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## **Understanding Works of Art, the Inexpressible, and Teaching: A Philosophical Sketch**

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### **Abstract**

Understanding is an elusive and little understood concept yet it is frequently cited as an educational aim. The aim of this paper is to illuminate the nature of understanding in the art education context. This paper explores critically the conceptual background of understanding, drawing on the work of Wittgenstein, to reveal its varied and indeterminate nature and the importance of public criteria in the sharing of understanding. Focusing on art, the paper shows how understanding involves an experiential and imaginative synthesis of a work's concepts and features, inexpressible aspects and the viewer's subjective contribution. The importance of giving an artwork its due as an artist's creative achievement is supported. Notes for teaching response to art are offered in keeping with understanding's open texture.

### Preamble

Terms such as understanding, hoping, remembering, wishing, thinking, intending, imagining, and appreciating, take us into the deep waters of philosophical psychology. How is it possible for a child to learn about the meaning and function of such mental capabilities if they take place in some private realm of mind? How is it possible to judge whether or not someone has understood something? What kind of phenomenon is understanding?

Understanding is a common enough educational aim yet it has a mysterious character. My aim in this paper therefore is to sketch out the background context of understanding with a view to aiding the education of students' responses to art.

Most of us feel that our thinking takes place in our minds, and that we can think privately to ourselves, sitting in a chair, without necessarily saying or doing anything. Evidence for thinking might include suitable comments, written material, sketches, or laughing at a joke, for example. I think this common sense view is correct. However, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1974) persistently critiques the idea of thinking and understanding as consisting of mental processes or experiences. Note for example his statement, "An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria" (para.58). This remark and many others of a similar nature led to an extensive literature on Wittgenstein's view on psychological concepts as exemplified by Schroeder (2006) and Baker and Hacker (1983). A major concern stems from the impression that Wittgenstein, with his emphasis on the circumstantial criteria of thinking, is embracing some form of behaviorism. Indeed, the use of quotation marks around 'inner process' seems to signify the implied silent comment, "as if there were such a thing." Before proceeding in this essay I feel I should try to clarify Wittgenstein's ideas as they have a direct bearing on my project.

On reflection, I would like to address this issue of behaviorism as follows: Wittgenstein is arguing that psychological capabilities such as understanding are developed largely in the public practices of using language. There is no inner private language that must first be translated into a public one in order to reveal understanding. I say largely, because in the artistic context, while verbal language is certainly needed to inform art-making and the understanding of art, it is the case, many would argue, that what we apprehend in art is not always communicable in words. Indeed, visual art is not in the first instance, a verbal discipline. Experience of art includes what is strictly inexpressible. Here, in a seeming contradiction, I think of an artwork's unique expressive qualities, or character, for example that can defy description. Wittgenstein would agree, and this is what has endeared him to artists. He was less interested in doctrines than in a style of seeing and was in that sense an artist himself, as Perloff (1996) points out. He had the conviction that the really important things in life, such as values in ethics and aesthetics and the meaning of life itself, could not

be addressed by science nor captured in propositional language. Such things are revealed if at all, he believed, indirectly, through subjective or mystical insight, and by poetry and art (Janik & Toulmin, 1973). In an interesting parallel, American Chickasee poet Linda Hogan (1996), addressing the limitations of spoken language, says:

We read one another via gesture, stance, facial expression, scent...we have feelings that can't be spoken. That very speechlessness results in poems that try to articulate what can't be said directly, in paintings that bypass the intellectual boundaries of our daily vision, and in music that goes straight to the body. (p.57)

Wittgenstein, in his exploration of language practices and their importance for inner reflection, in effect worked to free us from the grip of an outmoded metaphysics. We get the hang of words, of using them openly with others, of what they mean, of being corrected in our usage, and can use them to ourselves privately in thinking something through. Indeed, as Finch (1995) points out, "Wittgenstein's philosophical method was an inner dialogue with himself, consisting of posing questions and inwardly 'listening' to answers" (p.76). He observes, "Wittgenstein worked to abolish the inner world, but by no means the inner life" (p.74). Thus he was not a behaviorist. An understanding developed "privately" to oneself may well be rich and fulfilling in a situation, but establishing it as such would be subject to some form of public criteria. Not that such criteria can always be precise, or that every understanding must be transparent and fully explainable in words, but the possibility of some degree of public appraisal is what is necessary for understanding to be recognizable as understanding. The use of a language, we might say, enables and enlivens our mental capabilities and experiences, but not exclusively so. The emphasis on language and criteria of understanding is important, but so too, often, it is the inexpressible singular feeling or intuition that is valued in art, in love, in teaching, and in many other significant human engagements. Each person, for example, while being a member of the human race, is necessarily unique, and as such, in part, indescribable, and un-analyzable conceptually. Imagine trying to put into words the sensation of a lover's embrace.

