

Corrigé de la synthèse de documents (format X-ENS) : ART

Art: for sale or for the soul?

Variante : on the meaning / purpose of art

The purpose of art debated

Debating the purpose / significance of art

When some contend that an artist conveys “mixed messages” through his artefacts, others assume that art definitely has a use-value – while Oscar Wilde assertively claims that art is devoid of use. **Can artworks be appraised like any other objects or is art something more essential that is deeply ingrained in human nature?** Five documents contribute to the debate in their own way. They are all aimed at defining what art is. Lauren Oyler in the The New York Times takes issue with the new popular idea that art ought to be ‘necessary’. The Economist probes into a modern adaptation of *Antigone of Syria* and its wider individual and cultural significance. In The New York Review of Books, Perl sheds an ironical light on the (overrated?) works of Jeff Koons, an artist said to be critical of our consumerist societies. This is echoed by a picture of Warhol’s famous Pop Art “Campbell’s Soup Cans”, a series of thirty-two nearly similar canvasses. Finally, Oscar Wilde's Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray rather addresses art’s more self-reflexive or aesthetic functions.

Some (who are no adherents of the “art for art’s sake” movement) may think that **art’s virtue is based on its utility value as though artworks were mere commodities**. This is the point made by Lauren Oyler (something which leaves her in doubt): any purely aesthetic approach to art has lost relevance over time; any artwork has become an essential medium for “meaning”, morality and politics. Furthermore some artists like Jeff Koons are said to embody the mercantile aspect of art, exhibiting meaningless, garish and extra sized reproductions of items from our consumer society, for the mere purpose of making indecent amounts of money whilst taking advantage of the credulity and snobbery of museum-goers without even trying to stir any emotion in them (subversion having become a new convention), as art critique Jed Perl has it, thus debunking the exhibition at the Whitney museum. Warhol’s thirty-two canvasses featuring such a trite object as a soup can may also suggest that some “classics” have become so mundane that they may now be regarded as mere infamous products of mass culture.

And yet even though art can do without the market, it can hardly be denied that it has a real social “use”. Admittedly Jeff Koons's influence, underlined by Peter Schjeldahl, cannot be overlooked: his work (an example is his Balloon Dog showing in the picture) may be seen as a means to give some thought to the excesses of our materialistic society and to scoff at middle-class conventional culture. As The Economist bears evidence, a playwright may want to get across a

topical political message when having Syrian refugee women perform a version of Sophocles'(s) Antigone, in the wake of Brecht's or Fugard's 20th century committed versions, old tyrant Creon echoing the El Assad dynasty, thus providing a subversive medium for free speech, which goes back to the idea put forward by L. Oyler that art has become "necessary". Art (let alone songs or movies) then fosters the creativity and inventiveness of a country's designers but it also contributes to civilization.

Eventually, though, it is precisely the **ultimate "uselessness" of art**, as ironically stated by Oscar Wilde, or rather **its fundamental and priceless gratuity** that might define it best. First it conveys a universal message and cannot be reduced to the sole matter of moralizing or edifying beholders. In addition, art should not be limited to a happy few, most of whom are philistines. Oyler says, clearly and loudly, that there is not a single artwork that is "necessary": so-called "necessary" art curtails critical thinking, it exempts art from its role of having to arouse emotions and it undermines an artist's autonomy, which actually causes some people (unlike Peter Schjeldahl) to look down on Koons' work because to them being artistically autonomous paradoxically means suiting the average citizen's taste. Why not consider Warhol an autonomous artist whose canvasses simply free the imagination and stir an aesthetic emotion? Why should his or Koons' work necessarily "make sense"?

CONSEILS / RAPPELS

- Seuls les éléments présents dans le dossier peuvent figurer dans votre synthèse (y compris pour ce qui est de l'accroche et du préambule introductif).
- Renvoyez aux articles en utilisant le nom des auteurs plutôt que le journal. Par exemple au lieu d'écrire: The New York Times' writer qui compte pour 5 mots, préférez 'Oyler'.
- Optez pour la reformulation du contenu. Ne citez pas le texte.
- Faites attention à l'ordre des mots en anglais pour la problématique.
- Les documents « visuels » doivent être brièvement décrits à un moment donné. Il faut aussi les INTERPRÉTER.
- Certains documents contiennent du « non-dits », des intentions implicites (ou relativement implicites). Pensez, par exemple, à la position discrète que prend le rédacteur d'un article. Pensez à la tonalité ironique d'une préface, etc.
- Ne retenez pas que les grandes lignes de chaque document. Cherchez les subtilités qui se cachent dans les argumentaires.
- Trop de candidats ne respectent pas les consignes : saut de lignes éventuel, titre, nombre de mots à faire figurer.

STRUCTURES COMPLEXES

- They are **all aimed at defining** what art is.
- ... a picture of Warhol's famous Pop Art "Campbell's Soup Cans", a series of nearly similar thirty-two canvasses and "Antigone of Syria" taken from The Economist **have us question and reflect upon** the practical use of art.
- ... **as though** artworks **were** mere commodities.
- ... **without** even **trying** to stir any emotion in them.

Comment traduire: "Il me l'a donné **sans que j'aie à lui demander** quoi que ce soit. » ?

- In addition, art should not be limited to a happy few, **most of whom** are philistines.
- ... which actually **causes** some people (unlike Peter Schjeldahl) **to** look down on Koons' work...
- ... because to them **being** artistically autonomous paradoxically **means suiting** the average citizen's taste.
- Why not **consider** Warhol **an autonomous artist** / **whose canvasses** simply free the imagination and stir an aesthetic emotion?