

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Art Appreciation

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Abstract

Background: Under the challenge of many post-modern theories and critics on art and art history, the boundaries and definition of art has becoming more diverse. Conventional art appreciation no longer covers all the debates and issues arising from the complex meaning of art in the modern world. Art education today must widen students' vision of art appreciation.

Focus of discussion: The experience central to art appreciation relates one to a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary exposure. This paper aims to elucidate the close relationship between art and other disciplines including aesthetics, anthropology, history, social studies, and even science. It demonstrates how such integrated perspective can be conveyed to the students of different levels. Art appreciation, in many ways, is the study of human behaviours and experience, both past and present. Cross-disciplinary knowledge and comparative studies of various art help understand the meaning of art both in its microscopic and macroscopic levels.

Arguments: Conventional art education focuses on the intrinsic values of art, having well defined objects to study for their artistic qualities and theoretical bases. Today, the world of art has lost much of its autonomy. The paper argues that we can take art as a way of seeing and therefore will be better understood by relating art to its social, historical and cultural context. An interdisciplinary approach to art appreciation will widen students' perspective of and sensitivity to the meaning of art, and could be attained by students of different levels.

Conclusion: The interdisciplinary vision of art appreciation accords with the vision of Liberal Studies. It enhances students' analytical and critical thinking, broadens their world of ideas, and hones their judgement of cultural products and related issues.

Key words: art appreciation, interdisciplinary vision, liberal studies

跨學科的藝術欣賞

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摘要

背景：在各種後現代主義的沖擊下，藝術的界限和定義越益繁雜模糊，傳統的藝術欣賞已無法處理各類新的藝術形式和現代社會為藝術帶來的種種問題。今天，藝術教育需為擴闊學生欣賞藝術的視野。

目的：藝術欣賞涉及廣泛的學術領域，本文探討藝術與其他學科的密切關係，闡述如何引導不同程度的學生通過跨學科的思維來欣賞藝術。藝術欣賞可以是探討古今人類創作行為和經驗的研究，跨科學的視野，比較、對照的方式有助明白藝術的意義。

論點：傳統藝術欣賞注重藝術的內在價值，重藝術分析和風格理論。在現代社會的架構中，沒有純粹的藝術。藝術可以看成是一種看法，反映的是某時代的歷史和文化背景，因應不同程度，我們可以或深或淺的與學生探討一切與藝術創作相關的議題。

總結：跨學科的視野能夠開闊學生藝術欣賞的角度，增進他們的分析和批判能力，思考和掌握各類傳統的獨特性，切合通識教育的要求。

關鍵詞：藝術欣賞、傳統藝術教育、跨學科的視野、通識教育

In its mission statement the International Society for Education Through Art (InSEA) outlines the nature and ultimate goal of art education:

Education through art is a natural means of learning at all periods of the development of the individual, fostering values and disciplines essential for full intellectual, emotional and social development of human being in a community. (<http://insea.org>).

In art education, creation and learning are intertwined through the processes of making and responding to art. The two fundamental aspects of art education are creativity and appreciation. Creativity signifies the actual process of art making through which the student acquires the skills and techniques of making art. It is a process of learning through the senses that requires self-direction and which brings to light an understanding of the self and the environment. Art appreciation refers to the ways of responding to a work of art, of interpreting and understanding the work in particular and the meaning of art in general. It is an intellectual process of recognizing the different forms of perception and presentation embodied in art. Art appreciation is a multifaceted channel that exposes students to a broad spectrum of disciplines including aesthetics, anthropology, history, cultural and social studies, and even science. This paper elucidates how such exposure is both possible and necessary in art appreciation, and how it can be attained for students at different levels.

Conventional art appreciation and its challenges

Conventional art appreciation focuses on the intrinsic values of art, by analyzing and appreciating the qualities specific to the various artistic elements, such as composition, form, colour, light and space. It studies a well defined set of objects according to their formal qualities and artistic distinction and is often

characterised by varied forms of stylistic analysis and connoisseurship. The conventional approach is based on aesthetics and art history, and focuses primarily on works found in museums and galleries. Accordingly, conventional art appreciation studies the talent and artistic excellence of the masters and their masterpieces. As Gombrich (1995) succinctly states in the beginning of his book, *The Story of Art*: “There reality is no such thing as art. There are only artists” (p.3). This exalted notion of individual creativity has been treasured by art educators and connoisseurs throughout modernity.

