

DENNIS J. SPORRE

Fourth Edition

REALITY THROUGH THE ARTS

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DENNIS J. SPORRE

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PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to teach basic principles and practices of the arts—painting, printmaking, sculpture, music, theatre, dance, literature, and architecture—of Western and other cultures. This text is an introduction to the humanities, and is designed for individuals who have limited experience in the arts. In addition, it attempts to provide the humanities instructor with a helpful textbook for courses that touch upon the arts in an inter- or multi-disciplinary manner, and approach the arts from a world viewpoint. In order to meet those ends, I have been selective in the material included. My treatment of definitions and concepts in Part I is cursory: in order to stay within the bounds of practicality and the limited perspective of the intended audience, they are explained in general terms, making it simpler to apply them to the diverse cultural approaches examined in Part II.

This book is, of course, not a self-contained humanities course. It cannot substitute for the classroom teacher, whose responsibility it is to shape and mold a course according to the needs of local curricula, and to assist the student to focus on what is important for the thrust of that particular course. No textbook can be relied upon to answer all the students' questions and include all key points. A good book can only suggest the breadth of what is available. This text should encourage the use of other source materials. The instructor should develop emphases or foci of his or her own choosing by adding lectures, videos, or field trips, and expansion of particular areas raised in the general overview presented here. I have aimed to provide a convenient one-volume outline, with enough flexibility to serve a variety of purposes.

In Part I we examine the media of the arts—painting and architecture, for example,—define and explain important terminology, discuss how works are composed, and suggest ways in which some art effects responses in viewers and listeners. The compendium approach used in Part I seems useful because it allows us to apply its terms and concepts as tools for perceiving, describing, and understanding the arts of the diverse cultures discussed in Part II.

In discussing works of art, I have for the most part kept to description and compositional analysis. By so doing I hope to assist the readers in polishing their skills of technical observation. By avoiding forays into meanings and relationships, I have left room for the instructor to move discussions in whatever direction is deemed appropriate.

As suggested earlier, the choice of what to include and exclude has been more or less arbitrary. This is not a comprehensive history of the arts; nor is it an introduction to aesthetic theory. Even the media discussed in the various chapters vary—for the simple reason that different cultures have left us different kinds of artifacts, some of which are better examples of the culture than others. In organizing each chapter—particularly in Part II—I have let the nature of the material suggest its own internal structure. In all cases I have tried to keep the focus of the discussion on works of art.

Part II is arranged chronologically. Thus, with what I hope is a reasonably simple format, we are able to glimpse the arts from a variety of cultures that were occurring at roughly the same time in history. We must keep in mind, however, that the focus of Part II is style, not history. In addition, not every culture has been represented—for example, I have not included Oceania, primarily because consultation with humanities instructors suggested priorities for inclusion. Given practical considerations, such as space and accessibility of illustrations, those priorities became imperative.

This book is based on the belief that art from whatever culture is a view of the universe, of human reality, that is expressed in a particular medium and shared with others. Throughout time humans have struggled to understand the universe, and, though separated by centuries or cultures, our concerns and questions, as reflected in our works of art, are alike. By examining art we can enrich our own understanding of our existence. Therefore, as we proceed through the text, try to go beyond the facts and descriptions presented and seek meanings, if only from an individual perspective. Ask questions about what the artist may have been trying to accomplish, and seek to understand how you relate to these creative expressions in terms of your own perception of human reality.