One further point, Wittgenstein was by no means saying that we should not try to speak of what is inexpressible. Nor is he saying that words constitute the only form of language. His view seems to be that language shapes understanding, but that ineffable qualities may be shown or made manifest in the languages of dance and poetry, for example, and in the simple gestures of everyday life, but not so much in the languages of science or commerce (Richmond, 2008). This makes the arts themselves very complex forms of understanding, and eminently worthy of their role in education.

### **Contexts of Understanding**

Understanding is probably the most complex and dazzling of all human capabilities yet we know so little about it. It ranges from the arcane grasp of higher mathematics to the appreciative understanding of a haiku. Perceiving, realizing, apprehending, intuiting, and seeing: these are all terms, among others, that are used in different circumstances to connote understanding. But what in general terms may be understood? We speak of understanding persons, stories, mathematical theorems, scientific data, the self, string quartets, art works, and many other things, without finding features necessarily held in common. Is it meaning that is understood? If so what is the meaning of my friend? Can her unique qualities be explained? And yet it is reasonable to speak of the meaning of her actions. We might see a pattern in her behavior that makes sense. Pattern and structure might apply across a range of cases as a focus of understanding but not everything that has structure is an object of understanding, as with an oak leaf, for example. My sense is that something must be highly valued and suitably enmeshed in a culture to be designated as an object of understanding, which with all the variability of understanding's objects, probably accounts for the twists of linguistic usage and grammar. In English, we do not typically talk, for example, of understanding stones, or windows, or their meaning, but we understand their chemical composition and design respectively, and such things can be explained. Pattern, meaning and explanation relate closely to understanding but not in a necessary way. Poets and astrologers, unlike ordinary people, seek to understand the heart and stars. Perhaps there is an element of the arbitrary here influencing grammar that as Baker and Hacker point out "is a free creation of the human mind" (p. 166). We do not speak so much of understanding the Pacific Ocean in itself, for example, rather its natural history or ecology. And yet philosopher Wolfgang Iser's (2003) article "Reflecting the Pacific" seems to be attempting something no less than a sympathetic portrayal of the ocean's being. The borders of what can, and what cannot, be understood are not clearly demarcated and are subject to change.

Mason (2003) in his impressive critique of different attempts at definition concludes that understanding is highly variable, contextual, provisional, and that "the idea of having something in common, or an essence, in diverse forms of understanding, can seem an antiquated philosophical myth" (p. 2). Unlike knowledge, meaning some true and verified proposition, understanding has received little attention from philosophers because it is so elusive and intangible. Mason also points out that there is no reason to assume as correct any particular model for understanding or any method for arriving at understanding, such as for example, analysis, hermeneutics or deconstruction. Baker and Hacker (1983), in their far-reaching analysis of Wittgenstein's work on meaning and understanding, show that he was unable to reach any general conceptual conclusions. They also point out that definitions taking the form of necessary and sufficient conditions, far from being superior to other kinds, are

rather “a product of philosopher’s pipe dreams” (p. 37). The suitability, form, and completeness of definition they argue, are relative to circumstances, and they note, from Wittgenstein, that understanding is a family resemblance concept. This certainly eases some of the pressure to find a set of common attributes. A family resemblance concept is held together by a network of overlapping similarities without any single feature or thread being present in every case just as with members of a real human family. In this essay, unlike discussion of cognition, where human feeling seems, implausibly, to be banished, I am specifically interested in the contribution of the human subject to understanding.

### **Art and Understanding**

Art like understanding is full of variety. In writing about art there is always the likelihood of exceptions, disagreements and counter examples. The chances of finding some basic general idea about what art means are, as we know, remote. But this is not necessarily a problem; it is rather a reflection of cultural complexity.