Over the past few decades, however, the myth of masters and masterpieces has steadily losing its magic in the face of challenges from the many post-modern theories and criticisms of art and art history. At the same time, the definitions of what constitutes art have becoming more diverse than ever. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger (1972) described oil painting as a celebration of private property, a form of publicity for the privileged classes. Edward Said (1978) pointed out that the “Orient” has long been romanticized by the West through a subtle but persistent Eurocentric prejudice against the cultures of Asia and the Middle East. He provoked criticism of how art might serve the interests of power in specific historical, intellectual, and even economic settings. Both Berger and Said’s theories confront the authority of conventional art history by asking intuitive questions about whose perspective dominates the writing of art history, and who defines what we should see and how it should be appreciated.

For many years, the myth of masters and masterpieces has directed our appreciation of art towards the canon of works defined by art history and collected in museums. Yet beyond this canon, there is potentially an equal number of excellent works that have been neglected by art historians

and connoisseurs. One of the best examples of these neglected works are the many memorial sculptures carved by anonymous sculptors inside the Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno in Italy. Many of these sculptures display high artistic qualities, both technically and aesthetically, and exhibit innovative ways of presenting the subject of death, strong dramatic composition and expressions, exquisite taste and accomplished skill (Arnold, 2009). Yet none of these carvers are remembered in art history as masters.

Post-modern literary theory contends that interpretation can never be universal. Drawing on linguistic science and semiotics to point to the fact that language and thought are both learnt and structured, post-modern theory suggests that nothing has reality outside language that everything is interpretation, and interpretation is never neutral. How we see and represent the world is subject to personal, social and cultural factors that determine the formation of our visual field. Art, as a kind of visual language, is equally a sign of interpretation. As a result, the interpretation of art can never be generic, as it is always contained within various discourses. Other post-modern disciplines such as feminism and psychoanalysis further extend the boundaries for interpreting art.

Practices in modern art also pose a threat to the hierarchy of aesthetic value. In the early twentieth century, Marcel Duchamp shocked the art world with his explicit anti-art vision. Giving up painting in 1912, Duchamp turned to creating readymade objects, such as the *Bicycle Wheel* (dated 1913)ⁱ, a work assembled from a bicycle wheel and a kitchen stool. Duchamp's readymades are absolutely devoid of the conventional sense of aesthetic pleasure. In addition

to neglecting the value of skill and craftsmanship actualized in artistic creativity, they also significantly devalue the aesthetic quality of art. Duchamp (1961) himself stated that aesthetic delectation never dictated his choice of readymades. In defence of the *Fountain* (dated 1917)ⁱⁱ, an upside-down urinal signed under the name R. Mutt, Duchamp (1917) stated:

Whether Mr. Mutt made the fountain with his own hands or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view-created a new thought for that object. (p.5)

For Duchamp, the idea was what mattered in artistic creativity and ever since the aesthetic emphasis in artistic creativity has been increasingly overridden by conceptual values. Eventually, Donald Kuspit (2004) announced that art had come to an end because it had lost any aesthetic importance in the post-modern world.

Indeed, much of the art after 1960 has favoured eccentricity and irony and, in avoiding a sense of beauty, has sought to provoke a sense of shock, rather than pursue harmony. By the end of the twentieth century, the conventional theories of aesthetics no longer held any sway in art appreciation. The 39 case studies of post-war British art discussed in John Walker's (1999) *Art and Outrage* are so idiosyncratic and controversial that they exceed the standard of any conventional expectation of art. The best example is Rick Gibson's *Human Earrings* (1987), which displayed the head of a female mannequin wearing a pair of earrings Gibson made from two dehydrated foetuses of 3 to 4 weeks of gestation. The work was seized by the London Metropolitan Police Service and Gibson was charged with, and later found

ⁱ Image link: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81631

ⁱⁱ Image link: <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=26850>

guilty of outraging public decency. He and his art dealer were fined £500 and £300 respectively. The incident hit the news headlines and induced a heated debate on art and its social implications. As an indication of the fact the controversy remains, the opening statement on Gibson's website reads: "... making stuff that's hard to look at..."(<http://www.rickgibson.net/>).

