

WHAT IS AN ARTIST?

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What is an artist? Are there different concepts after this word? Do the different disciplines in the artistic creativity, produce different types of artists? Is it possible to establish a categorization of artists, and a categorization for different types of creativity? Some answers could be very different and, perhaps, clearly opposed. But, the concept of 'artist' exists, because some people think and produce art. In this article, I suggest some approaches regarding this concept.

In any case, in my mind, an **artist** is a person engaged in one or more of any of a broad spectrum of activities related to creating art, practicing the arts, and/or demonstrating an art. The common usage in both everyday speech and academic discourse is a practitioner in the visual arts only. The term is often used in the entertainment business, especially in a business context, for musicians and other performers (less often for actors). "Artiste" (the French for artist) is a variant used in English only in this context. Using this word to describe writers, for example, is certainly valid, but less common, and mostly restricted to contexts like criticism.

What are the definitions in a Dictionary ?

Wiktionary defines the noun 'artist' as follows:

1. A person who creates art.
2. A person who creates art as an occupation.
3. A person who is skilled at some activity.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the older broad meanings of the term "artist":

- A learned person or Master of Arts
- One who pursues a practical science, traditionally medicine, astrology, alchemy, chemistry
- A follower of a pursuit in which skill comes by study or practice
- A follower of a manual art, such as a mechanic
- One who makes their craft a fine art
- One who cultivates one of the fine arts – traditionally the arts presided over by the muses

A definition of Artist from Princeton.edu: creative person (a person whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination).

A little history of the term

Although the Greek word "technē" is often mistranslated as "art," it actually implies mastery of any sort of craft. The adjectival Latin form of the word, "technicus", became the source of the English words technique, technology, and technical.

In Greek culture, each of the nine Muses oversaw a different field of human creation:

- Calliope (the 'beautiful of speech'): chief of the muses and muse of epic or heroic poetry

- Clio (the 'glorious one'): muse of history
- Erato (the 'amorous one'): muse of love or erotic poetry, lyrics, and marriage songs
- Euterpe (the 'well-pleasing'): muse of music and lyric poetry
- Melpomene (the 'chanting one'): muse of tragedy
- Polyhymnia or Polymnia (the '[singer] of many hymns'): muse of sacred song, oratory, lyric, singing, and rhetoric
- Terpsichore (the '[one who] delights in dance'): muse of choral song and dance
- Thalia (the 'blossoming one'): muse of comedy and bucolic poetry
- Urania (the 'celestial one'): muse of astronomy

No muse was identified with the visual arts of painting and sculpture. In ancient Greece sculptors and painters were held in low regard, somewhere between freemen and slaves, their work regarded as mere manual labor.

The word *art* derives from the Latin "ars" (stem *art-*), which, although literally defined, means "skill method" or "technique", and conveys a connotation of beauty.

During the middle Ages the word *artist* already existed in some countries such as Italy, but the meaning was something resembling *craftsman*, while the word *artisan* was still unknown. An artist was someone able to do a work better than others, so the skilled excellency was underlined, rather than the activity field. In this period some "artisanal" products (such as textiles) were much more precious and expensive than paintings or sculptures.

The first division into major and minor arts dates back at least to the works of Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472): *De re aedificatoria*, *De statua*, *De pictura*, which focused on the importance of the intellectual skills of the artist rather than the manual skills (even if in other forms of art there was a project behind).

With the Academies in Europe (second half of 16th century) the gap between fine and applied arts was definitely set.

Many contemporary definitions of "artist" and "art" are highly contingent on culture, resisting aesthetic prescription, in much the same way that the features constituting beauty and the beautiful cannot be standardized easily without corruption into kitsch.

The current concept of an 'artist'

Artist is a descriptive term applied to a person who engages in an activity deemed to be an art. An artist also may be defined unofficially as "a person who expresses himself- or herself through a medium". The word is also used in a qualitative sense of, a person creative in, innovative in, or adept at, an artistic practice.

