in humanity that they can embrace and convey on medium with colors, composition and chiaroscuro.

The unspoken connection and rapport the painter can build however momentarily with the viewer is the key to success of gallery districts. “The art that favors the relational admits that the object is not as important as the level of experience the audience hopes to get from their encounter.”\(^2\) According to a distinguished art historian, Meyer Schapiro, “The great interest in painting and sculpture (versus poetry) arises precisely from its unique character as art that produces expense, rare, speculative commodities. Schapiro’s insight suggests one means of identifying the most important artists, through analysis of prices at public sales.”\(^3\) While pricing of a painting may differ also depending on primary or secondary market and whether the artist is emerging, established or deceased, the fundamental factors that enter into assessing pricing would be originality, labor involved, skills and the value of narration. It is gratifying to the

---

\(^1\) See generally. Roger Scruton, (Oxford University Press, 2009)
\(^2\) David Rothenberg, Survival of the Beautiful Art, Science, and Evolution, 206 (Bloomsbury Press, 2011)
\(^3\) David Galenson The Most Important Works of Art of the Twentieth Century, NBER Working Paper Series, 3 http://www.nber.org/paper/w12058 article
creator and painter whenever the visitors briefly feel exhilarated, stimulated or challenged by instant resemblance from life or image elsewhere viewers can recollect in their minds and appreciate from such instantaneous cognitive recognition. So in a way the dynamics I just described is an intelligence test. The more obscure, weird or awkward the painting seems the less appealing to our senses. The trick is a masterpiece would pass every viewer with extraordinarily high scores in intelligence and recognition tests that viewers unknowingly betray flash of brilliance in their own interpretation of goodness, beauty and other peaceful thought or material comfort. This kind of ability for such an aesthetic experience can make us feel redeemed in the eyes of God, if not by other mortals. On a more physical plane, “The beautiful is the root of science and the goal of art, the highest possibility that humanity can ever hope to see.”

“Aesthetics, according to Thompson, becomes a blend of what is possible with what is preferred, over generations of evolution. The rhythmic laws of nature, and the mathematics that determines them, have something beautiful right at the source. This is not beauty veiled in mystery, but a system of symmetry that mathematics can help to make clear.” This sense of predictability with patterns thereby creating symmetry and orderliness mimics nature and life yet defies the variables that each individual needs to account for each day even at a cost. “The possible unity of truth and beauty has proved so seductive that mathematicians and physicists often rely on unverified links between truth, beauty, and symmetry to frame their hypothesis.”

---

4 Rothenberg at 281
5 Id. at 51
Korean traditional art is an example of repetition of asymmetrical floral patterns that had been recognized as East Asian aesthetics whose patterns and symmetries have inspired American wall paper and fabric industries later into our time. While asymmetry in floral or sea shell patterns on the coating and contour are commonplace, it is unexpected to represent them and use it in tiles or roofing, scrolls and bricks to form ornate and intricate patterns that add splendor to Korean architecture of bygone dynastic eras.

“The science of evolution changes art by putting forth an incredibly provocative theory that begs for illustration and creator’s questioning. Then the opening up of artistic expression to consider pure line, shape, and form leads artists to take the scientific investigation of these theories much more seriously.”

Often in American paintings the buildings and streets are so renovated in the process of painting that they are devoid of garbage, filth and other signs of unevenness, decay or destruction. Many city scenes are brilliantly orderly, tidy and clean. Can one appreciate or sense any pathos or aesthetics from a close viewing of a garbage pale filled with putrid debris and rubbish. “Art evokes, comments, eludes analysis, takes a stab, stuns us with its surprising tack. ... The goal is to change the way we see the world through astonishment and delight.” The fact that humans are endowed with faculty to expect the unexpected to find pleasure in pleasant surprises in life lends itself to a direction that applauds pioneers into new sense of aesthetics while at the same time unlike scientific technology affords appreciation that old art is as good as new art.

