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# MOUSTAFA FARROUKH



## HOW TO APPRECIATE ART BY MOUSTAFA FARROUKH

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### How to appreciate Art by Moustafa Farroukh

Most visitors to art galleries notice that paintings have become a confusing mixture of many different styles and varying schools of art. The visitor is bewildered at what he sees and cannot distinguish between a good painting and a bad one. The Lebanese have not yet become highly improved in their knowledge of art, and are often unable to recognize the differences between various styles, schools or artistic movements. Due to this situation, it has become essential for us to explain to the public at least how to approach a painting, in order to allow people to better identify a work of art and view a painting with greater clarity.

Ever since man became aware of life around him, and reflected on the charming scenery of nature and its infinite wonders, he began to record his impressions on cave walls using rudimentary stone tools. Deep inside, the man felt an urgent need and desire to express his strong feelings for the various delights and manifestations of life and nature.

Art is an image of life itself and one of its greatest expressions. With the passing of time and the continuous efforts of humans, art developed a succession of rules and principles to be applied when creating any work of art. Today, this process has attained a high level of sophistication in all fields of art: architecture, music, literature, and painting.

A painting is one of these artistic manifestations. Most of us look at a painting in terms of its outer appearance and material value. This is the wrong approach, but it is not a sin for which the public should be severely

blamed or held responsible. We know that understanding a work of art is largely a cultural and educational matter based on special training, which has its particular rules and principles, and in which a person is brought up to learn about it just like any other science. Consequently, specialists and artists are required to perform the duty of elaborating and explaining the various aspects of a painting to its viewers and elucidate the work's characteristics as well as its social, national and human aspects. The higher the level of artistic education, the better can one understand and appreciate a painting, enjoy all its attributes and the multitude of its meanings and aims. One can, consequently, accompany the artist through his enchanting journey to an ideal world, and is momentarily lifted to a nobler and more humanistic world where his sensations are refined, his soul purified and his humanism sublimated. With such lofty intellectual wanderings, social and psychological forces are united and a balance is maintained between the needs of the body and the demands of the soul, thus preserving man's own identity as a human being.

A painting, or rather this simple patch of canvas, is in fact, from the viewpoint of the mind and intellect, a brief sketch of one's soul, disposition and temper. It is one of the fleeting phases of life which the artist momentarily encounters and records with his brush. In some cases, this may be a picture of the history of a whole nation and, as such, may become timeless. The philosopher Tame said: "A nation which has no art has no civilization and no history".

A painter, just like other masters of the arts, possesses desires and hopes which he expresses through colour, shadow and light. These are the materials with which he embodies these desires and hopes. Painting is the oldest language known to man; even more, it is the common language of all humanity. People today must know this in order to understand a painting: this mirror image that represents the artist's own self, his country and his humanity.

As mentioned earlier, lines are one of the means which an artist employs to express his ideas and aspirations. In this respect, one can say that horizontal lines often express tranquility and peacefulness, while curved and broken lines express movement and discord. Also, colour, a language in itself, can play a role that is as important as lines due to its impact on people's feelings and senses. Cool colours, i.e. yellow, green and their derivatives, culminating with silver, are soothing, intimate and invoke comfort and tranquility; this is in contrast to hot and warm colours, i.e. red, yellow and fiery colours derived from them, which convey to our senses feelings of pleasure, enthusiasm and vigour. There is also the critical issue of mixing colours harmoniously, which demands specialized training, sensitive feelings, a fine taste for their selection and mixing as well as the subtle ability to match cool and warm colours to create to the viewer a magnificent atmosphere of beauty and pleasure. Colours play a critical role due to their influence on one's soul; a role similar to that played by music and melodies. For this reason, the fine arts should hold a significant position in educational systems due to their great effect on people's morals, refinement and emotional development, all of which help to raise people to the sublime ideals of love, goodness and beauty.

We must also stress that the composition of a painting is one of its most critical, delicate and difficult aspects. A composition is essential to highlight ideas, perfect lines, and form them in a way that fits the subject matter of the painting. This process should observe the spaces among the various sections of a painting, thus creating harmony, delicate proportions and total consistency among its various parts to render it soothing to the soul and pleasant to the eye. Finally, a painting should maintain a perfect and delicate balance amongst its various volumes in a way that leads to the creation of a uniform entity and invokes a microcosm of the whole world in a way that is dominated by harmony, beauty and discipline.

In respect of the two words of "harmony" and "discipline", I would say that the West has given art a significant place and great importance in society since it is believed that it forms a strong motive for strengthening the spirit of harmony and discipline in man. These two qualities place man on the way to greater advancement and progress, and mould him into a civilized citizen who understands his duties and rights. A certain philosopher once said, "The absence of art in a nation is a sign of its decadence". In short, all these elements should be put together in a painting to convey the ideas that go through the artist's mind, led by the power of his imagination and feelings.

Regardless of the level of intelligence, preparedness and noble origin, an artist cannot express his feelings and sensations accurately and sincerely without recognizing all these aspects. Rodin, the famous sculptor, said: "Without knowing the principles of painting, shadow and light, and without studying the science of human anatomy, the science of perspective, and then learning about the nature of colours and how to mix them, as well as related principles and technical sciences, the hand of the greatest genius will be paralyzed". Each artist has his own preferences and employs the style of expressing himself through the selection of certain types of lines and colours that reflect his personal temperament and feelings. Some artists adopt simple straight lines and mild cool silver colours. Others combine the two, depending on their state of mind. There are numerous ways to express feelings: some artists might go to the extreme of strongly defining lines, features, and intensifying colours; others may render their lines light and radiant; while others still may leave them infinitely vague. As in literature, art schools are numerous.

The best way to understand painting is to visit art galleries, read and frequent artists' studios. These visits create in oneself a precious feeling of pleasure. Actually, they are like attending the theatre or reading a good book; they are like a school of ethics that teaches good manners, the true understanding of the value of things and a subtle appreciation of life.

The study of a painting requires ample time, since it is in fact like a great book with widely differing aspects. In my present observations, I shall leave these aspects without further elucidation, since only time will allow one to understand a painting and penetrate its core, by not only standing before it and saying: "This is a tree and this is the portrait of a person". Rather, one should try to understand that the tree represents one of the particular states of nature, and probably the psychological state of the artist. Also, the portrait of a person might represent all humanity, its feelings of pain, joy and other emotions.

People who demand from life more than food and drink, have to develop and attain a full understanding of art, so that they may come to understand their own reality, and, consequently, the real meaning of life.



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