

# What is Art?

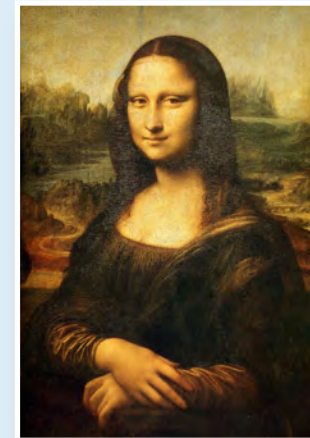
## People's Expectations

Examples from Traditional Works



Michelangelo's **David**

Leonardo da Vinci's **Mona Lisa**



Botticelli's **The Birth of Venus**

# Classical Art

## Art as Ritual

### Properties of Ritual

Shared belief system

Clarity and agreement on purpose

Utilizes shared gestures



### Judeo-Christian/Greco-Roman Traditions

Sarifices/Blood Sacrament

Homeric Heroes/Roman Tragedies

Renaissance Paintings

Shakespearian Tragedies

### Non-Western Traditions

Mayan King Ritual

Aboriginal Australian Youth Initiation Ceremonies

Blood poured over statues in Mali

Sacrificial Water Buffalo in Borneo

# Modern Art Theory

## Evaluating Beauty

— Aesthetics: From *Aisthesis* - Greek for sensation or perception.



**Alexander Baumgarten** (1714 - 1762)

Coined current usage of "aesthetics"

Founder of modern aesthetic theory.

Interested in discerning good perceptions from bad ones.

— Taste : "A refined ability to perceive quality in an artwork."



**David Hume** (1711 - 1776)

Education and Experience lead to good taste.

Consensus among "Men of Taste" creates universal standard.

**Contemporary Criticism:**

Hume's "Taste" is acquired through cultural indoctrination.

# Modern Art Theory

## Evaluating Beauty



### Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804)

Interested in judgements of beauty rather than taste.  
Interested in human perception and cognition.  
Predecessor to modern Scientific Psychologists.  
Influenced later theories of *Aesthetic Response*.  
Paved the way for appreciation of modern artists.

### Theory of Beauty:

Beauty is grounded in the features of the artwork itself.  
Beautiful objects should remain distant and neutral.  
Beauty arises from the interplay of Perception, Imagination and Intellect.  
People label objects to classify sensory inputs that suit a purpose.  
Beautiful objects have "Purposiveness without Purpose."

# Contemporary Art

## Defending Serrano

### **Piss Christ (1987)**

Formal and Material Properties  
Content  
Context



### **Meaning**

Condemnation of a culture that only superficially adheres to the tenants of a religion without endorsing its values.

### **Factors in Debate**

Demonstrates technical skill and artistry (60" x 40" Cibacrome Print.)  
The name of the picture generates revulsion, but imagery is reverential.  
Bodily suffering and bodily fluids are a source of Catholicism strength.  
Serrano's Honduran/Afro-Cuban culture views bodily fluids as natural.  
Ties to Francisco Goya and Louis Buñuel.

# Contemporary Art

## Rethinking Aesthetics

### What it is not

Contemporary art is not based on ritual.

Contemporary art is not based on Kant's notion of "Significant Form"

### What it is

Contemporary art is about content over beauty.

Contemporary art often contains negative or morally ambiguous messages.