Art may be full of variety but it is not entirely chaotic. Art typically clusters around a number of areas of practice that also overlap, such as installation art, conceptual art, and the art of different cultures. Across a wide range of cases, however, and drawing from art history, the features of creativeness, expressiveness, form, and aesthetics, have long been valued in the art community and among art’s public, and they can be justified also as being of value in an educational context. If students can be exposed to and learn from these artistic fundamentals, they will be better prepared for embarking on imaginative work of their own. Form here refers to pattern and structure in a work; expressiveness refers to an artwork’s quality of life, to its visual poetry, to an artist’s own unique way of rendering feelings and ideas into form; creativeness refers to a work’s originality and aptness for its purpose; and aesthetics refers to the intrinsic design qualities of a work, sometimes to beauty. All of these features imply the importance of the visual, of perceptual sensitivity, imagination and judgment, which can have a role across different media. But if an artwork is to be understood, it will have to be in a form that viewers can grasp. This implies the use of an artistic language embodying many of the features just mentioned. By language in this case is meant shared practices of making and shaping images to represent and express ideas, feelings and meaning. The term “interpretation” has application to art, and overlaps with understanding, but refers more to verbal explication and is thus not synonymous with understanding. It is not usual, for example, to speak of the interpretation of aesthetic qualities, which must be directly perceived. Also, it is common to speak of an individual artist’s visual language, meaning the way he or she treats and adapts forms and images to suit his or her individual style and circumstances, as is the case analogously with the other arts.

There is one further consideration regarding the notion of using an artistic language that needs to be raised and that is the deconstructionist idea that language, which to some extent predates each individual and is socially constructed, “speaks us.” Marjorie Perloff (1996) observes that it is in the

curious collision of the ‘mystical’ [the inexpressible] with the close and commonsensical study of actual language practices that makes Wittgenstein such a natural ally for the poets and artists of our time. For Lyotard’s assertion that “Humanity is not the user of language, nor even its guardian,” Wittgenstein substitutes a series of seemingly endless “poetic” questions as to how “humanity” in fact does use language. (p.182)

Speakers of a language and artists alike are inducted into communities of practice and learn to use their different language forms. Something as intangible as mood in painting must be understood against a background of culture. But also, language users require an element of personal creativeness and judgment, not already accounted for by rules, in having the imaginative vision to project and adapt language to suit new situations, purposes and contexts. We can see how this has transpired throughout western art history with various artistic evolutions. But verbal language, far from being a completely logical system with fixed rules, is open textured, indeterminate in meaning in many places, and subject to change across a wide range of cases in practice. Language is more a web of improvisational practices, held together by shared meanings and guidelines, than a fully rule-governed grid. Vagueness is not necessarily a defect. Terms such as “evening” and “happiness” have a useful flexibility without being strictly defined. Artists struggle with new media and conditions, adapting and making up new forms of visual language to meet their own and the changing demands of the cultural zeitgeist.

Across another large range of cases is the practice of contemporary art. At times, such art, meaning the art of the present day, incorporates one or more of the features mentioned above. Paula Rega and Marlene Dumas, for example, make art that has voice, is challenging, expressive, well formed, and is designed to be visually appreciated. But much contemporary art eschews, ideologically, the more traditional features in favor of the conceptual, critical, and social. Contemporary art critiques contemporary life, society and art. Meaning rather than form is what matters. The visual is a means to carry a message. In a work of the controversial Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, for example, shown on the experimental Tate Gallery Web Channel video <http://channel.tate.org.uk/>, the arrangement of his performance piece at the Tate Modern, *Group of Persons Facing a Wall*, 2002, involving a group of nine homeless women standing side by side in a line facing the wall for one hour, in return for a night’s lodging in a hostel, has strong visual impact. The artist explains that facing the wall has

connotations of reward and punishment and at the same time, since faces are hidden, prompts thinking about the purpose of the work. The viewer must create what cannot be seen and ask questions. Why, for example, are they all women? The work is disquieting, intended to provoke, and implicate the viewer in this opposition between poverty and the exclusivity of the art world. Sierra, whose face is also deliberately not shown in the video, observes, “the story behind the work is as significant as the work.” Nevertheless, the work does have a formal structure and the isolating in-line face-the-wall arrangement is powerfully expressive of the women’s powerless plight. In practice, art does not fall readily into categorically distinct groups. The work of Goya, for example, is known for its capacity to shock horrifically and critique society, particularly royalty, in the eighteenth century. I would like to say that since all art emerges in part, from an artist’s creative imagination, touch, and temperament it is bound to have some element of expressiveness. And as noted by Suzanne Langer (1953), expressiveness is an intangible quality to be grasped directly as a whole without recourse to rules. Artists have to find the most apt and compelling form of expression in a work, for themselves. Inevitably, audiences for the contemporary have to be prepared for virtually anything presented under the guise of art. Recently a student at a local art college slept in a bed for three weeks as part of her graduating exhibition. With art it is not as though it would be possible to get a one time, objective fix on a work. Art is a trickster, able to surprise. There can be no such thing as a complete and correct understanding of art in any absolute sense. Understanding is usually a work in progress. It is always possible to see and feel more, to find nuances, complexity, and for some differences in view.