There is little dispute that art appreciation today no longer relies on the simple perspective maintained in conventional art history. To develop an intellectual response to art, students at all levels should be exposed to the wide range of issues and debates related to art. The challenge lies on how to facilitate such exposure. Keith Moxey (1996) suggested that art appreciation should be extended to visual appreciation. The subject of appreciation will be broadened to "the visual", how a work of art is presented, represented and perceived. When we look into "what is art," we are at the same time questioning "what is non-art". When we admire works of the masters, we are examining how masterpieces are defined and how valid are these definitions. Duchamp's readymades and Gibson's eccentric works are thought provoking as they lead to questions concerning the meaning of art, beauty, and ethics of which can be connected to different values in life. Reflective questions such as "how to justify beauty" and "do we need ethics" allow students to realize that knowledge is to see different visions and to build their own values. Such connections promote learning experiences that are dynamic, interesting, and meaningful. The rest of this paper will discuss how students of different grades can gain exposure to this multifaceted range of disciplines.

Art as a human behaviour

For students of all levels, art appreciation, in its broadest sense, can be regarded as an act of human creativity. Art enables humans to explore the external world and to express their inner world. It channels ways of seeing and perceiving, and the ways they are depicted and represented. Even for primary students, art can be understood as primarily a language of thought, a tool for expression. In addition to helping them value their inner expression, seeing art in this manner can help students appreciate the art of primitive cultures and the meaning of civilizations. As a kind of writing in images, art is unlike textual language in that it applies to all, not just the literate. What is more, art is not just for the talented and experienced, but for all ages and genders. The artists' mastery of visual language enables them to illustrate their interests and thoughts skilfully and effectively. Art appreciation is thus the reading of these visual languages, whether explicit or implicit. It unveils the artists' feeling, vision and perception of the world.

For high school and college students, art can be examined as a uniquely human act. As Alexander Alland (1977) suggests in *The Artistic Animal: An Inquiry into the Biological Roots of Art*, art making has a biological origin in that it evolved from the animal capacity for 'play'. Contemporary anthropology argues that art making played a significant role in human evolution, so much so that Ellen Dissanayake coined the term *Homo Aestheticus* (1995) to describe innateness of art in humans. On the other hand, paintings have now been produced by elephants and monkeys. Can we call these works art? If not, what is the difference between these works and those done by humans? These questions can inspire students to investigate the nature of art as a language, a sign, and a symbol. Furthermore they can direct

college students towards further topics of interest such as art and psychology.

Art as a way of seeing

John Berger (1972) stated that “Seeing comes before words” (p.7). Seeing is a primitive kind of learning. Unlike the mechanical process where a camera captures an image, seeing is a sophisticated process of perceiving images and generating vision. As George Roeder (1995), points out, vision depends on how we look at things, and how we look relies very much on how others sees the thing. For all levels of students, the best way of illustrating such an apparently simple but complex theory is by comparing the image of the cows found in the Lascaux caveⁱⁱⁱ paintings with that of Jean Dubuffet’s *The Cow with the Subtile Nose, dated 1954*^{iv}. Neolithic peoples saw cows as wild beasts with threatening power, an idea with which modern people are unlikely to connect. Modern people tend to see cows as productive animals that work for and are manipulated by man. The tremendous difference between the two perspectives is a consequence of the way our perception of cows has changed through the years. By appreciating the two images, students from different levels can visualize Roeder’s theory to varying degrees.

For college students, the two different images of cows can mark the beginning of an intellectual journey into the social formation of the visual and the visual construction of the social field. In *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, W. J. T. Mitchell (1987) questions the difference between images and words, the system of power and canons of value. In a later

interview, Mitchell further elucidated that the idea of vision and the idea as vision both have their histories (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p. 244). Donald Lowe (1983), expresses a similar notion in the *History of Bourgeois Perception* in claiming that perception in Western civilization has changed over the course of five periods in European history. The styles of different periods can be appreciated as a reflection of the ways in which people saw the world in their times. Even for students in junior grades, this will extend their vision of seeing art to more than just a style.

