



ArtTalk: **Is this Art?-What is Art?**

Grade 11 and up

Start to think about art today!

What is art? How is art made? Each of us has used a paint brush with paint to make an image or express a mood or feeling. We've made a picture with shapes and colors or a sculpture out of paper maché. Now what if the artist uses instead of paint, brush and wallpaper paste, other kinds of things - like industrial materials or immaterial forms like words or ideas? Is this still art? Sometimes

the idea or what you don't see can be more important than the art object itself. This kind of artistic notion is part of a movement that began in the 1960's called "Concept Art". This style focuses on the artistic plan or concept behind the art work and not on the actual art object itself. The process or artistic idea was considered the work of art. Even earlier in history, artists began experimenting with words and used these as shapes separate from their meaning. Or they created puns and played visually with words.

Take a minute and imagine a word or words as sculpture. Not just a three dimensional word sign, like "Hollywood" but flat words painted or sprayed onto a wall or museum. What comes to your mind? How does the word feel? Is there a color? Personal meaning?

Here's an example by Liam Gillick that can be seen in the exhibition in Bonn:

" Day in day out day in day out day in day out "

On how many levels can this phrase be interpreted? What are they? Collect your ideas in a mind map and share them with the class.

Does your interpretation change if you know that one of Gillick's topics is the world of work - How? What are the advantages of using words as artistic material?

Liam Gillick's texts are often fragments – they point to ideas without naming them, like showing the outline without the details. He often leaves gaps or ellipses in his texts and does not use punctuation. **What could be the reason behind this? What is left out of the "day in day out" out phrase?**

Liam Gillick, a contemporary British artist with Irish roots, works with many different media. He not only designs buildings and furniture but makes films, writes plays, creates art objects and writes books, texts and articles for magazines. What is Gillick's art all about? He tries to let us understand certain currents that define our lives today. How our lives are affected by social and political topics and how ideologies flow into the buildings around us. He doesn't paint a clear picture of this, but creates environments with objects and texts in art places and museums where these currents can be investigated and experienced. Art for Gillick has the power to allow us to change our thoughts and our futures. Gillick designs minimal environments of aluminium and plexiglass which "makes certain thinking possible ..." "I absolutely believe that visual environments change behaviour and the way people act." He explains that he does not prescribe certain thinking and "if some people just stand with their backs to the work and talk to each other then that's good...Without people, it's not art – it's stuff in a room." ¹

1. Compare some differences and similarities between the usual use of the word "environment" and how Gillick uses it. Think about the phrase "minimal environment". Brainstorm how this artistic environment might look. What kind of "talk" do you think Gillick means? Hint: Here's a title of one of his pieces ("The What if Scenario") Second Stage Discussion Platform and Surface Designs"1996.

2. How would you rate your openness towards this kind of art experience on a scale from 1 to 10? Give reasons for your rating.

Vocabulary; *notion* – Begriff; *puns* – Wortspiele; *gaps* – Lücke; *contemporary* – zeitgenössisch; *currents* – Strömungen; *affected* – beeinflusst von; *prescribe* – verschreiben; *to rate on a scale from* – auf einer Skala von.

1. Liam Gillick (2000): Interview in: *renovation filter : recent past and near future*. Bristol: Arnolfini. 16

The following statements or quotes were made by famous artists or people working with art. Think about what the quotes mean. Write at least one sentence about what you think art means for the people behind the quotes?

You might want to begin your sentences with: Art is

1. "everyone is an artist"
2. "For me, art is a brilliant business! I meet lots of artists who make art and I try to match customers with art objects that they will like. Sometimes the art work becomes more valuable in time, that's great for me and my clients!."
3. "You know, music, art - these are not just little decorations to make life prettier. They're very deep necessities which people cannot live without."
4. "I see art as an expression of our society and our culture. My job is to collect, document and preserve these artefacts and present them in exhibitions to educate and entertain the public."
5. "Not everyone has the ability or the money to buy good art. My business has grown enormously in the last 10 years. Recently, we sold a sculpture by Giacometti in London for \$104.3 million dollars. This was a new world record. The artwork was reportedly expected to fetch \$20 million to \$30 million."
6. "The true work of art is but a shadow of the divine perfection."
7. "my work is like the light in the fridge: it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art - it's something else - stuff in a room."
8. "I've always loved art! It's such a pleasure to meet artists, read about their work and go to different galleries and openings. If I'm lucky, the art I buy will increase in value but that's not why I invest in art. Art is my passion."

Now match the quotes to the personalities and professions listed below:

Answers in wrong order! Liam Gillick (born 1964), gallerist, Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973), collector, museum director, Michelangelo (1475 - 1564), auctioneer, Joseph Beuys - German artist and social activist (1921- 1986).

Compare and discuss your answers in small groups. Pick one quote and give an example that you know or have read about. What messages are conveyed about art and art making? Share your findings. Is there a quote you find surprising or that you totally agree or disagree with?

Vocabulary: *valuable* - wertvoll; *clients* - Kunden; *necessities* - Notwendigkeiten; *preserve* - erhalten, bewahren; *artefacts* - Artefakte = Objekte; *ability* - Fähigkeit; *reportedly* - angeblich; *fetch* - einbringen; here *but* used to mean only or merely; *divine* - göttlich; *fridge* - Kühlschrank; *stuff* - Zeug; *collector* - Sammler; *auctioneer* - Auktionator.

Answers:

1. Joseph Beuys
2. Gallerist
3. Picasso
4. Museum director
5. Auctioneer:
6. Michelangelo
7. Liam Gillick
8. Collector