Most often, the term describes those who create within a context of the fine arts or 'high culture', activities such as drawing, painting, sculpture, acting, dancing, writing, filmmaking, new media, photography, and music—people who use imagination, talent, or skill to create works that may be judged to have an aesthetic value. Art historians and critics define artists as those who produce art within a recognized or recognizable discipline. Contrasting terms for highly skilled workers in media in the applied arts or

decorative arts include artisan, craftsman, and specialized terms such as potter, goldsmith or glassblower. Fine arts artists such as painters succeeded in the Renaissance in raising their status, formerly similar to these workers, to a decisively higher level, but in the 20th century the distinction became rather less relevant.

The term may also be used loosely or metaphorically to denote highly skilled people in any non-"art" activities, as well— law, medicine, mechanics, or mathematics, for example.

Often, discussions on the subject focus on the differences among "artist" and "technician", "entertainer" and "artisan", "fine art" and "applied art", or what constitutes art and what does not. The French word *artiste* (which in French simply means "artist") has been imported into the English language where it means a performer (frequently in Music Hall or Vaudeville). Use of the word "artiste" can also be a pejorative term.

The English word 'artiste' has thus a narrower range of meaning than the word 'artiste' in French.

In *Living with Art*, Mark Getlein proposes six activities, services or functions of contemporary artists:

1. Create places for some human purpose.
2. Create extraordinary versions of ordinary objects.
3. Record and commemorate.
4. Give tangible form to the unknown.
5. Give tangible form to feelings.
6. Refresh our vision and help see the world in new ways.

Well, those were the different Dictionary definitions, a little history of the term and the current concept of 'an artist'. But, perhaps, the word and your vision of it don't match clearly and, consequently, the question remains. In this case, perhaps the approach, by quotations, of relevant people could be interesting. We made a choice of 100 relevant quotations of 100 different and relevant people across eras, professions, engagement and proximity to this term. From S. Thomas Aquinas to John Lennon, from Michelangelo to Jackson Pollock, from Goethe to Albert Einstein, people expose their involvement, feeling, understanding and practice in this topic. This relevant quotations express the opinion of Saints, philosophers, scientists, painters, musicians, engravers, writers, sculptors, essayists, politicians, novelists...probably, the most exciting souls in the Humanity's history. Your thinking could be our guides. That is, really, the question and the purpose of this choice. Have a good time reading and good thinking!

100 QUOTATIONS ABOUT ARTISTS

(in chronological order)

“The test of the artist does not lie in the will with which he goes to work, but in the excellence of the work he produces.”

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

**“The best artist has that thought alone
This is contained within the marble shell;
The sculptor's hand can only break the spell
To free the figures slumbering in the stone.”**

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

“The job of the artist is to deepen the mystery.”

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

“In every artist there is a touch of audacity without which no talent is conceivable.”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

“The difference between a bad artist and a good one is: The bad artist seems to copy a great deal; the good one really does.”

William Blake (1757-1827)

“No one should drive a hard bargain with an artist.”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

“Only an artist can interpret the meaning of life.”

Novalis (1772-1801)

“An artist's sphere of influence is the world.”

Carl von Weber (1786-1826)

“If a book comes from the heart it will contrive to reach other hearts. All art and author craft are of small account to that.”

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

“The artist who aims at perfection in everything achieves it in nothing.”

Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863)

“Every artist was first an amateur.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

“To send light into the darkness of men's hearts - such is the duty of the artist.”

Robert A. Schumann (1810-1856)

“Sorrowful and great is the artist's destiny.”

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

“An artist is a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness...an ego a thirst for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting. The poet is like those wandering souls who go looking for a body, he enters as he likes into each man's personality. For him alone everything is vacant...The man who loves to lose himself in a crowd enjoys feverish delights that the egoist locked up in himself as in a box, and the slothful man like a mollusk in his shell, will be eternally deprived of. He adopts to his own all the occupations, all the joys and all the sorrows that chance offers.”