Art as cultural history

Vision is undeniably a socio-cultural construction. It is a selective and structural process largely based on the interests and preferences of the viewer. Visual experiences are necessarily contextual, and are bound by social and cultural factors. No artist can be totally isolated from people and time, and how the artist sees the world embodies the traces of his or her times. As Moxey points out, aesthetic criteria do not exist outside of a specific historical context (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p.14). Art appreciation, even at the level of its aesthetic concern, is thus a study of cultures and times. The works of the Italian Renaissance reflect a vision of faith through their presentation of the perfect harmony of law and order found in Nature. The sense of beauty and perfection evoked by Raphael’s *The Betrothal of the Virgin*, dated 1504 (Fig.1)^v is a glorification of God that is totally different from the stern-looking images of God produced in medieval times. In Byzantine art God and the saints are usually portrayed in frontal view with solemn facial expressions against a

ⁱⁱⁱ Image link: <http://maelstorm.itgo.com/photo.html>

^{iv} Image link: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/D/dubuffet/cow_with_subtile_nose.jpg.html

^v Image link: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/raphael/raphael_sposalizio.jpg.html

golden background (Fig.2)^{vi}. For medieval people, the heavenly world could only conform to an unearthly sense of absolute power, as suggested by the tangible glittering gold. However, with the emergence of humanism after the Black Death in Europe the European vision of God. began to change. Renaissance artists, under the influence of humanism, perceived God in a very different way from their medieval predecessors. Mary in Raphael's *Madonna dell Granduca*, dated 1505,^{vii} and God in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, dated 1511,^{viii} are idealized loving figures that can be approached by humans. These images visualize the Medieval sense of "darkness" and the meaning of humanism in the Renaissance. They are useful and vivid resources for teaching and learning Western history.

Art appreciation is a good way of connecting history and the social sciences. In studying representation, Janet Wolff suggests paying close attention to the image and using theories developed in the humanities and the social sciences to address the complex ways in which meaning is produced and circulated in specific social contexts (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p. 53). Evelyn Welch's (1997) *Art and Society in Italy 1350-1500* provides a new way of looking at Italian art of the fifteenth century by discussing contextual issues, such as artist-patron relationships, and the political and religious uses of art at a level above mere aesthetic concern.

To demonstrate Welch's perspective in classroom, we can compare the religious art of the Italian Baroque with that of the Italian Renaissance. The aesthetic qualities of both are distinctive and

admirable, yet the painters of the two periods presented their religious subjects in two completely disparate ways. Caravaggio's *The Death of the Virgin*, dated 1605 (Fig. 3),^{ix} and Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*, dated 1485 (Fig.4),^x have little in common. Whereas the former depicts a mundane middle-aged woman lying pale and frail on her deathbed, the latter presents a young and beautiful woman in an elegant pose. Caravaggio's rendering of light and dark is so natural and convincing that his figures almost become real characters in life, and his work evokes the sense of a real death. Although Da Vinci's figures are also very three-dimensional, his use of lines is so distinctively impressive that his work provokes a graceful sense of ease and flow that is idealistic rather than naturalistic. Caravaggio's naturalism and Da Vinci's idealism are not the random consequences of two individual preferences. Rather they are a reflection of the different social and cultural contexts of the two periods in which the artists lived. These two religious works cannot be appreciated fully if we are unaware of the significance of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. After the Reformation, Europeans were greatly influenced by the humanistic sense of individualism advocated by Martin Luthur. Accordingly, Christian art needed to be closer to people, and artists sought ways to evoke human emotions as naturally as possible. Caravaggio's naturalistic, un-idealized rendering of his figures aims to induce our natural emotion toward a dying person as intimate to us as a mother. This pursuit of "naturalism" was commonly shared by European painters of the seventeenth century (Martin, 1977,

^{vi} Image link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_von_Daphni_002.jpg

^{vii} Image link: <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/R/raphael/madonna.jpg.html>

^{viii} Image link: <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/michelangelo/creation.jpg.html>

^{ix} Image link: <http://www.abcgallery.com/C/caravaggio/caravaggio30.html>

^x Image link: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/L/leonardo/leonardo_virgin.jpg.html

p.41). In contrast, Da Vinci's elegant, idealized figures belie a notion of perfection eschewed by Renaissance painters. Without understanding the changing cultural contexts of the two periods, we cannot fully appreciate Caravaggio's naturalism and Da Vinci's perfection. From admiring the beauty of the works, to uncovering the social and historical context embodied in the images, we can encourage students to appreciate the works from different levels and integrate their knowledge of history, social science, and art appreciation coherently.