Finally, a work such as this does not spring entirely from the general knowledge or primary source research of its author. Some of it does, because of my long-term and close affiliation with the various arts disciplines. Much is the result of notes accumulated here and there, of travel around the world, and of research specifically directed to this project. In the interest of readability, and in recognition of the generalized purpose of this text, copious footnoting has been avoided. I hope that the method I have chosen for

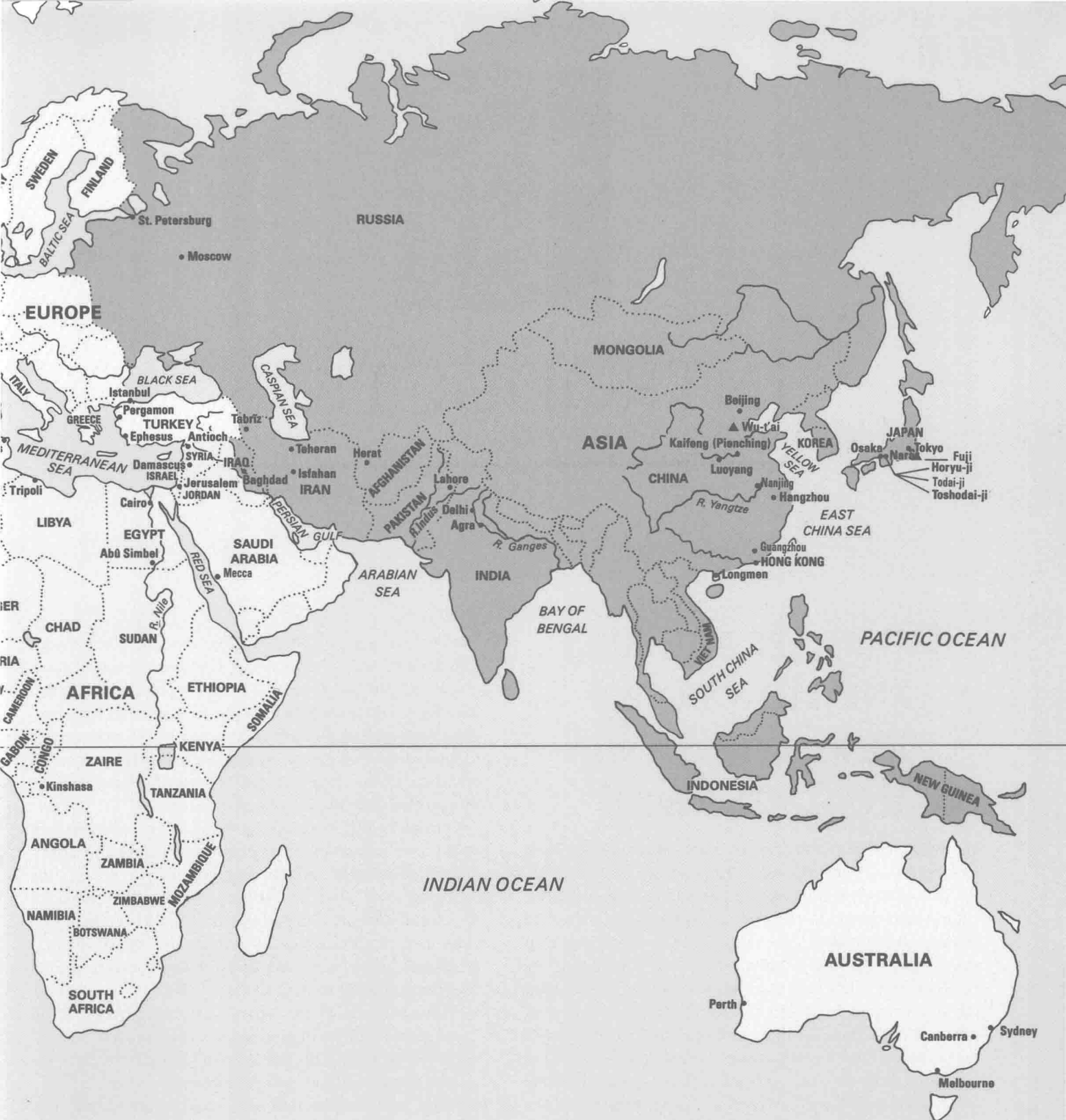
presentation and documentation of others' works meets the needs of both responsibility and practicality. The bibliography gives a comprehensive list of works used.