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

“The artist must be in his work as God is in creation, invisible and all-powerful; one must sense him everywhere but never see him.”

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)

“An artist's career always begins tomorrow.”

James Whistler (1834-1903)

“The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work.”

Emile Zola (1840-1902)

“The artist must create a spark before he can make a fire and before art is born, the artist must be ready to be consumed by the fire of his own creation.”

Auguste Rodin (1840-1917)

“An artist, under pain of oblivion, must have confidence in himself, and listen only to his real master: Nature.”

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919)

“The artist chooses his subject; that is his mode of praising.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

“It is just the little difference between the good and the best that makes the difference between the artist and the artisan. It is just the little touches after the average man would quit that makes the master's fame.”

Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924)

“While one should always study the method of a great artist, one should never imitate his manner. The manner of an artist is essentially individual; the method of an artist is absolutely universal. The first is personality, which no one should copy.”

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

“The artist needs no religion beyond his work.”

Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915)

“Scratch an artist and you surprise a child.”

James Gibbons Huneker (1857-1921)

“An artist is a man of action, whether he creates a personality, invents an expedient, or finds the issue of a complicated situation.”

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924)

“Every artist writes his own autobiography.”

Havelock Ellis (1859-1939)

“An artist's flair is sometimes worth a scientist's brains.”

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

“An artist may visit a museum, but only a pedant can live there.”

George Santayana (1863-1952)

“An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one.”

Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929)

“It is the artist's business to create sunshine when the sun fails”

Romain Rolland (1866-1944)

“The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul.”

Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)

“To the artist is sometimes granted a sudden, transient insight which serves in this matter for experience. A flash and where previously the brain held a dead fact, the soul grasps a living truth! At moments we are all artists.”

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931)

“To a true artist only that face is beautiful which, quite apart from its exterior, shines with the truth within the soul.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

“The artist must summon all his energy, his sincerity, and the greatest modesty in order to shatter the old *clichés* that come so easily to hand while working, which can suffocate the little flower that does not come, ever, the way one expects.”

Henri Matisse (1869-1954)

“Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments. An artist recreates those aspects of reality which represent his fundamental view of man's nature.”

Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

“An artist never really finishes his work; he merely abandons it”

Paul Valéry (1871-1945)

"The position of the artist is humble. He is essentially a channel."

Piet Mondrian (1872-1944)

"The teacher, like the artist and the philosopher, can perform his work adequately only if he feels himself to be an individual directed by an inner creative impulse, not dominated and fettered by an outside authority.”

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

“To note an artist's limitations is but to define his talent.”

Willa Sibert Cather (1873-1947)

“A great artist is always before his time or behind it.”

George Moore (1873-1958)

“My own general thesis was somewhat to this effect: that Artists have worried the world by being wantonly, needlessly, and gratuitously progressive. Politicians have to be progressive; that is, they have to live in the future, because they know they have done nothing but evil in the past. But Artists, who have been right from the beginning of the world, who were, perhaps, the only people who were right even in the beginning of the world, decorating pottery or designing rude frescoes on the rock when other people were fighting or offering human sacrifice, they have no right to despise their own past.”

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

“Every production of an artist should be the expression of an adventure of his soul.”

William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)

“Ideally a painter (and, generally, an artist) should not become conscious of his insights: without taking the detour through his reflective processes, and incomprehensibly to himself, all his progress should enter so swiftly into the work that he is unable to recognize them in the moment of transition. Alas, the artist who waits in ambush there, watching, detaining them, will find them transformed like the beautiful gold in the fairy tale which cannot remain gold because some small detail was not taken care of.”

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

“...and as far as talent is concerned, there will be such an excess that our artists will become their own audiences, and audiences made up of ordinary people will no longer exist.”

Hermann Hesse (1877-1962)

“Democracy with its semi-civilization sincerely cherishes junk. The artist's power should be spiritual. But the power of the majority is material. When these worlds meet occasionally, it is pure coincidence.”

