

# **Understanding art: a checklist of the three most basic categories of crafted material**

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One of the difficulties standing in the way of a straightforward understanding of art is caused by the confusion that arises at a very basic level between the purposes and functions of various types of crafted material. In fact, there are only three major types – covering all eventualities – and being able to differentiate between them very much helps to pinpoint exactly what the special nature of ‘art’ is.

‘Crafted material’ is material – in any medium, physical or intellectual – which has been deliberately crafted by someone to some purpose, the major categories of which are listed below:

## **(1) Functional [utilitarian]:**

tools / machinery / equipment / aids and assists

[can include the idea of ‘**design**’: that is, modifications to crafted material to make it both ergonomic and attractive to handle, or to look at]

Examples: all forms of tools, machinery, gadgets, computers, educational aids, books, communication aids, etc.

## **(2) Decorative:**

making the human lived environment – in its totality – look and feel attractive. Not to be confused with functional material, which is primarily utilitarian.

Examples: decorative architectural features, landscaped gardens, paintings in office foyers, objets d’art in houses, etc.

## **(3) Presentational [enjoyment, entertainment]:**

material crafted for presentation – for the purposes of entertainment – to a targeted audience. Media [forms] include music, painting, sculpture, dance, theatre, film, fiction, video, performance etc.

Within which there are three subcategories:

### **(a) ordinary presentational craft:**

This covers crafted material which either fails in its intention to achieve either **(b)** or **(c)**, or did not aspire to them in the first place, but which is nevertheless intended to be presentational and entertaining

Examples: mainstream films, plays, novels, etc.

### **(b) aesthetic craft:**

presentational objects crafted primarily for the sensorial delight afforded by the chosen medium itself, hopefully manifesting qualities of beauty and splendour

Examples: Cezanne, Matisse, Jackson Pollock, Brancusi, Brahms, etc.

### **(c) art:**

presentational media which deliberately or inadvertently reveals the 'strange and disturbing' – the unsettling, the provoking, the uncanny

Examples: Francis Bacon, David Lynch, Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, etc.

NB: all three categories – **functional, decorative and presentational** – can and do overlap to varying degrees, depending on the context. But it is their primary purpose as crafted material which distinguishes one specific type from another.

For greater detail on a definition of art, & the differences between art & craft, please consult the studies below, all available for pdf download:

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