This fourth edition contains several major additions. First is a series of feature boxes titled "Profile." These appear throughout the text and introduce the reader to artists of note in fuller biographical detail than would normally occur. Second is a series of feature boxes titled "Masterwork." These appear throughout the second half of the text and draw special attention to several significant works of art, architecture, and literature. The third addition is correlation of the music sections with a compact disc available from Prentice Hall. For the first time, we now have specific illustrations of music that apply both to the descriptive materials in the first half of the text and to the historical materials of the second half. Another addition to this edition is a greatly expanded treatment of music and musicians in the history sections. Also, I have increased the number of literature selections and the number of illustrations.

One final note: in 1977, when I wrote *Perceiving the Arts* (Prentice Hall, 6th edn., 2000), I asked Ellis Grove, my colleague at Penn State University, to prepare a chapter on film. Ten years later that chapter formed the basis for Chapter Five of this book. In twenty years of revisions of these two books, much of Ellis's original work has been altered by additions and editing. Nonetheless, the basics are his, and I am indebted to him, as I am to a score of colleagues whose insights, encouragement, and criticism have, hopefully, made each edition of this book better than its predecessor. I am also deeply indebted to Bud Therien at Prentice Hall, my friend, editor, and publisher for more than twenty years; to Marion Gottlieb for her gentle and pleasant spirit; to the editors and copy-editors at Calmann & King in London; and, most of all, to my wife, Hilda, whose patience, love, and understanding, proofreading, note-taking, and research assistance provided me with a solid foundation from which to generate my own part of the project.

D. J. S.







INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE THE ARTS AND HOW DO WE RESPOND TO AND EVALUATE THEM?

We live in buildings and listen to music constantly. We hang pictures on our walls and react like personal friends to characters in television, film, and live dramas. We escape to parks, engross ourselves in novels, wonder about a statue in front of a public building, and dance the night away. All of these situations involve forms of art in which we engage and are engaged daily. Curiously, as close to us as they are, in many ways they remain mysterious. What are they? How are they put together? How do they stimulate us? What do they mean? In this book we will attempt to answer those and other questions about the arts. We begin with the questions, *What are the arts?* and *How do we respond to and evaluate them?*

Humans are a creative species. Whether in science, politics, business, technology, or the arts, we depend on our creativity almost as much as anything else to meet the demands of daily life. Any story about the arts is a story about us: our perceptions of the world as we have come to see and respond to it and the ways we have communicated our understandings to each other since the Ice Age, more than

35,000 years ago (Fig. 0.1). At that time, we were already fully human. Since then, we have learned a great deal about our world and how it functions, and we have changed our patterns of existence. However, the fundamental characteristics that make us human—that is, our ability to intuit and to symbolize—have not changed. Art, the major remaining evidence of our earliest times, reflects these unchanging human characteristics in inescapable terms.

Our study will focus on the media of the arts and how artists use those media to reflect human reality: our hopes, dreams, fears, expectations, disappointments, and accomplishments. We begin with an introductory overview about art itself and its place in our world. This Introduction provides us with a foundation. It is more conceptual than the remainder of the book, and the following questions can be used as a guide for reading this material:

- What is meant by the term “humanities”? How do the humanities differ from other ways of knowing?
- What is meant by the statement that the arts are processes, products, and experiences?
- Why does a definition of a work of art imply non-restrictiveness, human enterprise, a medium of expression, and communication?
- What is a symbol and in what ways can it communicate?
- What are the major functions of art?
- How is it possible for a work of art to fulfill more than one function?
- How may religious ritual qualify as art?

THE HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS

The humanities, as opposed, for example, to the sciences, can very broadly be defined as those aspects of culture that look into the human spirit. But despite our desire to categorize, there really are few clear boundaries between the humanities and the sciences. The basic difference lies in the approach that separates investigation of the natural universe, technology, and social science from the sweeping search of the arts for human reality and truth.