---

7 Rothenberg at 55
8 Id. at 58
As a Japanese artist once say, “Only the painter can alter black to white and vice versa.” In the Western culture black is associated with dark force and white with lilies of valley personifying resurrection of Jesus and otherwise purity and goodness. In Korean Andong mask tradition, red mask represents the good people, farmer, black, an evil scoundrel, and white, a corrupt ruler. Similarly in Japan infants and small children are referred to as aka-jjang, aka meaning red. Colors sometimes are evocative as well as provocative and for this reason many cultures have assigned a symbolic meaning and moral value to them. Colors only heighten our appreciation for aesthetics.

What is then the point of beautification if they camouflage filth and make the dark underground activity fantastic and dream-like and therefore accepting and fitting in our society. Any writer spends some time working multiple drafts, editing and embellishing his writing. It would be foolhardy to submit a writing that is filled with unintentional errors. One customer asked me at a fair, “How long does it take you to do a small painting? A couple of hours?” Actually, it takes more than that. But I understand his point when he alluded to Oscar Wilde’s point of view of aesthetics to my effort. I believe in limitation of capacity and perhaps with more training, practice and opportunities I’ll get better but why work on ten different drafts if you feel like you don’t have a command of the subject matter. In my mind, there is no such thing as one singular masterly or painterly way that is fitting for showing. “Prum proposes that art is a communication that evolves by coevolution between the observed and the observer, a performance and an audience, through sensory evaluation.”9 Similarly, Dennis Dutton “wants art to be beautiful and aesthetic, but he also wants it to be adaptive, useful, good for humans.

---

9 Rothenberg, supra at 74
because it is instinctively part of our make up.”  I understand that people are not inclined to favor ugly and non-understandable scenes that lack symmetry or proper perspective from life however truthful the scenes were registered in the mind of artist initially upon perceiving the subject matter which he thought was worthy of depicting in picture form. Rather they want see imperfection, dirt, fuzz balls hidden and swept away on canvas. But does this make the artist the creator feel good to know he wiped out what he saw that is for instance, poverty, war, destruction, disaster and bloodbath.

When a prim and proper lady utters, “A Greek guy threw salad at me during lunch and he offered dinner for two, “ does the hearer care or have the time of the day to decipher and find encryption codes for instance hidden beneath calm and composed state of affair? “Art could be exact, while nature was unclear.” Art can make old houses seem mechanically precise when in reality it is imprecise and worn out. In essence, the corruption labor of beautification can be rationalized as science and artist as being silent partners to “combine the quest for Plato, for the pure forms hidden behind the imperfection we see, and the dream of Aristotle, for the whole of human creativity and technology designed to improve upon the possibilities for those left unfinished.” On the other hand, it is feasible for asymmetry and unfinished imperfection making the appearance to imagine a room for improvement because, “Art can chose to be abstract toward the pure and the perfect, like mathematics, or it can celebrate the messiness and court the importance of unevenness, that you must have that swing if you want to mean a thing.” One reason for such an appeal is sometimes we see a swift change in nature that permanently alters the shape that is to say for instance, cherry blossom at its full bloom at

10 Id. at 76
11 Id. at 169
12 Id. at 168
13 Id. at 170
once showering the ground with the peddles that fell off as a result of quick jerk on the branches from the spring breeze.

What is the responsibility of a painter then? A crowd pleaser? Paint whatever banal subject matters that are guaranteed to sell because those finer and innocent things are pretty and desirable? Or is it just a self-serving therapy to create a brief sanctuary in a space whether man-made or God created nature to uplift what is mundane and sordid into something more magnificent, mystifying and beautiful. Another way to look is to claim master of human situations and shed life to scenarios that adds ripples to what was known before us because really everything was revealed before our time. It is just a matter of searching and finding in our life journey.

