

## Purposes of Art

Art has had a great number of different functions throughout its history, making its purpose difficult to quantify to any single concept. This does not imply that the purpose of art is “vague” but that it has had many unique, different reasons for being created. Some of the functions of art are provided in the outline below. This is a partial list of purposes as developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

1. *Expression of the imagination.* Art provides a means to express the imagination in nongrammatic ways that are not tied to the formality of spoken or written language. Unlike words, which come in sequences and each of which have a definite meaning, art provides a range of forms, symbols and ideas with meanings that are malleable.
2. *Ritualistic and symbolic functions.* In many cultures, art is used in rituals, performances and dances as a decoration or symbol. While these often have no specific utilitarian (motivated) purpose, anthropologists know that they often serve a purpose at the level of meaning within a particular culture. This meaning is not furnished by any one individual, but is often the result of many generations of change, and of a cosmological relationship within the culture.
3. *Communication.* Art, at its simplest, is a form of communication. As most forms of communication have an intent or goal directed toward another individual, this is a motivated purpose. Illustrative arts, such as scientific illustration, are a form of art as communication. Maps are another example. However, the content need not be scientific. Emotions, moods and feelings are also communicated through art.
4. *Art as entertainment.* Art may seek to bring about a particular emotion or mood, for the purpose of relaxing or entertaining the viewer. This is often the function of the art industries such as Motion Pictures and Video Games. Some art is simply meant to be enjoyable.
5. *Political change.* One of the defining functions of early twentieth-century art has been to use visual images to bring about political change. Art movements that had this goal—Dadaism, Surrealism, Russian constructivism, and Abstract Expressionism, among others—are collectively referred to as the avante-garde arts.
6. *Art for social causes.* Art can be used to raise awareness for a large variety of causes. A number of art activities were aimed at raising awareness of AIDS, autism, cancer, human trafficking, and a variety of other topics, such as ocean conservation, human rights in Darfur, murdered and missing Aboriginal women, elder abuse, marriage equality, and pollution. Trashion, using trash to make fashion, is one example of using art to raise awareness about pollution.
7. *Art for psychological and healing purposes.* Art is also used by art therapists, psychotherapists and clinical psychologists as art therapy. The [Diagnostic Drawing Series](#), for example, is used to determine the

personality and emotional functioning of a patient. The end product is not the principal goal in this case, but rather a process of healing, through creative acts, is sought. The resultant piece of artwork may also offer insight into the troubles experienced by the subject and may suggest suitable approaches to be used in more conventional forms of psychiatric therapy.

8. *Art for propaganda or commercialism.* Art is often utilized as a form of propaganda, and thus can be used to subtly influence popular conceptions or mood. In a similar way, art that tries to sell a product also influences mood and emotion. In both cases, the purpose of art here is to subtly manipulate the viewer into a particular emotional or psychological response toward a particular idea or object.

These are just one writer's categorization of purposes for art; there are many other ways to try to organize the diverse and complex ideas of art into artificial categories. In addition, the functions of art described above are not mutually exclusive, as many of them may overlap. For example, art for the purpose of entertainment may also seek to sell a product (i.e. a movie or video game).

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