

Art in My Eyes

Hongfei Guo guo@cs.wisc.edu



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Hongfei Guo (guo@cs.wisc.edu)

We live with art, don't we? We visit art museums, listen to music, watch dances... For dance students, we are even learning art everyday by taking classes. What is art? When trying to answer this question, many things come to my mind: Monet's *Water Lily*, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*; Michelangelo's *David*, Rodain's *The Thinker*; Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, Mozart's *Figaro* — these beautiful paintings, sculptures, music and ballets. Nobody would argue with me that they are art.

Last year, I went to a modern art exhibition in the Memorial Union gallery. One of the works displayed depicted a chemistry lab setting with pipes and bottles. I wondered: is this art? Obviously to some people, it was, or it wouldn't appear in a gallery.

These two experiences raised an interesting question: what is art? When I searched for “art definition” in Google, I found a webpage that contains hundreds of definitions of “art” from different people! This suggests that art is really subjective, each person can have his own interpretation. However, I think that, as much as one is free to define anything the way he / she likes, it is meaningless if such a concept goes against common sense. Having said that, what is my definition of art? There are two parties involved in the definition of art: the artist who creates an art piece and its audience. To the artist, art is the expression of his / her unique love, imagination, vision, and interpretation of beauty through eyes, sensation, smell and sound. It is the artist's view of spirituality and perfection. To the audience, art is about appreciation. On both sides the concept is personal experience and thus subjective. We humans need food to survive. But art

provides us spiritual nutrition. It is a universal communication tool that exceeds the barrier of time, space, language and culture.

One or two years ago I watched *Swan Lake* presented by the Milwaukee Ballet Company in the Civic Center in Madison. It was a wonderful art experience. It was the first time that I found ballet could be so personal and so touching. I didn't watch it much before. I had the prejudice that being a ballerina was like being a skillful puppet, following those pretty standard poses, and losing her own personality in the process. However, this concert shocked me thoroughly because of its artistic beauty.

It was not poses, no. It was dancing. There was a sharp contrast between the movements of the white swan and the black swan. The movements of the white swan consisted of sequence after sequence of adagio. They looked simple, yet so beautiful and powerful. I loved her at once, who would not: she was the purest, nothing but kindness and beauty. During her passage, I sat straight and tall, smiling, feeling peace and happiness.

In contrast, the movements of the black swan were quick and ever-changing. They were challenging and pretty. Yet she conveyed the atmosphere of cunning, greed and ugliness. What a hideous black swan! I felt my heart sink. The ballerina successfully created a strong character.

Talking about *Swan Lake*, one couldn't ignore the music. What an expressive and powerful work! The adagio of the violin vividly depicts the beauty and nobility of the white swan. The ballet adagio was a perfect match to the music. Together, they created the strong visual and audio impact on the audience — me. It brought me into this deep, deep forest, to the quiet and crystal clear lake, to the elegant, beautiful and innocent princess swan, to the fairy tale.

This was one of my art experiences, a beautiful and pleasant trip of the mind. Although I was already familiar with the story and music beforehand, it nevertheless shocked my heart with its artistic charm. It purified my heart, woke up the soft part of it, become callous by the everyday tedious and busy life, brought me back across the river of time and space, to that land where fairy tales are still reality.

My thanks to those great artists, who keep a pure, innocent and romantic heart among this mediocre life, who create the most beautiful things in the world. I cannot imagine a life without them.