As Roger Scruton writes, “Beauty can be consoling, disturbing, sacred, profane; it can be exhilarating, appealing, inspiring, chilling.”\textsuperscript{14} To me, beauty is therefore aspirational as well as inspirational and peculiar to location and its local history and drama. As Scruton explains, “There is an ancient view that beauty is the object of a sensory rather than an intellectual delight, and that the senses must always be involved in appreciating it.”\textsuperscript{15} Just as each locale has its special cuisine and use of spice and cooking method so does the taste in beauty vary from one place to another place. “Beauty, I argue, is a real and universal value, one anchored in our rational nature, and the sense of beauty has an indispensable part to play in shaping the human world.”\textsuperscript{16} While the concept of beauty, I agree, is a real and universal value as is the old saying which says, “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder,” “[w]e are taught that art should just be made, to express whatever lies buried inside us that need to be expressed. We all know beauty

\textsuperscript{14} Scruton, supra at ix
\textsuperscript{15} Id. at 22
\textsuperscript{16} Id. at x
is in the eye, ear, or touch of the beholder. We like what we like; it’s all suppose to be personal opinion.”17 While a social truth may begin with embodiment of “the belief that, once found, would be simple as well as pretty, [t]he gesture of youthful arrogance, however, rarely, if ever, yields the truth on its own. “18 Jim Chen then adds that many comments may seem biased when for instance “lawyers follow an ‘incomplete and hurried’ protocol by which they ‘frequently decide to like or dislike a new idea or acquaintance.” 19

One may therefore speak of ranking in beauty as illustrated by Kant and Hegel who conceived “of relation between natural beauty and artistic beauty in a hierarchical arrangement, the former regarding natural beauty to be superior to artistic beauty and the latter regarding the beauty of art to be higher than the beauty of nature.”20 Notwithstanding, in Theodor Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory, natural beauty is neither superior to, nor subordinate to artistic beauty, though natural beauty is the precondition for an appreciation of artistic beauty.” On the one hand, Kant argues “that natural beauty is superior to artistic beauty in that the immediate interest the lover of nature takes in contemplating nature is indicative of a good soul and of one who has cultivated their moral feeling.”21 Can’t one expand on Kant’s contention then that having fun and not learning or imitating or being influenced by bad things is superior to making and creating good things at the cost of eliminating and covering up bad things? According to Hegel, “[t]he beauty of art born of the spirit and born again, and the higher the spirit and its productions and stand above nature and its phenomena, the higher too is the beauty of art above that of nature. … For Hegel, the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of nature taken in

17 Rothenberg at 59
18 Chen at 266
19 Chen at 266
21 Id. at 2
its immediacy, for the work of art is a spiritual product that is first conceived in the mind, which refashion natural material that is born again as a work of art imbued with spirit.”

So in essence, Adorno reconciles this natural verse artistic beauty hierarchy by emphasizing that “the aesthetic experience of natural beauty entails a relation between subject and object that is not that of domination or mastery. ... According to Adorno, aesthetic rationality is that form of rationality that governs the coherence and unity of a work of art: ‘art is not something pre-rational or irrational. ... Rationality in the art work is the unity –founding, organizing element, not related to the rationality that governs externally, but it does not reflect its categorizing order.” Therefore, “Adorno focuses his attention on artistic production rather than the reception of works of art.” For me, aesthetics is about appreciating painting as art not learning how to paint aesthetically. Adorno offers aesthetic experience based on nostalgia and ephemeral quality of beauty while Kant and Hagel’s arguments assume cyclical nature of all beings and restoration and rejuvenation of all things natural and hence artistic beauty being capable being captured into infinity of our time and human civilization.

Can a Semite or South Asian appreciate English beauty of sandy blonde with hazel-brown eyes? I think not at first look. Do they have to accept blonde brown eyes as a beauty that they should aspire, imitate or desire and uphold? I think not. But British Empire had been such a resounding and profound influence on the earth since nineteenth century that one cannot escape the feeling that many aliens are inured to what is inundated and educated as beautiful by some as the universal truth because they in power are held to the public as more acceptable and fitting than those marginalized in human society. Even in a small peninsula of North and South Koreas

---

22 Burke, supra at 5
23 Id. at 8
before their division the people of Koreas had for long generations described distinguishable
and discernible traits and taste in beauty depending on location, mainly folks speak of
Pyongyang beauty on one hand and Taegu beauty on the other. I concede therefore as what
Bertrand Russell called “a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without any appeal to
any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet
sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show.”