Art and science

Scientific discoveries in history did not simply change our ways of living, they also transformed our understanding of the world. European oil paintings of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries depict how science opened a new perspective of time, space and light for the European artists of the times. The Baroque landscape paintings of the seventeenth century are often admired for their panoramic sense of space and the way they precisely detail a particular moment. The vision of space and time found in these landscapes is characteristic of the age of science in Western civilization. Telescopes and microscopes were invented near the beginning of the seventeenth century. Later, Galileo perfected his telescope and discovered four of the nine moons of Jupiter. In 1656, the Dutch scientist Christian Huygens made the first pendulum clock, enabling time to be counted in seconds. These discoveries extended the European artists' vision of the world into the universe and gave precision to the concept of time, enabling them to see the world differently from their predecessors.

Ruisdael's *The Windmill at Wijk*, dated 1670

(Fig.5), portrays an enormous sense of space beyond that possibly imagined by any Western painter before the seventeenth century. The light arising in the distance from beyond the horizon of the sea creates an infinite sense of space on the canvas. The rolling clouds in the sky foretell the coming of a rainstorm, illustrating a precision of time. The land in the foreground is shaded by the clouds while the windmill stands motionless between the light and the dark. The painting freezes a moment in a quiet scene that presages a forthcoming chaos. In all, the presentation of this painting evinces a hitherto unknown sense of time and space, which can help science students see the meaning of science in vivid terms.

The novel sense of time and space envisioned by the Baroque landscape painters also induced new achievements in Christian art. Peter Paul Rubens' *Raising of the Cross*, dated 1610 (Fig.6), is no ordinary representation of the subject of crucifixion. Unlike most crucifixes, which in the past were depicted standing in an up right position, Rubens' crucifix is shown diagonally, both across the painting surface and inclining into the depth at the back. The torso of Christ's body and the facial expressions of the figures are real and intense, making the painting affective and dramatic, and provoking a vivid sense of witnessing the actual event. It exhibits the particular moment during the raising of the cross when the cross is halfway towards being upright. This notion of capturing the precise moment of a drama is often found in Baroque art. Other prime examples include Caravaggio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, dated 1601,^{xi} and Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, dated 1645.^{xii}

The impact of scientific discoveries on the

^{xi} Image link: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/caravaggio/caravaggio_sacrifice_of_isaac.jpg.html

development of Baroque art is clear and unmistakable. Another Baroque master, Vermeer, whose rendering of light is widely admired, is believed to have made use of a “camera obscura”, a newly invented technique of capturing images through a type of “optic glass” (Marin, 1977, p. 70). His *Milkmaid*, dated 1658,^{xiii} demonstrates his mastery of the technique of verisimilitude. Every single detail in his image, including the facial expressions, the texture of the hair, the jar, the milk, and the table, are as real and natural as the objects themselves would be to our eyes, just like a photograph. The sense of warmth evoked by the light shining into the room from the window connects the interior with the exterior. The distinctive rendering of light in this painting hints at scientific study and an understanding of light without which this kind of flawless naturalism could never have been visualized. The Baroque period coincided with an age of science in Western civilization. The appreciation of Baroque art vividly demonstrates the impact and meaning of science at this time. Likewise, Monet’s art is better understood in relation to the development of optical science in the nineteenth century. The broken strokes used in Monet’s series of *Rouen Cathedral*, dated 1892-93,^{xiv} are based on his studies of light reflection. Art and science are not mutual exclusive. On the contrary, art can encapsulate the meaning of science in visible terms. Through art appreciation, science students can realize and relate their study of science to human existence and society.