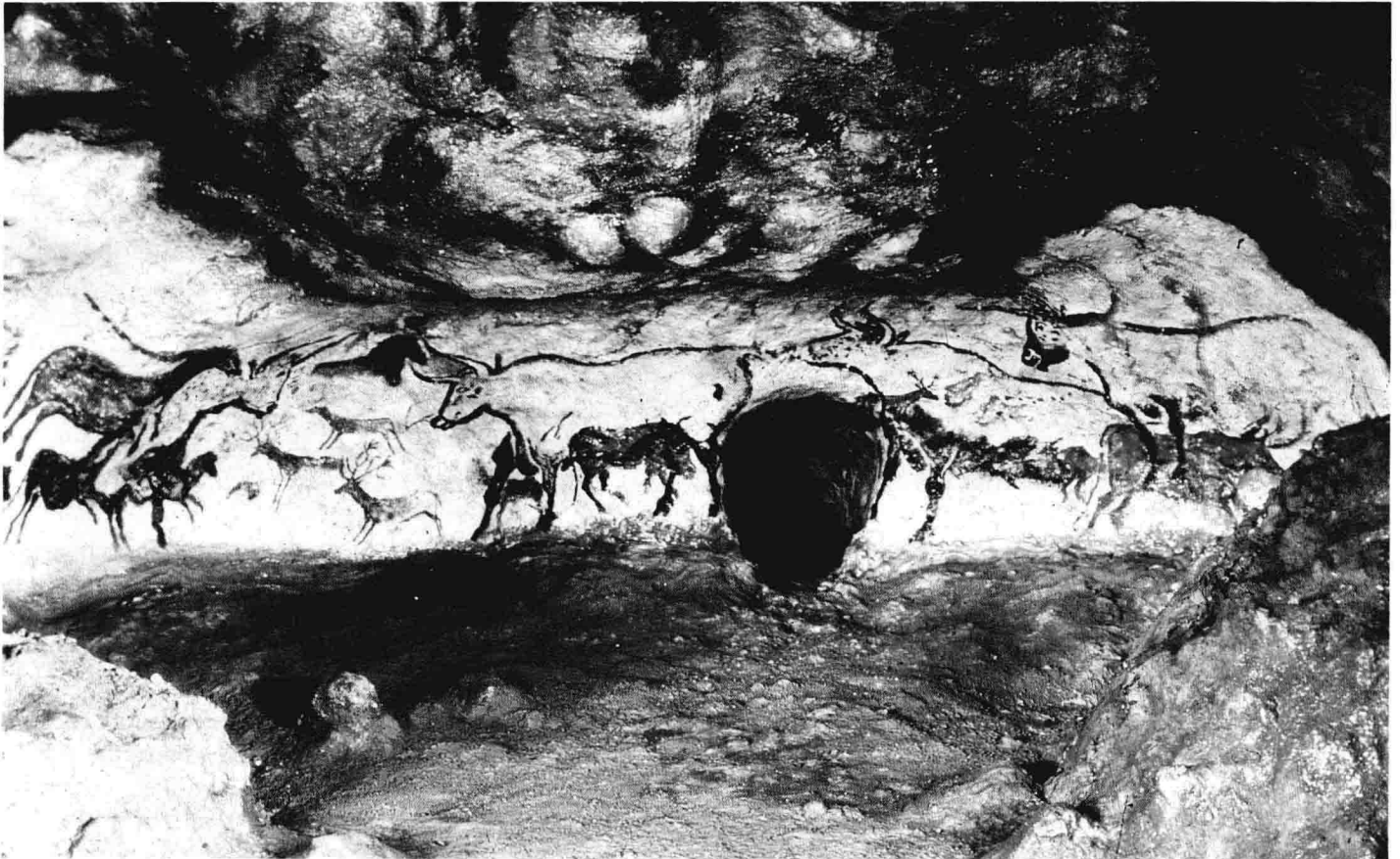
Within the educational system, the humanities have traditionally included the fine arts, literature, philosophy, and, sometimes, history. These subjects are all oriented toward exploring what it is to be human, what human beings think and feel, and what motivates their actions and shapes their thoughts. Many of the answers lie in the millions of artworks all round the globe, from the earliest sculpted fertility figures to the video arts of today. These artifacts and images are themselves expressions of the humanities, not merely illustrations of past or present ways of life.

