

Choose a Reality



By Jane Denison

A particular and distinct reality encompasses the sphere of your world and this actuality is the only reality you are experiencing at that time. It becomes your reality of choice. Others have access to their own real experiences so you could say to someone, "Your reality is not my reality."

The word "reality" generally applies to a state or condition of things as they actually exist or happen. A reality can be experienced, seen or felt by you because it exists in fact as opposed to that which is not a reality but would only be considered as something you could just think about or as being imagined, idealistic or fanciful but not real.

Many realities are constantly being introduced to us for acceptance such as Objective Reality, Subjective Reality, Virtual Reality, Spiritual Reality, Material Reality, Augmented Reality and the list expands because each rhythm in a reality contains within itself an endless reality of sub-rhythms. Unless, of course, you are experiencing an Absolute Reality.

A case in point would be the time I was completely engrossed in the reality of a very emotional, tear jerky movie. As the plot thickened I gave a quick glance around me and it seemed every female in the audience was crying. I never completely left the absorbing drama happening on the screen but I did become slightly conscious of a brief sobbing sound near me and quickly assumed there was someone in the audience personally identifying with the plot but that was all the attention I gave it. Then a bit later I heard the sound again as heart felt crying. My real self thought someone might need some help in their trauma so I turned to find its source. Three empty seats from my seat a young teen age girl was making those sounds. But she wasn't crying, she was laughing out loud as she looked around the auditorium. A bit surprised and curious I also began to look around and became aware of the many white tissues being used to wipe away the tears. At that moment I let my reality change from the dramatization on the screen into a reality I now was experiencing by being part of the audience. Then I chose to enter into the young girl's reality. When I observed from her point of view I became more aware of the deep tearful emotions felt by the audience and it did appear very humorous from the perspective of my new reality. Through my art experiences I had learned to become more aware of the endless, though temporary and finite, realities surrounding humanity on a 24/7 time schedule. My chosen realities were an awareness of an existence that I perceived as so real that I could feel it and experience all that it included.

When I tried to get involved again in the occurrences within the play I realized I just couldn't make that connection anymore. I began looking around the auditorium again and began to notice people and myself just sitting there. As an artist I realized I could center my attention on a variety of expressions of creativity that were involved during the making of that movie or I could just get up and go home. I had learned to enter into and enjoy a painting or a music score or a book and realized I could do that now through the perception of a Subjective Reality by going beyond the moving shapes, colors and sounds that made up the surface of the Objective Reality displayed on the screen.

Looking at the screen again I first became aware of and acknowledged how the photographers were expressing their world by the thoughtful selections of the camera angles, lighting, background shots, etc. This was an enjoyable experience because I was able to connect with their creative talent and understand some of their artistic decisions necessary to bring the entire movie to a perfect conclusion. I began to observe and enter into the reality of the talented actors as they immersed themselves within different characters, emotion and events their artistry was able to pull an audience right into the reality of the events in the scenes because they were not just speaking words but had made the characters so real for themselves that the audience could respond by joining with them, tears and all.

This process continued through unexpected appreciations of realities of the set designers, costume designers, directors and many other sub-realities involved within and beyond the making of the movie. I left the theater with an enriched lasting sense that I had experienced much more than my first intention of just going to watch a movie. Similar to leaving an art museum and knowing I had not just been looking at pictures.

Unfortunately we so often are satisfied with only a Surface or Objective Reality. This limitation deprives us from going beyond the visible or instantly obvious and leaves us incapable of having a broader unobstructed view of all that really exists in front of us. Much can be learned during the development of an appreciation of the Fine Arts that can be carried over into everyday life experiences. You can learn that a reality doesn't force itself on you. You really can choose your reality. You will be able to go beyond an empathic awareness and enter a genuine reality of your choice totally uninfluenced by the pressures of this world or you can choose to not enter it or to leave it entirely.

The composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein knew this and spoke of art as a form of creating possible worlds, or realities. "Any great work of art....revives and readapts time and space, and the measure of its success is the extent to which it makes you an inhabitant of that world — the extent to which it invites you in and lets you breathe it's strange, special air."

There are several ways you can enter or inhabit the world of a work of Visual Fine Art.



During a visit to the Louvre Museum with our two teenage sons we passed a massive realistic painting of a sixteen or seventeen century battle scene. The boys just walked past it without giving it much attention because the whole painting was very drab, dark and uninviting. I asked them to stand in front of it for a few minutes and let their eyes adjust to the light within the painting. The same way we would enter a darkened room before we decide to turn on the light. After a few minutes they were surprised as the any details, characters and events happening in the painting became more and more visible for them. In a sense they had become connected to the reality of the artist who had envisioned and expressed it as a painting. Such as this MEDITATING PHILOSOPHER, 1632, by Rembrandt van Rijn

Usually you are the one to choose if you want to enter into the reality of a work of art and there are times when the painting reaches out to you and pulls you in and surrounds your very being, I feel this is one reason art museums and better galleries have benches for a visitor to sit and be alone within a painting.