Comparative approach to art appreciation

James Herbert asserts that “Art is something to be analysed, but analysed locally” (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p. 186). Indeed, all of the forms, genres, and media of visual production must embody different

localized social, cultural values. The comparative approach to art appreciation can distinguish the unique qualities of various cultures. This is obvious when we compare a Baroque landscape painting with a traditional Chinese landscape of the same period. Although both take nature as their subject, the Baroque and ancient Chinese landscape painters perceived nature in distinct ways. Landscape painting in the West emerged as an independent and popular genre in the seventeenth century. Landscape art in the Chinese context attained its peak much earlier in the tenth century, in works by the Daoist and Confucian elite. In depicting nature, the Western landscape painters, influenced by the scientific spirit of the seventeenth-century European, adopted the notion of verisimilitude. Their works, such as Ruisdael’s *The Windmill at Wijk* mentioned earlier, faithfully portray specific details of time and space. Ancient Chinese landscape painters, in contrast, sought an understanding of the universality, laws and orders of Nature. Their works prefer generalization to specificity, and lack the particular details of time and space. These works are better known as *shanshui*, which literally means mountain (*shan*) and water (*shui*). Best examples include Jing Ho’s *Mt. Lu* (Fig. 7), Guo Xi’s *Early Spring* (Fig. 8), and Fan Kuan’s *Autumn Travelers Dwelling in the Mountains* (Fig.9). The colossal and panoramic composition found in these works aims to convey the universal rules and orders in nature, and the harmonious unification of man and nature. This explains why there are no scenes of thunderstorms or other natural disasters in ancient classical Chinese landscape paintings.

Traditional Chinese landscape painting emerged and developed in a very disparate course from its western counterpart. A comparative approach such as this can help students understand the different ways

^{xii} Image link: http://www.artchive.com/ftp_site.htm

^{xiii} Image Link: <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/V/vermeer/milkmaid.jpg.html>

^{xiv} Image link: <http://www.artchive.com/artchive/M/monet/rouen1.jpg.html>

of seeing, and highlights the distinctiveness of the two traditions. Questions such as why there are no equivalents of Mona Lisa or Rembrandt's *Self Portrait* in Chinese art history are interesting and worth exploring. Is figure painting in the Chinese context a type of portrait? If not, what are the differences between the two forms? Likewise, is the tradition of flower-and-bird tradition in Chinese painting akin to the Western still life? Responses to these questions can lead to a better appreciation of the art, as they probe into the core of the artistic pursuits of the ancient Chinese painters, which were greatly influenced by classical Chinese philosophy. In the classroom, different depths of understanding ranging from ways of seeing things (such as Nature) to impact of science and philosophy on Western and Chinese cultures, can be explored accordingly to the different levels and interests of the students. Findings from this comparative approach highlight the value of the two traditions in their own right and can inspire and motivate Hong Kong students to study Chinese culture.

Art and modern world

The art of the modern world is complicated by the many new issues arising from modern technologies and new social structures. New art forms, such as films, environmental art, multimedia, and digital art, all require new sets of measures for analysis and appreciation. As Burgin points out, "it is no longer plausible to separate culture into such distinct realms as mass culture, popular art, and high art" (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p. 31). What is more, the social structure of the modern world is much manipulated by market concerns, making art in many cases inseparable from a commodity. This is best explained by Burgin: "At the levels of production

and distribution, all cultural workers today actually or potentially rely on much the same technologies and institutions, and all cultural products are equally subject to commodification" (ibid). For college students, modern art provides numerous interesting issues through which to study the modern world. Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes, for example, is a good research topic as it enables students to study economics, social science, cultural studies, and American history.

As our modern society has become increasingly dominated by consumerism and commodification, the world of art has lost some autonomy, and materialism has corrupted and replaced idealism. As Crimp Douglas suggests, an artwork carries a meaning of its own with no concern for the subjectivity of the viewer. Crimp contends that art since the 1970s has become more situated in specific subjectivities, and particular social sites (Dikovitskaya, 2006, p.133). Walter Benjamin also notes that "Removed from ritual, art becomes politics, but of a particular kind" (1960, pp.240-241). The ritual here can be taken as the autonomy of art.

Removed from the intrinsic value of art, art in the age of mechanical reproduction can be a powerful tool with which to influence economic or political interests. At the end of the twentieth century, there were on the one hand works of autonomy, forms of enlightenment art that echoed the ideas of Immanuel Kant. On the other hand, there were works that were more concerned with the spectacle than the concept, with materials and methods rather than art, and with crafts and beliefs rather than the specificity of art engaged almost exclusively with defining itself (Cubitt, Araeen and Sardar, 2001, pp.1-8). Hence, without reference to the political situation and the place of the viewer, many works of contemporary art

may be significantly misread or naively interpreted. Some of the best examples of contemporary art include those done by Chinese artists such as Zhang Xiao Gang^{xv} and Yue Min Jun.^{xvi} Young people tend to be more engaged with contemporary art, and at the college level, appreciation of contemporary art can connect students to many worldwide issues such as globalization, consumerism and problems of monopoly.