### **Viewers and Artists**

In considering understanding it is necessary to bring in the viewer of art as a person with a life and history. We bring our whole bodily selves to a work of art. In Michael Ondaatje’s (2008) affecting novel *Divisadero*, a story of love and tragedy beginning on a ranch in California in the 1950’s, we find this passage: “‘Everything is biographical,’ Lucian Freud says. What we make, why it is made, how we draw a dog, who it is we are drawn to, why we cannot forget. Everything is collage, even genetics” (p. 16). We are all subjective thinkers. How could it be otherwise? Can thought be separated from feeling, or from life? As we age our view of the world, of ourselves, changes. The same is true for artists who show us their sense of how things are, their subjective truth, “the truth of the world as it appears to me.”

Theorists trade in words and artists work through concepts but also through their sense of sight, color, touch, sensibility, and imagination. Starting with a blank canvas or no particular idea or way of working can be as intimidating as a blank page or computer screen. Artists work with their own methods, being on the lookout for possibilities, being inspired by something seen, found, or read about, perhaps doing some preliminary work, nothing definite,

letting an idea come rather than forcing, making sketches, making a small model, taking photographs, collecting material, going for walks, visiting galleries, making a start, trusting that thought, reflection and preparation, trial and error, not always being focused on one thing, led by instinct, feeling around the edges of something, will eventually yield something of value. I base this on my own experience as a photographer, the teaching of art to university students, the evidence of artists' methods in, for example, the Phaidon series of books on contemporary artists that give first hand testimony from such artists as Christian Boltanski and Roni Horn, novels such as *A Painter of Our Time* by John Berger (1958), individual publications on working approaches to art by artists such as Gerhard Richter (1995) in *The Daily Practice of Painting*, art historical studies, and now most fruitfully by the web channel, as previously mentioned, from the Tate Galleries in Britain <http://channel.tate.org.uk/>. This web channel provides access to dozens of short videos of artists discussing their work; interviews with artists; responses of high school students to artworks; visits to artist's studios; symposia; artist's films and tours of exhibitions.

Even with a distinct starting idea such as the making of a portrait in paint there is the question of how it is to be done to suit the subject. Sierra works with various social oppositions—work and worth, poverty versus wealth—but he still has to make or create an effective form. So in responding to an artwork our first duty as students and viewers is to face the work on an individual basis, to look, to feel its impact, resisting the urge to categorize or analyze, letting the work play over us and affect us as we receive it, openly and sympathetically. Mark Hudson recalls his art student days in London in the 1960's in his recent book *Titian: The Last Days* (2009), and notes that on being “sent to the National Gallery to draw from ‘that painting that seems to you most marvelous,’ I chose Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne...my approach was simple: did the painting give me a buzz or not?” (p. 11). He goes on to say:

My teachers were artists...and the thing they had in common was a reluctance to consider anything outside the frame of the painting.... They weren't quite anti-intellectual, but it was a different kind of intellectualism—an intellectualism of the visual. And in this way of looking at art, no artist was entirely dead. When you were looking at Titian's paintings, he was alive, and these paintings...were as immediate and real as if they had been painted last week. (p.11-12)

In a sense the students were being taught to feel a kinship with the artists in the gallery, in not seeing the artworks just as objects of academic study, but as alive with an immediacy and physicality. “Titian,” observes Hudson, “above all was the artist who established painting as a language, a medium of expression in its own right” (p.11). It is interesting to see the impression Titian made on the young Hudson, remaining to the present day. There is something vibrant and refreshing about Hudson's account. Perhaps it is time to rehabilitate the

artist and the work, after so much emphasis on arcane theory that can obscure and blunt individual viewer response. Today, artists seem to be more willing to engage the public regarding their motivations, values, methods, and media, and this can be at least as helpful for the viewer's understanding as ideas from other sources. A work of art is a human creation and as an object of understanding, an artist's intentions bear consideration, whether these are openly discussed or embodied in a work. Art that has value for education, I suggest, is art that shows something enlightening and critical about life and the ecology of the planet, broadly understood. Art can draw attention to beauty in the everyday and to the wonder of the natural environment. In engaging with art we see through the eyes and sensibility of another and in so doing transcend our own limitations. And such is true for all the arts.

