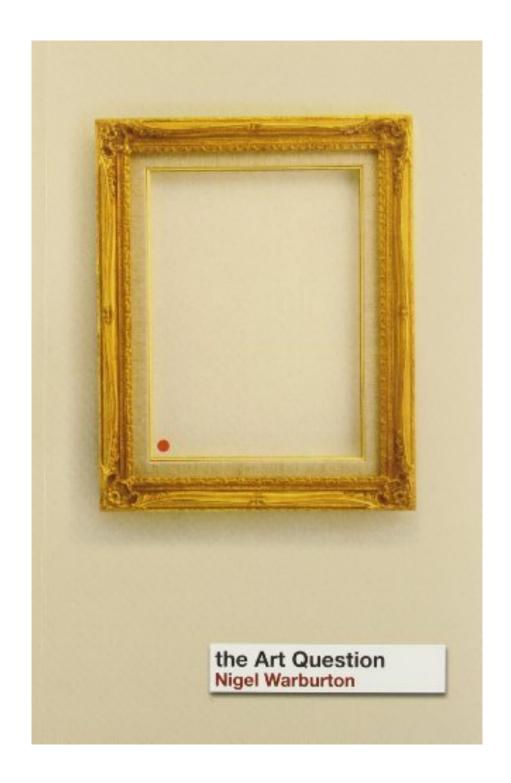


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Arrived as described, absolutely loved this edition

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excellent book

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If you're looking at challenging yourself for your art this is a great book. It's short sweet and to the point but at the same time makes you think about what you're creating. This is a definite must have for any aspiring artist.

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I'd like to share a few of my own thoughts

By Glenn Russell

Contemporary British philosopher Nigel Warburton, host of the podcast series "Philosophy Bites" asks us to consider if the live peacock Belgian artist Francis Alÿs recently sent to the Venice Biennale to be entered as a work of art is, in fact, a true work of art. Curiously, this is the same question my philosophy instructor asked our class nearly fifty years ago when he showed us a slide of Alpha-Pi by Morris Lewis, a white canvas with wavy lines of color painted on the bottom left and bottom right. In other words, different work, same question.

In an attempt to address this question, "What is art?" Warburton has written his engaging little book, approaching this philosophic conundrum from four specific theoretical angles: 1) Clive Bell's significant form, that is, the work's line, shape and color possessing the power to produce an aesthetic emotion in the viewer, 2) R.G.Collingwood's theory of emotional expression and clarity of feeling needed in the process of artistic creation, 3) Ludwig Wittgenstein's focus on the concept of 'family resemblance' along with an overview of the nature of language, 4) the 'Institutional Theory' developed by George Dickie, shifting attention from the work itself to the context of how the work is exhibited by museums and galleries and how it is appreciated by an audience. As by way of a wrap-up, in the fifth and final section of his little book, Nigel himself steps forward to share his views on the art question. I wouldn't want to restate the various facets of his position but let me mention one thing he does say: we should move away from general rules and hone our attention back to the individual works themselves.

After reading Nigel's book and giving the art question some reflection, I'd like to share a few of my own thoughts. This art question revolves around the visual arts, particularly painting and sculpture. The other arts, such as theater, dance and music do not face this question in quite the same way. Why is that? I suspect it has to do with recognized quality of performers and performances, for example, when we see or listen the best of the best – Royal Shakespeare Company, Imperial Russian Ballet, Philadelphia Orchestra, Cirque de Soleil, Pilobolus Dance -- we know we are in the presence of great art.

So, my modest view, this is what the visual arts needs in our brave new 21st century world: a breakthrough, that is, an artist or artists creating great art, so great, similar to the above examples of theater and dance, there would be no question as to its greatness. Of course, I don't have a clue respecting the form such breakthrough art would take, nor do I think such art would sufficiently answer the question 'What is art' but by such a breakthrough I strongly suspect the public perception of the visual arts would be enormously enhanced.

Anyway, back on the book. Here is a passage I find especially probing, "What you know and believe affects what you see. Your expectations and knowledge don't just help you to understand and interpret what you see, they in part help you to construct and categorize what you see." The example offered is Van Gogh's painting of crows flying over a cornfield. We look at the painting a first time. Then, we are told this is the last painting Van Gogh painted before killing himself. We take a second look. All of a sudden the crows appear ominous and threatening. I think this examples underscores how art can be a transforming – the more we open ourselves to multiple viewings, open ourselves to exploring the cultural and historical context of a work along with the artist's development, the more we can grow in our understanding of that specific art form and also grow in our overall artistic sensitivity and aesthetic delicacy of taste. Am I overdoing it with all the sensitivity and delicacy? Reading Nigel Warburton's little book will undoubtedly help you formulate an opinion. Highly recommended.

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