The first time I stood in front of a huge Jackson Pollack painting I felt I was almost being sucked into the very heart of the rhythms and flow of his lines and color.



Another example of being alone in the reality of a painting was when I was visiting the Houston Art Museum. One of my favorite artist is Kandinsky and because I had read his writings and understood the substance, intent and values he deposited in his paintings I became deeply connected, totally enjoying the activities within one of his large paintings not unlike this one. COMPOSITION VII, 1913 By Wassily Kandinsky



When a Docent, followed by a gaggle of Middle School students approached. She went right up to the painting and with

an excited voice asked, "Does anyone see the teapot?" I have no idea what else she was teaching them because I knew I should leave the room before being arrested for brutalizing a Museum Docent in front of children. But this encounter did start me thinking about how many times we are taught and passively accept that looking at paintings is primarily a surface recognition of familiar objects with absolutely no clue that it could be possible to encounter and experience an in-depth perception of a reality that can exist within any form of Fine Art.

Later I painted these three paintings just to show myself what actually would hold the attention of a viewer when they look at a painting. I was not surprised when most comments were showing interest only in recognizable shapes and completely ignoring the rest of the painting. To many viewers, the paintings became a picture of a thing or objects with a background of insignificant whatever. The full reality included in an original work of art is not just height and width but it has both a seen and an unseen depth dimension as well.



Artist and teacher Clay Spohm, one of the pioneer thinkers dealing with Abstract Expressionism, is quoted as saying, "As far as I am concerned, all painting is a form of realism which falls into either of two very general classifications. Some paintings could be called Objective Realism. That is where the material used deals with the visual appearances of reality in some degree or another. The other kind....is what I would prefer to call Subjective Realism.

That is where the material used deals entirely with subjective things, with feeling meanings, with living experiences.... The principal difference between these two, to put it simply, is that the objective realist believes in (or accepts) only what he sees, where as the subjective realist may believe in what he sees, but for his world of creation, he chooses only to accept that which he knows to be true, because it is that which he feels, and he regards the experience of feeling.....as being very real."

When you choose to enter into the Subjective Reality of a work of any Fine Art you are tapping into the same energy, emotion, and ideas as its creator. It is not difficult to feel when another persons life force and energy is communicated through a work of art. Unfortunately, at times, when someone is introducing a work of their art it becomes obvious there is nothing very significant coming from the artist or the art with which to relate. That piece of art is shallow but a perceptive observer, who has substance of his own, can detect the void right away. This doesn't completely devalue those more widespread paintings or crafts that are merely surface expressions of colors and shapes, such as a print or any reproduction of an original painting or a portion of an original. They too have their place in the field of art display. The appreciation of a painting simply because it would look good hanging over the couch or will fill up an empty space is meeting a need for that viewer. Art appreciation is an art in itself having many stages. Any one of them just right for individuals who becomes aware of and appreciates a piece of art that attracts their interest for whatever reason.

Do you ever see yourself or others as representing an outward appearance but having no inward significance? Another

question is do you include a reality beyond what the physical senses can recognize? Just how deep is your individual reality? Is your own subjective reality a place where others would want to enter and benefit from?

These are not self-help questions but are questions to ask yourself using the same perception as well known artists use in the creation of their visible paintings or musical scores or writing. The skills we learn either by being an artist or by simply appreciating art in all of its many forms are readily available to be applied to our own and others enrichment of everyday experiences. You chose your reality.

Here are some quotes from artists who understood the subjective phenomenon and their role in expressing it.

"Creativity is essentially a lonely art. An even lonelier struggle. To some a blessing. To others a curse. It is in reality the ability to reach inside yourself and drag forth from your very soul an idea." -Lou Dorfsman

"What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things... it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface." -Brancusi

"They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my reality." -Frida Kahlo

"I do not literally paint that table, but the emotion it produces upon me." -Henri Matisse

"Good art is not what it looks like, but what it does to us." -Roy Adzak

"I applied streaks and blobs of colors onto the canvas with a palette knife and I made them sing with all the intensity I could..." -Wassily Kandinsky

"The true work of art is born from the Artist: a mysterious, enigmatic, and mystical creation. It detaches itself from him, it acquires an autonomous life, becomes a personality, an independent subject, animated with a spiritual breath, the living subject of a real existence of being." -Wassily Kandinsky

"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." -Aristotle