24

Scruton writes, “From Kierkegaard to Wilde the “aesthetic” way of life, in which beauty is
pursued as the supreme value, has been opposed to the life of virtue. The love of myths, stories
and rituals, the need for consolation and harmony, the deep desire for order all have drawn
people to religious beliefs regardless of whether those beliefs are true.”

25 So on an
epistemological plane, people are universally agreeable on the conceptual and philosophical
definition of beauty without any illustrations of sample portraits.

Can a Kenyan or Greek appreciate the beauty of Japanese Noh maiden mask that has been
somewhat commercialized even in Western world nowadays? I once painted a mother and her
infant baby basing the mother’s face from my own recollection of a facebook photo from a
Korean American friend who posted her aunt posing with her baby. But the finished product
that I created was an image of an East Asian young woman whom I have no personal knowledge
superimposed in my mind with Japanese Noh mask. This is not necessarily because I instinctively
felt kinship or aesthetics with Japanese craftsmanship of such masks for Noh Drama but because
I studied Noh Drama and so I have become accustomed and ingrained in my mind with the
image of such masks and quite unintentionally in my effort to capture warmth and beauty I

24 Chen at 265
25 Scruton at 3
mimicked the face of Noh Drama maiden mask. One Chinese American woman probably from Taiwan with half-breed white daughters instinctively felt something visceral and blurted out, “She’s beautiful.” But this was a surprise as well as a relief for me for my appreciation of my labor.

As they say in art world, it’s all about labor because everything shows up on your work and your final product. God forgives, and people can be forgiving at times but things move and shape the way humans command and create and amend.

Indeed “human beauty places the transcendental subject before our eyes and within our grasp. It affects us as sacred things affect us, as something that can be more easily profaned than possessed. ... There is hardly a person alive who is not moved by the beauty of the perfectly formed child. Yet most people are horrified by the thought that this beauty should be a spur to desire, other than the desire to cuddle and comfort. Every hint of arousal is, in these circumstances, a transgression,” says Scruton.26 A distant respect and a solemn awe coupled with silent and private solitary pleasure add to one’s acquired taste of beauty and rigor of self-control and self-restraint which adds dignity and value to unperturbed object of beauty. By the same token a woman is like a house in that it all depends on maintenance. A sense of beauty is enhanced when a woman, for instance, takes active part in maintenance in terms of her appearance, health and mental hygiene. A homely woman with ill fitting polyester bargain off the rack attire can too seem beautiful when she thwarts intrusive evil and dirty thoughts and welcomes wholesome and pure thoughts and triumphs in self-control and will to maintain her pretty appearance.

26 Scruton at 53-54
“[Aquinas’] view on beauty is more implied than stated; nevertheless he wrote as though beauty too is such a transcendental, which is one way of explaining the point already made, that beauty belongs to every category. He also thought that beauty and goodness are, in the end, identical, being separate ways in which a single positive reality is rationally apprehended.”

This is why an anonymous good woman is as marriageable as glamorous and beautiful model/actress. Although some men take advantage of women with bad thoughts because they can’t help themselves when the woman is filled with bad thoughts because the world gets them down and so does her sense of resistance, still other men believe sex can make a woman prettier by being busy because the woman would thereafter mull over pregnancy and so she becomes busy thinking about the fetus, her health and the prospect of arrival of new born baby and thus become temporarily at least becomes oblivious to the bad thought that overwhelmed and filled her heart and mind. In reality sex crime victims are scarred for life and may suffer various level of acuity of symptoms and syndromes which time may or may not heal entirely.

“The beautiful soul is aware of evil, but stands aloof from it in a posture of forgiveness-forgiveness of others, which is also a forgiveness of self.”

Scruton continues, “The beautiful soul is one whose moral nature is perceivable, who is not just a moral agent but a moral presence, with the kind of virtue that shows itself to the contemplating gaze.”