### **Understanding and Art**

Perhaps the first thing to note is that the understanding of works of art is experiential. We look at a work, reflect on it, move around it, and have feelings about it. We lose ourselves and indulge the mind's "free play," to use Kant's famous phrase. The live experience of a work is part of art's great attraction, and there can be no understanding without it, though I recognize that it is not possible to see every artwork at first hand. Here accessing reputable gallery websites and using a data projector can work well in an art classroom. To jump forward a little I would like to propose that the understanding of art could be described as an experiential synthesis or fusion of a work's concepts, features, expressiveness, and aesthetic qualities, into an imaginative whole. I say imaginative because viewers frequently need to test out in their minds possibilities from cues given by the work. I note also that a work's features and meaning are inevitably shaped to some extent by the viewer's perceptual, bodily, aesthetic and ethical capabilities and dispositions. This I would term the viewer's subjective contribution. In many instances in art, pattern and structure are relevant. As viewers we tend to oscillate between looking at what is before us in detail and in the wider picture, seeking ways to distinguish aspects and features, find relationships and imagine forms. And here I note that "form" in art is not synonymous with formalism—a connection to life is vital for art—nor is it intended to imply anything rigid or limiting. Form implies coherence and this can be improvised and loose as well as more defined. Even the expressionist paintings of Cy Twombly, for example, seemingly quite random looking at first glance, expand in meaning as the inner relationships are apprehended. The art of other cultures, while needing to be treated with care and sensitivity, can broaden understanding of art and humanity.

I would argue that it is possible for the viewer in practice simultaneously to view a work with some historical knowledge in mind, interpret a visual language, and get a feel for the artwork's aesthetic qualities. This is simply a way of saying that human beings can function holistically. We could never have survived as a species otherwise. Yet it is possible to give a

convincing analysis and interpretation of a work while remaining emotionally untouched. There may be many reasons for such lack of awareness but one, I suggest, could be the prevalence of the instrumental mindset in our society. This does not mean that art should have no purpose, but in focusing so sturdily on means we may miss moments of intrinsic value.

Based on the earlier discussions of art and understanding I am convinced that there is no necessary method, rule, model, or process for viewing art. Each artwork makes its own demands just as each viewer responds to some extent according to their own personal sympathies. In viewing art it may take some time to get our bearings. What happens in a person's inner life in responding to art may not be fully expressible in words but it must at least be possible, in keeping with Wittgenstein's notion of outward criteria, to say a few words about the way a subject is treated, a work's design, point to certain significant areas in a work, write notes in a journal, make a sketch, and show appreciation or pleasure. On the other hand, criteria for understanding may involve a telling critique of a work's formal weaknesses and lack of skill, triviality of concept, or perhaps of the ethical values in, for example, Andres Serrano's photographs of members of the Ku Klux Klan, or his Morgue series showing parts of dead animals and people. As noted, art has its own visual languages, though without doubt, ways of speaking about art, learned as persons grow up in a culture, help shape what it means to engage fruitfully with art.

What I hope I have shown in the preceding sections is something of the open textured richness of understanding, which in my view is as close as we can come to a conception of mind in a holistic sense. For teachers particularly this should provide ample justification for working in a non-dogmatic, intuitive and learner-centered way. There is no certain path to understanding, though with practice under the teacher's guidance, it is possible to get a better feeling for and practical knowledge of the approaches and assumptions involved. Understanding also is a matter of degree, and for students, knowledge of art history and the social factors that shape art are important, as is experience in artmaking for aiding response to art. But it is as well to remember that we feel the "buzz" of a work just as much in our flesh and bones as in our intellect.

