What is to be considered as ART:
by George Dickie, Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics

1. An **artist** is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.

2. A **work of art** is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

3. A **public** is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.

4. The **artworld** is the totality of all artworld systems.

5. The **artworld system** is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.

This is known as the INSTITUTIONAL definition/theory of art.
Who talks about ART?

Academia
- art historian (Jean Robertson)
- art theorist / art critic (George Dickie)
- philosopher (aesthetic) (Dave Hickey)

Artworld
- curator (Stefano Catalani, BAM; Robin Held, The Frye)
- newspaper art critic (The Stranger's Jen Graves; Seattle Times' Regina Hackett; Village Voice's Jerry Saltz)
- gallerist / collector (Greg Kucera)
- artist

Public
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**ARTWORLD SYSTEM creates a DIALOGUE around the art.**
This dialogue is what defines art as such.

This is known as the **INSTITUTIONAL definition/theory of art**.
WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

WHAT IS MODERN ART?
WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART?

- Art of the PRESENT, art of our time
- Artist is usually still alive
- Being in flux: constantly changing
- There is no unified, crystallized interpretation or theory of it
- Diverse nature of issues, styles, and forms
- Part of our Culture and visual culture (takes inspiration from it and contributes to it)

Different from “Modern Art”

MODERN ART:
Refers to specific time period (from late 19th c. though the first half of 20th century: influenced by industrialization, WW I., machine-technology, socio-cultural changes of the time) and a specific style:
- Emphasis on composition.
- Artwork creates autonomous aesthetic effect without any outside information.
- Rejection of pictorial illusion and “about-ness”
- Concerned with the purity of the medium: e.g. what is painting?
Contemporary Art: Some Peculiar Characteristics

- **New art forms** appear besides traditionally recognized art forms.
  e.g.: installation art, process art, video art, digital and experimental forms
- **Diverse and eclectic.** No single medium or ideology dominates. (no “-ism”)
- Medium categories are broadening, **boundaries are getting blurred and redefined.**

- **Referencing and sampling** from contemporary popular/consumer culture.
- Art becomes **interdisciplinary & cross-disciplinary** (artists as scientists, cultural anthropologists, journalists, reporters, etc.)

- **Technologies** => new way of producing and conceptualizing art (digital culture, Internet, virtual reality)
- New media potentials: video, robotics, transgenic art, etc.
- New technologies create **new paradigms** (i.e., photography and truth)

- Art world goes **global** (global production, reproduction, art market: global economy, dissemination)

- “**About-ness**” - artist as social & cultural observer, critic.
  Artwork functions as a “**window through which to view and deepen our understanding of the world.**”

- **Audience becomes an active contributor** to the work of art, including constructing meaning.
LOOKING AT ART
**TALKING ABOUT ART**

- elements of a CRITIQUE, backbone of writing and talking about art

### 1. Description (Verbal pointing)
- objective
- based on **observation**
- relies on internal information **in the work**: subject matter, medium and form

### 2. Interpretation ("Aboutness")
- subjective
- relies on information **external to the work** (not available in the work),
- involves research, **analysis & synthesis**
- in relationship to a system of rules, cultural conditions, worldview, knowledge, history and art history, biases, beliefs, etc.

### 3. Evaluation (Value judgment)
- extremely subjective
- according to a specific value system, theory, ideology, worldview
Describing Art:

What?
**Internal Information = Visible in the work**
Can be gathered by looking at the work

1. **Subject matter = Imagery** (naming of what’s in a work of art: persons, objects, places, events, etc.)

It is different from
**Subject (theme, main idea, recurring topic) = What is the work about?**

Not the same but used interchangeably with

**Content:** Everything that’s in the work of art.
Artist’s intent, and
handling of visuals: subject matter, form, media.
+ Meaning originating from context in culture and presentation, as well as from critical discourse around the art.
**Warning:** CONTENT is INTERPRETIVE!!!
2. Medium/media
   = materials (C-print, pencil on paper, porcelain)
   - or used to refer to a group of artworks (photography, ceramics)

3. Form = Compositional elements
   - Formal elements: line, dot, shape, light&value, color, texture, mass, space, volume
   - Principles of design: scale, proportions, unity, variety, repetition, rhythm, balance, emphasis, etc...
   - Framing, cropping, depth of space, foreground/middle ground/background
   - Scale
   - Spatial aspects: use of space, location, proportions, movement, dynamism/energy

Abstraction/realism
Representation/non-representation
Edouard Manet: The bar at the Folies-Bergeres 1881

Jeff Wall: Picture for Women 1979
External Information:  
(forming the basis of INTERPRETATION)

1. Context
Where does the artwork live?
- Physical location, institutional context;
- Place in culture, society, history, art history, etc.  
and how does it relate to these?