Artistic styles, schools, and conventions are the stuff of art history. But change in the arts differs from change in the

sciences in one significant way: New technology usually displaces the old; new scientific theory explodes the old; but new art does not invalidate earlier human expression. Obviously, not all artistic styles survive, but the art of Picasso cannot make the art of Rembrandt an idle curiosity of history in the way the theories of Einstein did those of others.

Works of art also remain, in a curious way, always in the present. We react *now* to the sound of a symphony or to the color and composition of a painting. No doubt a historical perspective on the composer or painter and a knowledge of the circumstances in which the art was created enhance understanding and appreciation. But for most of us, today's reaction is most important.

The arts can be approached with all the subtlety we normally apply to human relationships. We learn very young that people cannot simply be categorized as "good" or "bad," as "friends," "acquaintances," or "enemies." We relate in complex ways. Some friendships are pleasant but superficial, some people are easy to work with, and others (but few) are lifelong companions. Similarly, when we have gone beyond textbook categories and learned this sort of sensitivity, we find that art, like friendship, has a major place in our growth and quality of life.



0.1 Cave chamber at Lascaux, France, early Stone Age (c. 15,000 B.C.).



0.2 Andy Warhol, *Green Coca-Cola Bottles*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 6 ft 10 in x 4 ft 9 in (1.97 x 1.37 m). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

WHAT IS ART?

We might paraphrase G. K. Chesterton (*The Everlasting Man*) to say that, in one sense, the arts are the “signature” of humankind. In another, broad sense, the arts are *processes*, *products*, and *experiences* that communicate aspects of human living in a variety of ways, many of which do not use words. *Processes* are the creative actions, thoughts, materials, and techniques artists combine to create *products*—that is, artworks. *Experiences* are human interactions and responses that occur when people

encounter an artist’s vision in an artwork. These are a few of the characteristics that identify the arts—as opposed to science, technology, and social science—as vantage points we use to understand our attitudes, actions, and beliefs.

But what is art? Scholars, philosophers, and aestheticians have attempted to answer this question for centuries without yielding many adequate results. The late pop artist Andy Warhol reportedly said, “Art is anything you can get away with” (Fig. 0.2). Perhaps we should be a little less cynical, and a little more specific. Instead of asking “What is art?,” let us ask “What is a work of art?” A *work of art* is

one person's vision of human reality (emotions, ideas, values, religions, political beliefs, etc.), expressed in a particular medium and shared with others. (This is not a universally acceptable definition of a work of art. It will, however, serve us in this textbook and should form the basis for classroom discussion and debate.) Now we can explore the terms of this definition.

