

# Unit 1

## What is art?

Romantic poet John Keats ended his famous *Ode on a Grecian Urn* with the following two lines:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

Read these lines again and give them some thinking time. Do you agree with the statement made here? Do you feel there is a close connection between art, beauty and truth?

Now join together in small groups and address the following questions: What do you think *art* is associated with? When you use the word *art* what picture comes to mind? Do you see a painting? Or, maybe, a statue, or a film? What about *the arts*? Is it the same thing? Do you use the two terms interchangeably? When you have finished, share your ideas with the class.

Now read this passage and complete the exercises that follow.

### Text 1

Art – like beauty, truth, and life itself – is larger than any single definition. One widely used dictionary defines art in this way:

**art** (*art*), *n.* 1. *the quality, production, or expression of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance.*

- 5 Within this book a *work of art* is the visual expression of an idea or experience formed with skill through the use of a medium. A *medium* is a particular material, along with its accompanying technique. (The plural is *media*.) Artists select media that best suit the ideas and feelings they

10 wish to present. When a medium is used in such a way that the object or performance contributes to our understanding or enjoyment of life, we experience the final product as art.

15 Media in use for many centuries include clay, fiber, stone, wood, and paint. By the mid-twentieth century, modern technology had added new media, including video and computers, to the nineteenth-century contributions of photography and motion pictures. Art made with a combination of different materials is referred to as *mixed media*.

20 When people speak of *the arts*, they are usually referring to music, dance, theater, literature, and the visual arts. Each art form is perceived in different ways by our senses, yet each grows from a common need to give expressive substance to feelings, ideas, insights, and experiences. Here, the focus is the visual arts, including drawing, painting, sculpture, film, and architecture.

25 Much of our communication is verbal, yet any single medium of expression has its limitations. Certain ideas and feelings can be communicated only through visual forms, while other insights can be expressed only through music. American painter Georgia O'Keeffe said: "I found that I could say things with colors and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way – things I had no words for." The arts provide ways to communicate meanings that go far beyond ordinary verbal exchange. The entire range of thought, feeling, and observation is the subject of art.

30 Preble et al, 2004:2-3.

### ***Reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises***

A. In small groups, discuss the following questions. Numbers in brackets refer to lines in the text.

1. *appealing* (4) means: (a) pleasing and attractive, (b) uninteresting, (c) boring.
2. Can you explain the difference between *the arts* (17) and *the visual arts* (18)?
3. Explain *expressive substance* (19-20) in your own words.
4. *limitations* (24) is likely to mean: (a) constraints, (b) possibilities, (c) expectations.

**B. Complete the sentences in column A by choosing the appropriate part from column B.**

**Column A**

1. A medium is...
2. When we speak of the arts we...
3. Media include...
4. The arts can communicate meaning...
5. The visual arts include...

**Column B**

- a. [...] clay, fiber, stone, wood and paint.
- b. [...] a material used by artists to create artworks.
- c. [...] refer to music, dance, theatre, literature and the visual arts.
- d. [...] drawing, painting and sculpture.
- e. [...] beyond ordinary verbal exchange.

Answers: 1. \_\_\_\_\_, 2. \_\_\_\_\_, 3. \_\_\_\_\_, 4. \_\_\_\_\_, 5. \_\_\_\_\_.

**C. Based on your understanding of Georgia O'Keeffe's statement mentioned in the text, decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F).**

1. Georgia O'Keeffe could only express herself through verbal communication.
2. Georgia O'Keeffe realized that she could not express herself unless she used colors and shapes.
3. Georgia O'Keeffe had difficulty in expressing herself through any other medium than colors and shapes.
4. It was only through colors and shapes that Georgia O'Keeffe could ultimately express herself.
5. It was only through a combination of verbal and written communication that Georgia O'Keefe could express herself.

**D. Study the list of words below. Do you know the meaning of each word? Are there any words with more than one meaning?**

1. artistic \_\_\_\_\_
2. artful \_\_\_\_\_
3. artless \_\_\_\_\_
4. creativity \_\_\_\_\_
5. sensibility \_\_\_\_\_

E. Work in groups. There are many classifications of art. Use your wider artistic experience and match the types and classifications of art in box A with the art forms in box B below. Discuss your answers with your group and then with the class.