Why else would a first rate mind or for instance, Jesus Christ, a sexless, self-less, human embodiment of the perfect and mighty God be worth gazing and portraying globally? “The judgment of beauty, it emerges, is not merely a statement of preference. It demands an act of attention. And it may be

---

27 Scruton at 4
28 Id. at 49
29 Id. at 50-51
expressed in many different ways. Less important than the final verdict is the attempt to show what is right, fitting, worthwhile, attractive or expressive in the object: in other words, to identify the aspect of the thing that claims our attention.”

A corollary to this is that, “The [Holy] Virgin’s beauty is a symbol of purity, and for this very reason is held apart from the realm of sexual appetite, in a world of its own. This thought reaches back to Plato’s original ideal: that beauty is not just an invitation to desire, but also a call to renounce it.”

“That beauty inspires desire is unsurprising, since beauty resides in the presentation of an individual, and desire yearns for the individual and delights in another’s presented form.” Yet, on the other hand when we consider beauty it is often without the consideration of the dynamics of economics because, “More generally the idea of aesthetics encourages us to believe that by isolating objects from their use, and purifying them of the economic conditions that produced them or which tied them to human interests, we somehow see what they truly are and what they truly mean. We thereby turn our attention away from the economic reality and gaze on the world as though under the aspect of the eternity, accepting as inevitable and unchangeable what ought to be subject to politically organized change.”

“Kant also believed that natural beauty is a ‘symbol’ of morality, and suggested that people who take a real interest in natural beauty thereby show that they possess the germ of a morally good disposition—of a ‘good will.’ “Our favorite works of art seem to guide us to the truth of human condition and, by presenting completed instances of human actions and passions, freed

30 Scruton, supra at 15
31 Id. at 54
32 Id. at 57
33 Id. at 62
34 Id. at 77
from contingencies of every day life, to show the worthwhileness of being human.”\textsuperscript{35} “Works of art are forbidden to moralize, only because moralizing destroys their true moral value, which lies in the ability to open our eyes to others, and to discipline our sympathies towards life as it is. ... Art is not morally neutral, but has its own way of making and justifying moral claims.”\textsuperscript{36} To me, art describes and represents to the extent artist can describe, depict, sense and master the subject matter. Just as during Christmas season shopkeepers dress up windows so as to convey a feeling of good tiding and make atmosphere devoid of crime and grime and thus pleasant enough for even an unwitting passerby to enter the shop and consider shopping, artist can convey reality where good triumphs over evil because evil is often associated with darkness, filth and atrocity. This is appropriate because God had ousted the serpent from his garden that he created for Adam and Eve. The Satan is the highest ranking angel from God’s kingdom because of his haughtiness yet because mortals are sinners after the bite of the apple from the Garden of Eden, as the Bible says, we are all equipped to make assessment and judge good and evil because of knowledge from the fruit. That is to say we possess the capacity to think about and commit bad deeds, but we don’t necessarily have to indulge in them. Surely, we can direct our attention briefly to cool down, for instance, for the sake of engagement of art appreciation that would appeal to our sense of aesthetics.

“For Hume’s argument suggests that the judgment of taste reflects the character of the one who makes it, and character matters. The characteristics of the good critic, as Hume envisaged them, point to virtues which, in Hume’s thinking, are vital to the good conduct of life, and not just to discrimination of aesthetic qualities. ... Beauty is therefore as firmly rooted in the scheme of things as goodness. It speaks to us, as virtue speaks to us, of human fulfillment: not of things

\textsuperscript{35} Id. at 129

\textsuperscript{36} Id. at 132
that we want, but of things that we ought to want, because human nature requires them.”  

“Art is the way to present and evoke feeling, but science dares to explain it. The best art, Wilson presumes, is that which is truest to our biological origins. Wilson guesses that art evolved to enable our sense of self-reflection, unique in the animal world, to bring us back into joyous contact with where we came from. Art’s quality should be measured by its fidelity to human nature, its ability to reveal our essence and our species place in nature. Necessity is the goal of invention, and the beauty is art should also be its truth.”

“Human culture evolves, but not so simply as nature does. We can learn to take in all that is around us, make decisions, and choose trends and opportunities. Or maybe we can’t learn as much as we think; perhaps what people like depends, as does aesthetic evolution, on the whims of the possible that arbitrarily catch on.”