Although the many complex issues involved in appreciating modern art might be too difficult for junior students to comprehend, modern images such as graffiti and comics can encourage younger students to think about the meaning and function of art, and to promote their awareness of social and community identity.

Art appreciation and liberal studies

As the definition of art becomes increasingly dispersed, art appreciation has to extend its boundary to cover all of the debates and issues arising from the complex meaning of art in the modern world. This form of liberal studies uses art and images as a tool to get transcend different disciplines. When Hong Kong implemented its New Secondary School curriculum in 2009 Liberal Studies was included as a core subject to enable students to make meaningful connections across different disciplines. Yet, many teachers find bridging and connecting the various disciplines a great challenge. Similarly, students find it difficult to articulate and communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively using such a wide range of references. The principle is to avoid compartmentalization of our knowledge of different fields. The integrative approach to art appreciation, as elucidated in this paper, serves to meet the vision of Liberal Studies,

getting knowledge across various disciplines and enhancing students' ability of critical thinking in the process of learning.

Art appreciation can connect various disciplines in a close and seamless manner, and provides rich resources to teaching and learning Liberal Studies. Art of any kinds can be a subject of Liberal Studies. Egyptian art is a perfect illustration to visualize the meaning of ancient civilizations. Chinese flower-and-bird tradition serves well as a connotation to ancient Chinese literature. Caricature and comics ranging from those done by Goya in the eighteenth century to contemporary comics are interesting means to examine issues related to politics, popular cultures, commodity and society. The integrative approach to art appreciation enhances a self-directed issue-based learning for students at all levels, and helps them develop an understanding of a wide range of perspectives and values in more interesting and vivid ways.

The study of art is, in many ways, the study of human behaviour and experience, both past and present. Students of different ages can study such behaviour at different levels. Theories of anthropology, social sciences, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies, can be taught in simple terms for students in lower grades, or elaborated at a deeper level for college students. Comparative studies of the art of different cultures can give students, even in primary schools, to a better awareness of the unique features of different traditions. This can also improve students' analytical and critical thinking, broaden the scope of their knowledge, and hone their appreciation of cultural products and art-related issues. Although the aesthetic and intrinsic values of art are important aspects of art appreciation, an interdisciplinary vision of art will greatly enrich students' experience of art appreciation, and foster

^{xv} Image link: http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/zhang_xiaogang_family.htm

^{xvi} Image link: http://www.yueminjun.com/cn/gallery/oil/zoomo10_new9.html

values and interests essential for their full intellectual, emotional and social development, as advocated by InSEA at the beginning of this essay.

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List of illustrations

Fig.1 Raphael The Betrothal of the Virgin 1504

Works of the Italian Renaissance reflect a vision of faith through their presentation of the perfect harmony of laws and orders found in Nature. This painting evokes a sense of perfection and beauty.

Fig. 2 Meister von Daphni ca.1100

In Byzantine and Medieval art God and the saints are usually portrayed in frontal view with solemn facial expressions against a golden background.

Fig. 3 Caravaggio The Death of the Virgin 1605

Caravaggio's Virgin is presented as a mundane middle-aged woman lying pale and frail on her deathbed. His figures are so natural that they almost become real characters in life.

Fig. 4 Leonardo da Vinci Virgin of the Rocks 1485

The use of lines is so distinctively impressive that this

work provokes a graceful sense of ease and flow that is idealistic rather than naturalistic.

Fig. 5 Ruisdael The Windmill at Wijk 1670

The enormous sense of space and the precision of time were exhibited in this painting are beyond the imagination of Western painters before the seventeenth century.

Fig. 6 Peter Paul Rubens Raising of the Cross 1610

The notion of capturing the precise moment of a drama is vivid in this painting.

Fig. 7 Jing Ho Mt. Lu ca.900

Fig. 8 Guo Xi Early Spring 1072

Fig. 9 Fan Kuan Autumn Travelers Dwelling in the Mountains ca.1000

The colossal and panoramic composition found in ancient shanshui aims to convey the universal rules and orders in nature.