

Why Study Art

“Thanks to art, instead of seeing a single world, our own,
we see it multiply until we have before us
as many worlds as there are artists.”

Marcel Proust

Why do artists create art? They want to communicate with other people. They want to express ideas and feelings – theirs or their patrons. When we study art, we learn what artists and cultures think about their world. We see the personal emotions and memories artists want to share. We see the ideas and beliefs important to a culture. We compare their feelings to our feelings and look for ideas we have in common.

As we see what ideas and feelings artists express, we learn what their values and beliefs are. **Values** are *social* ideas – principles, standards or qualities people consider desirable or worthwhile. We see what *social* ideas – loyalty, faith, courage, wisdom, justice, equality, social status, respect community unity or individual freedom – are important to a culture. Values are shown in a culture’s artworks by the qualities they show in their people and leaders and the stories they choose to show about their lives.

Beliefs are *spiritual* or *religious* ideas people accept as true. We see what *spiritual* beliefs guide peoples’ lives: who created the world and why, there is a higher power, good conquers evil and there is life after death. Non-Western cultures follow many different religious traditions, from ancestor worship to Buddhism, Hinduism and animistic beliefs. Many of these religions change and evolve over time.

As we study art, we learn what individuals and what cultures think is beautiful. **Values** and **beliefs** influence what people think is beautiful. Every culture defines beauty in its own unique way. Most people think something is beautiful if it brings pleasure to the heart, the eyes or the mind. The most beautiful artworks appeal to all three, our **heart**, our **eyes** and our **mind**.

Artworks that affect our emotions, touch our memories or illustrate our beliefs and values appeal to our **heart**. Colors, lines, shapes, space and texture appeal to our **eyes**. Values and beliefs influence what artists show about their heroes and history. Those stories and stories about artists, their culture and why they created their artworks appeal to our **minds**. Some values and beliefs you will agree with; but you will not agree with others. During this course we will explore many different artworks and how values and beliefs influenced what was beautiful – what appealed to people’s hearts, eyes and minds. You will also explore what is beautiful to you and what values and beliefs appeal to your heart, your eyes and your mind.