Therefore, the criteria for the merit in painting for showing, for instance, can have many categorization and themes after meeting First Amendment requirements and perhaps meeting the theme of mission of the institution extending invitation to artists.

“Throughout the Western philosophical tradition, ethics and morality have generally referred to the task of living in accordance with a body of objectively verifiable moral rules, of adhering to a moral code that is knowable through rational inquiry and which by virtue of its rational basis, applies to all people in all places. ... This conception of morality as obedience to an objectively verifiable moral code makes perfect sense when one subscribes to what is often called ‘the correspondence theory of truth.’ Put simply, this theory of truth holds that the purpose of philosophical inquiry is to determine (or determine the method for determining) which linguistic propositions reflect metaphysical and moral reality, and which do not. Within this framework of understanding, the goal of moral philosophy is to base normative, value-laden conclusions upon

37 Scruton at 147
38 Rothenberg at 191
39 Rothenberg at 279
secure, metaphysical foundations, foundations that are external to the human mind, eternal, objective, universal, and unchanging, and which, for these reasons, transcend all personal or contextual perspectives."\textsuperscript{40}

For example, in France of bygone days poaching a rabbit was punishable by flogging. But when we see that mad lover poaching a rabbit upon being jilted after a heated adulterous affair we questions a few things. First, was she raped? A woman has the right to withhold consent to a sexual intercourse regardless of race, ethnicity, marital status and age upon reaching the age of maturity. For minors, regardless of consent, such sex is rape for moral reason. Second, why doesn’t the woman avail herself for medical treatment if she’s sick and has gone mad? Pining for the married lover’s return in this scenario may be an unreasonable conclusion to a seedy escapade. Third, why wasn’t the man able to control and restrain his base urges to maintain his happy marriage? Why did he act so destructive for a fleeting passion? If he had no intention of leaving his wife, should he have stepped into the mind of the other woman and thought out in advance various scenarios. Lastly, why was flogging necessary and approved as an appropriate corporeal punishment? This causes orthopedic and psychiatric trauma and disorder, to say the least. No law enforcement would want to deliberately turn a sinner into a disabled and disfigured outcast or a reprehensible criminal as a result of syndromes related activities upon flogging. So this is an example of how one country sought to maintain the stature of nobles against savage-like common serfs. But can one objectively say that flogging is a befitting conduct of any person regardless of pedigree, wealth or race.

\textsuperscript{40} Samuel Alexander at 1 Voluntary Simplicity as an Aesthetics of Existence, 1, http://ssrn.com/abstract=1941087
Clearly from the standpoint of the other woman this was a case of fight or flight situation. Poaching a rabbit is a statement that she doesn’t want to leave but by the same token she’s not happy where she is. Does she have to poach a rabbit given this kind of grief and outrage? This was her self-expression to assert the presence of herself as a human being. As Foucault once said, “I think that there is only one consequence, we have to create ourselves as a work of art.”

Was the fallen woman a work of art? What about the fallen man? Yes. According to Alexander, “Nobody, for example gets to choose the categories which structure their perception of the world; rather, we are all educated into-or subjected to- a form of life, and through that process we find ourselves embedded within elaborate structures of power/knowledge that both enable and construct our thoughts and actions. This education and those power/knowledge structures shape who are as individuals and they define the nature of our subjectivity.”

Nevertheless, Foucault argued, “we can also act upon ourselves, act upon our socially constructed subjectivities, through processes that he variously called ‘self-fashioning,’ ‘care of the self’ techniques of the self,’ or ‘arts of the self.’ Through these processes, in which the self engages the self, human beings are able to transform their subjectivities in much the same way a sculptor transforms a given lump of clay.” Foucault expands as follows, “Life, he is suggesting, like art (or as art), is fundamentally a creative undertaking; a project that requires shaping, molding, sculpting, and creating, in accordance with some vision. But even if this aesthetic dimension of existence is accepted, on what basis, one might ask, could Foucault legitimately call his notion of an ‘aesthetics of existence’ an ethics? That is, so far as ethics

---

41 Alexander, supra at 5
42 Id. at 6
43 Id. at 6
concerns the question of ‘how one ought to live,’ surely there is more to living ethically than being creative?”

