

Peter Clements Art Studios

What is a Masterpiece

Scenario

If I were asked that question, what is a Masterpiece? The first thoughts my imagination would conjure up would be of a group of selected academics milling around and discussing the pros and cons of their latest discover.

Behind closed doors in a room somewhere deep inside a public museum they would vigorously follow each step of a well-organized procedure to determine merits of the painting in front of them. Clearly, they know what they are doing, and few would dispute their opinion.

In one hand they would have a clipboard with a number of lab reports attached. The first being the chemical analysis report or 'Toxscan'. The high content of Iodine, Mercury and Lead were first chemicals listed, followed by an unexpected entry of the element, Uranium. Followed by a list of toxins and bio-hazardous bacteria. Besides that, 'above normal' levels of Bee's wax and Animal fats, were also mentioned. At the bottom was a note in bold red print that read '**Hazardous to human wealth**'.

Next there were the analogy forms, which list a number of criteria the academic's were supposed to review. But, in this particular case, they ignored most of the subheadings and went directly to the conclusion to add their comments. Some of which read, *Illogical – It's a mess – Void – Offensive.*

I guess it is just as well we can only imagine what happens behind closed doors.

Classic Definition

The scenario above is a narrative of the classic definition of a masterpiece where a selected study from an apprentice or journeyman would be appraised. If that art study was approved and deemed to be an 'art work of a master', the craftsman would have been accepted as master craftsman in the old European guild system and noted as a master of his profession. Similar to the modern day equivalent of an apprentice passing his trade-test and becoming a qualified tradesman or artisans.

Ancient Art

The question now is, could art prior to the guild system be called an 'art work of a master'?

Could not an artefact such as king Tutankhamun's golden mask be considered as being a masterpiece? Furthermore, could not the same be asked of a Ming Density vase, or ancient Greek pottery?

By definition the answer has to be no. Yet in theory, are they not fine examples of an artist that has mastered their craft and stood the test of time? Are they not masterpieces?



The only dispute could be whether these 'art pieces' created by an artist or craftsmen. Moreover and most likely, they were probably 'crafted' by a number of craftsmen.

Define Art

The definition of 'Art' and its creator 'The Artist' only came about during the renaissance, where 'craftsmen' such as painters, sculptors and the like were classified as being artists. Later, in the eighteenth century, poets and musicians were included under a new label referred to as 'The Arts'.

Modern World

The next question has to be, what of the modern day 'art work of a master'? We can recall a piece of music, a dramatic performance or a piece of art that has demonstrated that that artist was indeed a master of his or her profession.

The true merit of a masterpiece can not be measured by the values on a checklist of qualities, but rather by the response it creates. Be it a dramatic performance, piece of music, or other artistic study it is the air of mystique it embodies that is its true asset. An asset which brands it as being 'one of a kind', unique and not part of the norm.

Critics can evaluate the apparent virtues of an artistic study, but there comes a point when reasoning will be challenged by the unexplained. As with scientific discoveries where there will come a point when the analogy will break down through the lack of tangible information. Where the unexplained is confronted with sentiment, or a dimension that cannot be translated into the language of logic.

It is this void of the unexplained that is the masterpiece's true strength.

Therefore, I believe the true strength of a masterpiece lies not in reasoning or values but rather in the sentiment it embodies. It is that void of the unexplained, air of mystique that is its true virtue, and the greater that void, the greater the masterpiece.

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