### **Notes on Teaching**

The indeterminacies of art and understanding make the job of teaching response to art no small thing. Mason (2003) notes that, "Teaching can be portrayed--no doubt unfairly--as the transmission of knowledge. Understanding, famously, can be taught only erratically, if at all. It is something, maybe with some help, that you have to do for yourself" (p.110). This latter thought is true, especially for art. Nevertheless, the teacher is not completely without a role, though teaching here is by no means outcomes-led instructing. Instead pedagogy could be

seen as an opening up of possibilities for students. In showing a work to senior students, for example, the teacher can opt for saying little or nothing to begin with, eliciting instead comments from the class, looking for and identifying areas of difference and inter-subjective agreement. In my experience, responses tend to be overlapping rather than dramatically disparate. As a teacher I am supporting an approach that is free-ranging and free flowing in discussion, rather than anything overly structured, as this encourages some spontaneity in response, and greater participation. The teacher may ask, and encourage others to ask, questions that emerge in a viewing. Indeed, while impressions from a work are undoubtedly shaped by each student's subjective make-up, the teacher can encourage a disinterested attention. By this I mean an effort to give a work its due, as an artist's creative achievement. An artwork is an object made by design, it can be or not be, at the artist's behest. But to reiterate, the understanding of a work of art in its more traditional sense is not the same thing as the decoding of its message. There is the matter of a work's aesthetic "import" (p.397) to use Langer's old word. Here I include a poem by Maria Luiza Spaziani titled *Old Photograph* to give a sense of the spirit of response I have in mind:

I was that smile, that flash  
of light in those almond-shaped eyes.  
What year? What season? Who was I smiling at?  
A breeze playing with wisps of jet-black hair.

How often have I thought that it's Etruscan blood  
that flows red in my veins.  
But something equally mysterious connects me tonight to those eyes,  
to those wisps of hair, to that forgotten breeze.

The poet describes in a few evocative words the most compelling features in the portrait. This is description redolent with meaning. She invokes a bodily connection with an archaic past, and expresses feelings of longing and remembrance, sharing with the reader her inner and deeply felt emotions. The poet does not address directly, explain or interpret, the meaning of the photograph. Rather she shows her understanding and feeling expressively and imaginatively through her poetic language. This is the way in which what is ineffable in ordinary language is given form poetically. It is the difference between a scientific illustration of a flower and a painting by Georgia O'Keefe. O'Keefe shows us the vibrant life or aesthetic being of the flower. Students can be encouraged to make fine, and finer descriptions, and use figurative language in their writings and discussions of art, and it is possible that appreciation could be rendered in a poem or indeed in a student artwork on a similar theme. An education in art becomes an education in seeing, in freeing the mind from prejudice and in an opening

up of the self to a more sensitive and appreciative connection with art and the world around. In Sierra's work with the group of homeless women mentioned earlier, verbal interpretation is clearly important. Who are these women? Why are they lined up facing the wall? What is their story? The work has a formal arrangement but it is not designed for aesthetic appreciation unless it is appreciation in the sense of a sympathetic understanding.

Students can work on art making projects and give class presentations that develop their understanding of a theme as artists. I found this to be helpful in a project recently undertaken with graduate students making self-portraits using small digital cameras. The idea was to find ways, through various experimental means, to break through the habituated habits of posing for photographs to reveal a more authentic self. Here the student artists have the opportunity to project their work on a screen and field questions from their peers. This sheds light on the relationship between artists and viewers of art. Students can do further research in exploring an artist's websites, reading artists' statements, journals and biographies, art history texts, learning about the artist's genre to create cultural-historical reports that inform understanding. Criteria for evaluating student responses and, by implication, understanding, can be worked out in class with the students, relative to a work in question, but some reference to depth and clarity of insight, feeling for the work, coherence, and the imaginative and personal expressiveness of the account would likely be relevant, slanted more towards deconstruction and the conceptual in other cases. But each attempt at understanding remains a small act of faith in community showing that we need not as humans live in isolation but that through art we learn to tread the common ground of humanity together.

In conclusion, there is much about understanding that is uncharted, despite its seeming familiarity. The understanding of works of art is provisional and approximate, requiring collaboration between artist and viewer. The wonder of art is that it can show what words cannot say particularly in regard to many of life's most affecting, singular and enduring experiences. The ability to understand works of art and indeed, process in art making, which involves in both cases a synthesizing of perceived aspects, concepts, feeling and aesthetic judgment into imaginative and expressive forms, is without doubt of incomparable value for a child's education. Teachers are encouraged to embrace the open-texture of understanding in the artistic context and trust to a sympathetic, intuitive, and learner-centered style of teaching. Models of teaching and measurement with their categorizing tendencies, might serve to reduce understanding's complexity and subjective richness. Perhaps the holistic understanding of art, with its human shape and imprint, will stretch beyond the confines of the classroom and into the broader horizons of the lived world.

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