Nonrestrictiveness

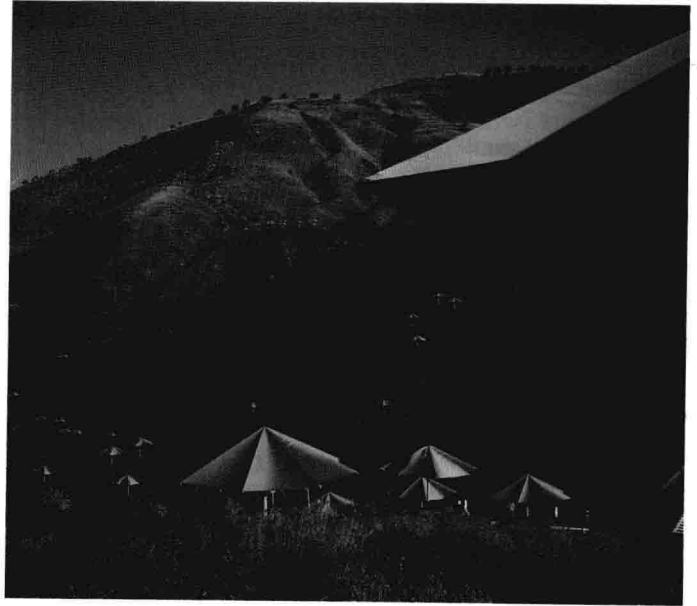
First, the definition is sufficiently nonrestrictive: An artwork is anything that attempts to communicate a vision of human reality through a means traditionally associated with the arts—for example, drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture, as well as works of music, dance, literature, film, architecture, and theatre. We should note here that when we link the terms “reality” and “art,” we are not implying that art is in any way restricted to representing its subject matter representationally (see the Glossary)—as we will see in Part II. If the originator intends it as a work of art, it is one. Whether it is good or bad, sophisticated or naive, profound or inconsequential, matters little to our definition. A child's drawing that expresses some feeling about mother, father, and home is as much an artwork as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes. The music of R.E.M. and that by Mozart both qualify as artworks under our definition, even though the qualities we might ascribe to these artworks would probably be different. (We discuss *value judgments* later in this Introduction.)

Human Enterprise

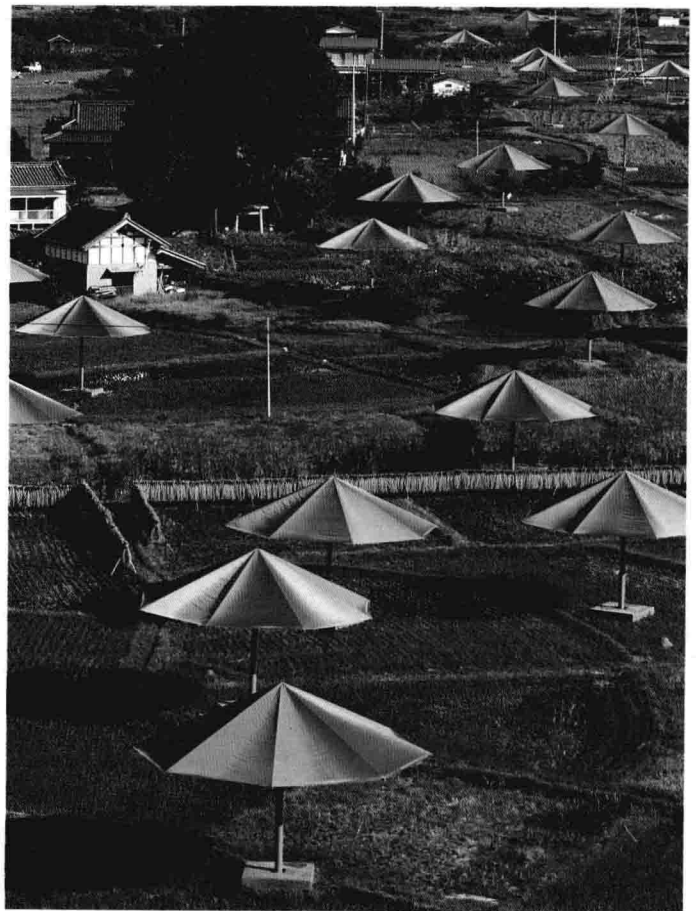
The second implication of our definition is that a work of art is a human enterprise. Whenever we experience a work of art, we come into contact with another human being. We experience human contact because artworks are intended to engage us and to initiate a desire to respond. In the theatre, for example, we are exposed to a variety of visual and aural stimuli that attempt to make us feel, think, or react in harmony with the goals of the artists.