“Ethics was historically about living in accordance with one’s ‘true self,’ and since the ‘true self’ was typically assumed to be a ‘rational self,’ living the ethical or moral life was about living in accordance with a universally applicable moral code, knowable through reason, and which, on that basis, was deserving of obedience. “ Alexander says Foucault suggests in effect, “the task nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are... We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.” An emergence of new kind of subjectivity is celebrated based on knowledge of favoring the innocent pioneer without regard to his racial or ethnic stock but rather based on universal and salient moral and ethical value and act accordingly even if this means not fitting in perfectly neatly into a status, class or a trade occupation. This kind of new subjectivity affords us broader and more benevolent sense of tolerance and cohesion in a civil society.

Therefore, Alexander argues that “voluntary simplicity is predicated on the assumption that human beings can live meaningful, free, happy, and infinitely diverse lives, while consuming no more than a sustainable and equitable share of nature. ... According to this philosophy of living, personal and social progress is measured not by the conspicuous display of wealth or status, but

44 Id. at 7
45 Id. at 15
46 Id. at 15-16
by increase in the qualitative richness of daily living, the cultivation of relationships, and the
development of social, intellectual, aesthetic, and/or spiritual potentials." 47

“As Duane Elgin has famously defined it, voluntary simplicity is ‘a manner of living that is
outwardly simple and inwardly rich, ... a deliberate choice to live with less in the belief that more
life will be returned to us in the process. According to the most prominent historian of
voluntary simplicity, Davis Shi, the primary attributes of the simple life include: a desire for self-
sufficiency; a commitment to conscientious rather than conspicuous consumption; a privileging
of creativity and contemplation over possessions; an aesthetic preference for minimalism and
functionality; and a sense of responsibility for the just use of the world’s resources.” More
concisely, Shi defines voluntary simplicity as “enlightened material restraint.”48 “Furthermore,
any effort to live simply in a consumer culture should not be construed as something that has a
destination, as such; instead, it should be conceived as an ongoing creative process.”49 “It can
be argued, therefore, that practicing voluntary simplicity as an aesthetics of existence implies
cultivating an indifference to social status, which would involve constantly thinking about what
is truly valuable in life and recognizing perhaps, that it is more important to shape one’s life for
the purpose of gaining self-respect than for the purpose of seeking the respect of others. After
all, one merely seeks the respect of others, one might come to the end of life and have
succeeded in attaining that respect, but have little respect for oneself. A case can be made that
such a life would not be a successful life.”50

“[T]he great value placed on rapid conceptual innovation differentiated the twentieth century
from earlier periods, with respect to artistic practice. So for example the eminent critic David

47 Alexander at 16-17
48 Id. at 17
49 Id. at 18
50 Id. at 23
Sylvester observed that Picasso, who was recognized from the beginning of his career for his extraordinary draftsmanship, was “kind of artist who couldn’t have existed before this century, since his art is a celebration of this century’s introduction of a totally promiscuous eclecticism into the practice of art. Only in the twentieth century did the increased value placed on sustained change in art allow a painter to make a frequent, abrupt stylistic shifts without fear of alienating his audience, and Picasso, the greatest painter of his era, made more frequent, abrupt shifts than any of his peers. And only in the twentieth century would a ranking of the eight most important individual works of art include not only the traditional genre of painting and sculpture but no less than three other genres-readymade, collage, and earthwork-that did not exist when the century began. In 2001, Arthur Danto observed that “We are living in a conceptual art world.”

“Specifically, the twentieth century is the first in which a large number of visual artists made most or all of their art about themselves and their lives.” Prior to that most painters devoted substantial attention in painting “the biblical scenes and commissioned portraits that were the products expected by most purchasers of oil painting in the seventeenth century. It was only in the modern era that painters could not simply make self-portraits a larger share of their total output, but that artists who wished to do so could make most or even all of their works about their own lives-image of people and things they themselves knew and cared about.”