Paul Klee (1879-1940)

"Our head is round to allow that mind changes direction."

Francis Picabia (1879-1953)

“I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

“Every other artist begins with a blank canvas, a piece of paper the photographer begins with the finished product.”

Edward Steichen (1879-1973)

“The great artists of the world are never Puritans, and seldom even ordinarily respectable.”

Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956)

“The artist is a receptacle for the emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web.”

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)

“The artist is not a different kind of person, but every person is a different kind of artist.”

Eric Gill (1882-1940)

“The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails.”

James Joyce (1882-1941)

“It may be said that artist and censor differ in this wise: that the first is a decent mind in an indecent body and that the second is an indecent mind in a decent body.”

George Jean Nathan (1882-1958)

“No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination.”

Edward Hopper (1882-1967)

“Being an artist means ceasing to take seriously that very serious person we are when we are not an artist.”

José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955)

“The defining function of the artist is to cherish consciousness.”

Max Eastman (1883-1969)

“An artist is only an ordinary man with a greater potentiality--same stuff, same make up, only more force. And the strong driving force usually finds his weak spot, and he goes cranked, or goes under.”

D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

**“Then Martine said: “So you will be poor now all your life, Babette?”
Poor?” said Babette. She smiled as if to herself. “No, I shall never be poor. I told
you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have
something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing.”**

Karen Blixen (1885-1962)

**“An artist must be a reactionary. He has to stand out against the tenor of the age
and not go flopping along.”**

Andre Maurois (1885-1967)

**“The creative artist seems to be almost the only kind of man that you could never
meet on neutral ground. You can only meet him as an artist. He sees nothing
objectively because his own ego is always in the foreground of every picture.”**

Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)

**“The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of
personality.”**

T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

**“An artist cannot speak about his art any more than a plant can discuss
horticulture.”**

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)

**“All my life as an artist I have asked myself: What pushes me continually to make
sculpture? I have found the answer. Art is an action against death. It is a denial of
death.”**

Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973)

“An artist is always alone / if he is an artist. No, what the artist needs is loneliness.”

Henry Miller (1891-1980)

“The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life.”

William Faulkner (1897-1962)

“The artist should be a seeing-eye dog for a myopic civilization.”

Jacob Getlar Smith (1898-1958)

“The most vigilant self-criticism of course is necessary, but the time comes when the artist must tell himself he is good or he will go under.”

Gerald Moore (1899-1987)

“In any society, the artist has a responsibility. His effectiveness is certainly limited and a painter or writer cannot change the world. But they can keep an essential margin of non-conformity alive. Thanks to them the powerful can never affirm that everyone agrees with their acts. That small difference is important.”

Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)

“A fine artist is one who makes familiar things new and new things familiar.”

Louis Nizer (1902-1994)

“Today the function of the artist is to bring imagination to science and science to imagination, where they meet, in the myth.”

Cyril Connolly (1903-1974)

“The artist is the only one who knows that the world is a subjective creation, that there is a choice to be made, a selection of elements.”

Anais Nin (1903-1977)

“Whatever an artist's personal feelings are, as soon as an artist fills a certain area on the canvas or circumscribes it, he becomes historical. He acts from or upon other artists.”

Willem de Kooning (1904-1997)

“A creative artist works on his next composition because he was not satisfied with his previous one.”

Dimitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

“To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.”

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)

“An artist has every right - one may even say a duty - to exhibit his productions as prominently as he can.”

Jacques Barzun (1907-2012)

“The poet, the artist, the sleuth, whoever sharpens our perception tends to antisocial; rarely 'well adjusted,' he cannot go along with currents and trends.”

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980)

“The modern artist...is working and expressing an inner world – in other words – expressing the energy, the motion, and other inner forces.”

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

“Everyone loathes his own country and countrymen if he is any sort of artist.”

Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990)

“I do strongly feel that among the greatest pieces of luck for high achievement is ordeal. Certain great artists can make out without it, Titian and others, but mostly you need ordeal. My idea is this: the artist is extremely lucky who is presented with the worst possible ordeal which will not actually kill him. At that point, he's in business: Beethoven's deafness, Goya's deafness, Milton's blindness, that kind of thing.”

John Berryman (1914-1972)

“Artists to my mind are the real architects of change, and not the political legislators who implement change after the fact.”

William S. Burroughs (1914-1997)

“The artist does not lead culture and lead patterns; he holds up a mirror for society to see things it might not otherwise see”.

Edward T. Hall (1914-2009)

“I passionately hate the idea of being with it; I think an artist has always to be out of step with his time.”

Orson Welles (1915-1985)

“In the business of portrait photography, one must combine the artist and the craftsman.”

Louis Fabian Bachrach (1917-2010)

“The key to the mystery of a great artist is that for reasons unknown, he will give away his energies and his life just to make sure that one note follows another... and leaves us with the feeling that something is right in the world.”

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

“What is an artist? A provincial who finds himself somewhere between a physical reality and a metaphysical one.... It’s this in-between that I’m calling a province, this frontier country between the tangible world and the intangible one—which is really the realm of the artist.”

Federico Fellini (1920-1993)

“Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”

Saint John Paul II (1920-2005)

“One can desire to be marginal, to be on the edge, off at the sides, even untraceable. Marginality can be provocative, perhaps a way out. Or to put it another way, I had no choice! One can get stuck in marginality. So artists may very well seek marginality even while they strive for art world success.”

Leon Golub (1922-2004)

“With the pride of the artist, you must blow against the walls of every power that exists the small trumpet of your defiance.”

Norman Mailer (1923-2007)

“Are artists and writers the only people entitled to lives of their own?”

Richard Yates (1926-1992)

“The most visible creators are those artists whose medium is life itself. The ones who express the inexpressible ~ without brush, hammer, clay, or guitar. They neither paint nor sculpt. Their medium is simply being. Whatever their presence touches has increased life. They see, but don't have to draw...Because they are the artists of being alive...”

Donna J. Stone (1933-1994)

“If we are to change our world view, images have to change. The artist now has a very important job to do. He's not a little peripheral figure entertaining rich people, he's really needed.”

David Hockney (b. 1937)

“My role in society, or any artist's or poet's role, is to try and express what we all feel. Not to tell people how to feel. Not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all.”

John Lennon (1940-1980)

“I've been called many names like perfectionist, difficult and obsessive. I think it takes obsession, takes searching for the details for any artist to be good.”

Barbra Streisand (b.1942)

"I think to be an artist, today, it's to call into question the nature of art - to be "creative ", for me, it's that. That implies a total responsibility for the artist as an individual vis-a-vis to the political, social and cultural implications of his activity."

Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945)

“What distinguishes a great artist from a weak one is first their sensibility and tenderness; second, their imagination, and third, their industry.”

Salman Rushdie (b.1947)

“Love is the spirit that motivates the artist's journey.”

Eric Maisel (b. 1947)

“Artists are those who can evade the verbose.”

Haruki Murakami (b. 1949)

“The higher the artist, the fewer the gestures. The fewer the tools, the greater the imagination. The greater the will, the greater the secret failure.”

Ben Okri (b. 1959)

“Although the art world reveres the unconventional, it is rife with conformity. Artists make work that "looks like art" and behave in ways that enhance stereotypes. Curators pander to the expectations of their peers and their museum boards. Collectors run in herds to buy work by a handful of fashionable painters. Critics stick their finger in the air to see which way the wind is blowing so as to "get it right". Originality is not always rewarded, but some people take real risks and innovate, which gives a raison d'être to the rest.”

Sarah Thornton (b. 1963)

“Magic is always there. Sometimes it just takes an artist to find it and show the rest of us where to look.”

Amy Neftzger (b. 1967)