



Intercultural Aesthetics

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What is it?

A work of art, when displayed, can be considered as a vehicle through which identity and expression are revealed. This is not a one-way process: it serves both individually and collectively, the latter as a means of intercultural agency called “intercultural aesthetics.” Also known as “comparative aesthetics,” or “transcultural aesthetics,” this is a concept based on common aesthetic judgment using deep human empathy and understanding. It rejects the old aesthetic thinking mostly based on Western definitions to employ other schools of aesthetics, such as those with roots in ancient Eastern beliefs and thoughts. The most frequent goal is to move beyond any single set of assumptions in evaluating artistic productions, toward understanding the universal nature of art and experience. Two alternative approaches are also sometimes chosen: either to compare art across cultures, or to broaden the way in which philosophy and aesthetics are practiced, so that Western assumptions are disrupted by and supplemented by eastern assumptions.

Who uses the concept?

Scholars in art and philosophy, and especially philosophy of art, most often use the concept of intercultural aesthetics. Occasionally museum curators, artists or even dancers have used the concept to describe their work. International organizations whose work involves intercultural dialogue might benefit from considering intercultural aesthetics.

Fit with intercultural dialogue

As a fundamental element of culture, art plays an important role in intercultural dialogues. Art exists in all cultures, and therefore can be used as an important tool facilitating intercultural interactions. Art is not only a dialogue between individuals and their own inner voices but also with “the Other”. This “Other” is not restricted to people from the same culture but also more distant “Others,” who wish to interpret and learn the language of a work and to join the dialogue.

What work remains?

The power of intercultural aesthetics has been emphasized in recent years as the importance of constructive intercultural dialogue has become obvious. The rapid growth of globalization as well as differentiation and heterogeneity require understanding non-native artworks by considering the fundamental and aesthetic values shared, as well as understanding different approaches expressed by the people of various cultures.

Resources

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