The following are excerpts from Galenson’s selection of three important artists in the twentieth century who goad and prepare us into this direction in art that seems to salvage civilization.

51 Galenson, supra at 21
53 Galenson, Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art I the Twentieth Century at 4
unique to each locale without compromising quality and merit of art that at the same time uplifts and diversifies aesthetic sense.

1) Van Gogh

“The prototype if the visual artist who made his art entirely out of his own life was Vincent Van Gogh. This fact was recognized by Meyer Schapiro, who observed that “van Gogh converted all [his] aspiration and anguish into his art, which thus became the first example of a truly personal art, art as deeply lived means of spiritual deliverance or transformation of the self.” Van Gogh was an archetypal example of a conceptual artist whose art was intended to express his own emotions. From an early stage of his career as a painter, he resolved to ignore his critics and “to paint what I feel and to feel what I paint.” Embracing precedent he saw in Poussin, “in whose picture all reality is at the same time symbolic,” and in the work of the writer Guy de Maupassant, who declared “the artist’s liberty to exaggerate, to create his novel a world more beautiful, more simple, more consoling than ours,” van Gogh created a personal symbolic language that pervaded his entire oeuvre.”

Thus Hamilton concluded that van Gogh’s art was “totally self-expressive. When it achieves... a more personal power and beauty, it is expressive to such a degree that it became almost immediately ... one of principal sources for the broader currents of European Expressionism.”

Munch

“Early in his career, Munch’s conception of art was deeply affected by Hans Jaeger, a charismatic philosopher who was the leader of group of Norwegian bohemians. One of Jaeger’s belief was

---

54 Galenson, Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art in the Twentieth Century, at 7
55 Id., at 8
56 Id., at 9
that the individual could become free only through self-examination. Munch’s self-portraits were his response. ... Munch believed that his own experience could be of value to others. Thus he reflected that his focus on himself “could be called egotism. However, I have always thought and felt that my art might be able to help others to clarify their own search for truth.”

In the celebrated final version of The Scream, which Munch completed in the fall of 1893, the central figure turns face to the viewer: “Its completely flat body loses all effects of human anatomy and twists like a worm to conform to and extend the fjord landscape.” The distorted figure, and the horror of its features as it presses its hands against the sides of its head, have been widely seen as an early psychological expression of the anxiety of modern man.”

**Bacon**

“Knowing his subject was key to Bacon’s practice. “I couldn’t do people I don’t know very well. I wouldn’t want to. It wouldn’t interest me to try and do them unless I had seen a lot of them, watched their contours, watched the way they behaved.” The importance of familiarity was magnified by Bacon’s recognition that resemblance was not solely a visual phenomenon: “Every form you make has an implication, so that, when you are painting somebody, you know that you are, of course, trying to get near not only to their appearance but also to the way they have affected you.” He wanted his portraits to have what he called “the living quality;” the problem “was to find a technique by which you can give over all the pulsations of a person.” The distortions of Bacon’s portraits might be understood as a product of both this elusive goal and his conception of relationships: “I’ve always thought of friendship as where two people tear each other apart and perhaps in that way learn something from one another.” Bacon wanted the result of his efforts to transcend the appearance of individuals; “In catching the ‘likeness’ of

---

57 Id., 10-11
58 Id., at 11
his friends. Bacon also caught their dominant characteristics, which in turn hoped, would give
the portraits greater universality as image of human beings not bound to specific
circumstances.\footnote{Galenson, \textit{Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art in the Twentieth Century}, at 16}

All in all, the idea of bracing for what is to come tomorrow by being prepared today for
uncertain future seems to be an uneasy undercurrent that supports the importance of these
three artists. Any pioneering painter runs a risk of portraying semi-pornography but that is not
to say to be dismissive of important message that conveys truth, morality and goodness that
ultimately glorifies and pleases our creator, God.
References


Samuel Alexander, *Voluntary Simplicity as an Aesthetics of Existence*, ,

http://ssrn.com/abstract=1941087 article


Donald Burke, *On the Dialectic of Natural Beauty and Artistic Beauty*,

http://ssrn.com/abstract=1460191