2. Concept
Artist’s intention behind the work:
regarding form, meaning, interaction with the viewer, 
placement, etc.
RULES OF INTERPRETATION

- Interpretations are subjective
  BUT,

- Interpretations are persuasive arguments (based on facts, follow a logical trajectory, lead to a clear point);
- Some interpretations are better than others;
- Interpretations tell more about the artwork than about the critic;
- Different/opposing interpretations can co-exist;
- Interpretations are influenced by one’s world-view;
- Different interpretations are enlightening, even if one does not agree with them (part of the discourse);
- All interpretations can be evaluated based on their
  - inclusiveness,
  - clarity of point,
  - well-funded/supported argument examples and facts
  - appropriateness in the larger cultural context.
“Dead-end” Question:
- Is this art?
Contemporary Visual Art

Appropriate Questions:
- **What makes a work of art a work of art?**
- What are the subjects/themes important for artists working today?
- What distinguishes visual art from any other form of visual communication like photojournalism, design, advertising?

- What is the role of the contemporary artist? Has this role changed over time?
- What are the most important skills an artist must have?
- What tools and materials are being used to create art today? Have these changed over time?
- Where do artists find inspiration and how they use it to create work?
- What's the difference between working alone and collaborating with other artists, fabricators, performers, audience, etc.

- In addition to museums and galleries, what are other sites where art can be shown? How does the location (context) affects its meaning?
- Does contemporary art have a purpose, a role, a responsibility?
- What role beauty plays in contemporary art? Does a work of art need to be beautiful?
- What is the viewer’s role?
- How is meaning constructed?
Theme:
Clustering of ideas around a particular topic.

Why looking at themes?

- Non-chronological look at current art (in the West);
- Not organized by mediums, formal characteristics, and “-isms” (art movements);
- Better reflects on what is happening in art currently;
- Allows flexibility of interpretation and discussion while introduces a spectrum of artistic choices and ideas.

Note: It is an artificial categorization of artworks and artists that mainly serves didactic purposes. It allows to “cherry pick” among various topics to find “vital” or “historically important” ones.
Homework Writing Assignment#1:

Come up with your own definition of what ART is.

- Create a set of criteria ART must have that distinguishes it from other things and activities. Be sure to consider your set of criteria from both the point of view of the maker/artist, as well as that of the audience/receiver. **Make sure your set of criteria is well rounded.**
- Your definition should look more like a checklist of clear, concise sentences.
- Think about it as if you were to write an outline for a larger paper on what art is.
- Include examples from lectures, readings, where possible. Be careful to reference sources correctly. Consider examples and counterexamples!
- **Submit through your DROPBOX by 11pm on Sunday, Jan 15th.** Remember, dropbox will close at 11pm!
- PDF format only!
- You will need to bring a hard copy for peer review on Wednesday, Jan18th.

**Site visit: See links to video talks posted on course website.**
Expectations and Policies

- You will derive the greatest benefit from this class if you remain alert, follow the material presented, ask questions and interact with the instructor, guest speakers, and your colleagues.

  **Why not sit in the front row?**

- **Just because the class is large it does not mean that you are invisible:** If you want to surf the web, send text or email messages, listen to music, play games or do homework for your other classes, there are better places to do these activities than in this class.

  **Practice common courtesy toward the speaker and your peers; do not prevent others from learning.**

- Absolutely NO cell phone calls are to be taken or made during class.
- **Turn off and put away all electronic devices: cell phones, iPods, MP3 players, etc. for the entire duration of class.**
- Use of a laptop in class is OK, as long as it is being used for note taking.

- **Class begins and ends at the appointed time.** Arrive on time and plan to stay for the entire duration of class. In the exceptional case when you do need to leave early or arrive late, take every precaution to not to disrupt the speaker.
Expectations and Policies

- There are **NO make-ups** for missed quizzes, homework assignments, and any in-class activities under any circumstances.
- **Missing the Final Project or more than 3 quizzes, homework assignments, or peer-reviews will result in failing (E) grade and no credit earned.**

- **Absences from class prevent participation and may negatively affect grades.**
- If sudden illness, emergency or random act of nature should prevent you from attending class, you are responsible for following up with a classmate, receiving any assignments, and completing them **ON TIME.**

- **Plagiarism** is defined as using in your own work the creations, ideas, words, inventions, or work of someone else without formally acknowledging them through the use of quotation marks, footnotes, bibliography, or other reference.
  
  Instances of plagiarism will be referred to the Vice Provost/Special Asst to the President for Student Relations and may lead to disciplinary action.

- If you would like to request **academic accommodations** due to a disability, please contact Disabled Student Services and talk to me as soon as possible so we can discuss the accommodations you might need for the class.