Medium of Expression

Although we can readily accept the traditional media—for example, painting, traditional sculpture, music using traditional instruments, theatre using a script and performed in an auditorium—sometimes when a medium of expression does not conform to our expectations or experiences, we might decide that the work is not art. For example, Figures 0.3A and B show details of two gigantic environ-



0.3A and B Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Umbrellas*, Japan–USA, 1984–91. (A) Valley north of Los Angeles, California, detail of 1,760 yellow umbrellas; (B) Valley in prefecture of Ibaraki, Japan, detail of 1,340 blue umbrellas. Nylon and aluminum, height of each umbrella including base, 19 ft 8¼ ins (6 m); combined length 30 miles (48 km).



mental installations of blue and yellow umbrellas in Japan and the United States, respectively, created (and financed) by the artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude. For them, the installations (which existed for only a short time) are art. For other people, they most definitely were not. Even though the medium was unconventional and the work transitory, our definition would allow the artwork because the intent of the work was clearly artistic.

Communication

Artworks involve communication and sharing. The common factor in all art is the humanizing experience; artists need other people to whom they can convey their perception of human reality. When artworks and humans interact, many possibilities exist. Interaction may be casual and fleeting, as in the first meeting of two people, when one is not at all interested in the other. Similarly, an artist may not have much to say, or may not say it very well. For example, a poorly written or produced play will probably not excite an audience. Similarly, if an audience member is self-absorbed, distracted, has rigid preconceptions not met by the production, or is so preoccupied by what may have occurred outside the theatre that he or she finds it impossible to perceive what the production offers, then the artistic experience also fizzles out. On the other hand, all conditions may be optimum, and a profoundly exciting and meaningful experience may occur: The play may treat a significant subject in a unique manner; the acting, directing, and design may be excellent; and the audience may be receptive. Or the interaction may fall somewhere between these two extremes. In any case, the experience is a human one, and that is fundamental to art.

In discussing art as communication, we need to note one important term: *symbol*. Symbols are things that represent something else. They often use a material object to suggest something less tangible or less obvious: a wedding ring, for example. Symbols differ from signs, which suggest a fact or condition. Signs are what they denote. Symbols carry

deeper, wider, and richer meanings. Look at Figure 0.4. What do you see? You might identify this illustration as a sign, which looks like a plus in arithmetic. But the shape might be a Greek cross, in which case it becomes a symbol because it suggests many images, meanings, and implications. Artworks use a variety of symbols to convey meaning. By using symbols, artworks can relay meanings that go well beyond the surface of the work and offer glimpses of human reality that cannot be sufficiently described in any other manner. Symbols transform artworks into doorways through which we pass in order to experience, in limited time and space, more of the human condition.

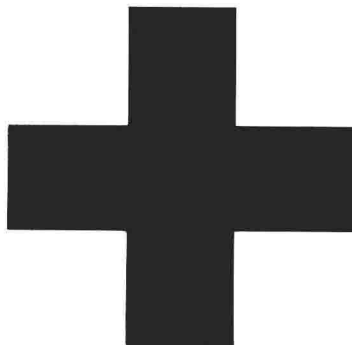
THE FUNCTIONS OF ART

Art can function in many ways: as enjoyment, political and social tool, therapy, or artifact. No one function is more important than the others. Nor are they mutually exclusive; one artwork may fill many functions. Nor are the four categories just mentioned the only ones. Rather, they serve as indicators of how art has functioned in the past and can operate in the present. Like the types and styles of art that have occurred through history, these four functions, and others, are options for artists and the choice depends on what artists wish to do with their artworks.

Enjoyment

Plays, paintings, and concerts can provide escape from everyday cares, treat us to a pleasant time, and engage us in social occasions. Works of art that provide enjoyment may perform other functions as well. The same artworks we enjoy may also create insights into human experience. We can also glimpse the conditions of other cultures, and we can find healing therapy in enjoyment.

An artwork in which one individual finds only enjoyment may function as a profound social and personal com-



0.4 Greek Cross (?).