Box A	Box B
fine arts	painting
applied or decorative arts	architecture
graphic arts	etchings
visual arts	woodcuts
pictorial arts	pottery
plastic arts	novels
performing arts	poems
literary arts	dance
	drama
	glassware
	tapestry
	ceramics

Study the following definition of the Arts and Crafts movement and do the exercises that follow. Do you think that there is a well-defined distinction between the “crafts” and the “arts”?

### Text 2

A social and aesthetic movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that championed good design and craftsmanship at a time of increasing mechanization and mass production. The movement, which was concerned mainly with architecture and the decorative arts, originated in Britain and chiefly flourished there, but it also had a significant impact in several Continental countries and in the USA.

Chilvers, 2009:27. By permission of Oxford University Press.

A. In small groups, discuss the following questions.

1. *craftsmanship* requires: (a) special skill, esp. manual skill, (b) lack of skill or talent, (c) lack of dexterity.
2. craft objects tend to be: (a) useless, (b) decorative, (c) archaic, (d) personal.
3. The Arts and Crafts movement (a) influenced only British artists, (b) spread across Europe and to America.

B. Match the words in column A with the definitions in column B.

*Column A*

1. crafty
2. artisan
3. flourish
4. impact
5. apprentice

*Column B*

- a. influence
- b. thrive
- c. learner
- d. craftsman
- e. cunning

### ***Language focus***

*Read the following sentences from the text and answer the questions that follow:*

- a. Each art form is perceived in different ways by our senses, yet each grows from a common need to give expressive substance to feelings, ideas, insights, and experiences.
- b. Much of our communication is verbal, yet any single medium of expression has its limitations.

What part of speech is the word 'yet' in the above sentences?

What does it mean in each specific context? Choose the best answer from the options given below for sentences 1 and 2:

(i) so far, (ii) in addition, (iii) nevertheless, (iv) thus far, (v) hardly

## ***Discussion questions***

1. Make a list of at least six painting media. Have you ever used any of those to create artworks? Can you elaborate on the particular characteristics and limitations of each one of them?
2. Do you agree with what Georgia O'Keeffe says in the first passage of this unit? As an artist, would you say that there are things you can only express through your art?
3. Would you say that wood working, ceramics and metal crafting are types of visual art?
4. What is the difference between the visual and the decorative arts?
5. Do you agree with the view that an excellent piece of tapestry should be regarded as a piece of fine art?

## ***Broader and more adventurous activities***

1. Read the following passage and answer the question that follows:

All art is a compromise, in which the choice of what is to be foregone must be left somewhat to the discretion of nature. When the sculptor foregoes colour, when the painter foregoes relief, when the poet foregoes the music which soars beyond words and the musician that precise meaning which lies in words alone, he follows a kind of necessity in things, and the compromise seems to be ready-made for him. But there will always be those who are discontented with no matter what fixed limits, who dream, like Wagner, of a possible, or, like Mallarmé, of an impossible, fusion of the arts.

Symons, 1909 Ebook 2004: 57

### ***Vocabulary***

discretion = judgment, discreetness / discontented = dissatisfied  
forego = to give up / fusion = blending / soar = to fly upward

Do you endorse the view that it would indeed be possible for artists to aspire to a fusion of the arts and thus stretch the bounds of what most of us think artistic creation is? Discuss your views with the class.

2. Work in pairs. Read the poem by T.E. Hulme several times and answer the questions that follow.



*Above the Dock*

Above the quiet dock in mid night,  
Tangled in the tall mast's corded height,  
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away  
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

*Vocabulary*

cord=to tie with rope / mast=a tall pole on which the sails on a ship are hung /  
dock=a place in a port where ships are loaded and unloaded

- a. What is the poem about?
- b. From the list, choose two to five words to describe the feelings generated by the description in the poem. Add your own words in case none of the words included in the list correspond to your feelings.

- despondency      sadness  
imminent evil      depression  
serenity      relaxation  
innocence      enjoyment  
despair      tranquility

- c. What picture do you see when you read the poem? Relax and give the question some thinking time without worrying about supposedly correct or expected answers. Let your imagination guide you and enjoy what you see. Following that, work in pairs and share your picture with your partner. Describe it in detail to your partner by referring to the specific objects included, contours and shapes created, colors that predominate etc. Then, work with your pair to make a list of words or phrases that convey the main idea of the pictures described.