

# ARTS

*‘Arts is the lie that enables us to realise the truth.’*

- *Pablo Picasso*

Art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Arts entertains.

There are various art forms: architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, music, performing, film, etc. Art forms can evolve with the development of society and technology (e.g. Singaporean electronic music artist Jasmine Sokko was once ranked as No.1 on Spotify in Singapore). Graffiti, as an art form, is illegal in Singapore, considered as vandalism (e.g. Samantha Lo, the “Sticker Lady”, was arrested in 2012 for spraying painting on public road).

Arts have the following functions:

- to encourage an aesthetic expression and entertainment in life, which improves the quality of people’s lives.
- to provide a platform for social and political commentary – to critique those that can be improved upon (e.g. satire/mockery: *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift).
- to preserve the heritage and the culture of a group of people (e.g. racial).
- to help create social cohesion. It builds a community through a shared experience.
- to be a vehicle for emotional or psychological therapy.

We can use a SPERM-GT approach to analyse the values of art:

|   | <b>Elaboration</b>   | <b>Examples</b>  |
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| S | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reflect social reality to expose flaws or help uphold social justice.</li> <li>• To capture the spirit of the age for future record.</li> <li>• To beautiful the environment and engage the public.</li> <li>• To raise awareness of social issues.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alfian Sa’at on LGBT in his play <i>Asian Boys</i>.</li> <li>• Harper Lee’s <i>To Kill A Mockingbird</i> on prejudices against the Black community, was once banned from school libraries.</li> <li>• The Beat Generation’s works on WWII are now read as important documents to</li> </ul> |

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|   |  | <p>reflect the situation of that period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sculptures by Botero, Salvador Dali and Ng Eng Teng in Singapore's Central Business District (e.g. <i>Progress and Development</i>).</li> <li>• Haresh Sharma's <i>Off Centre</i> on social prejudices against mental illnesses.</li> <li>• Alfian Sa'at's <i>Cooling Off Day</i> on the complex nature of politics and the responsibility of individuals.</li> </ul>               |
| P | <p>Arts provide a platform for political expression and have the ability to uphold the right to the freedom of expression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-war movements.</li> <li>• To comment or critique to prevailing structure of power.</li> <li>• To propagate the own beliefs and ideologies of the government.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picasso's <i>Guernica</i> in response to the bombing in Guernica in 1937 portrays the devastations of war, in particular the suffering of the innocent citizens.</li> <li>• Ai Weiwei, a Chinese artist and political activist, has been arrested, jailed and exiled for criticizing the Chinese government.</li> <li>• The Nazi Germany uses posters, cartoons, stamps and flyers to blatantly present Nazi beliefs.</li> </ul> |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A vibrant arts scene will have a direct economic impact when a creative environment is fostered.</li> <li>• Arts scene can also promote tourism industry.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singapore has accepted a 'Renaissance City Plan', to establish Singapore as a global arts city conducive to creative, knowledge-based industries and talent and to strengthen national identity and belonging among Singaporeans by nurturing an appreciation of shared heritage.</li> <li>• Art Stage Singapore.</li> </ul>   |
| R | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional arts can reflect cultures</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Last Supper</i> by Leonardo da Vinci is</li> </ul>  |

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| <p>and religions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts can oppose and challenge religious thoughts (controversies).</li> </ul> | <p>a famous Christian piece.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thai and Indonesian cultures believe that spirits live in and around the instruments. Musicians remove their footwear before playing and they also never step on their instruments.</li> <li>• Jeanette Winterson's <i>Orange is not the only fruit</i> opposes the Church's oppression of sexual minorities.</li> <li>• Chris Ofili's <i>Holy Virgin Mary</i> in elephant dung; Andres Serrano's <i>Piss Christ</i>.</li> </ul> |
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Sometimes, the arts may be censored in order to control or suppress certain ideas and beliefs. This may sometimes be due to the arts' function of social commentary and its role in upholding freedom of expression. Censorship may also be practiced if the content of the arts is deemed as socially undesirable or inappropriate for young audiences. However, censorship sometimes is extreme, which endangers the life of artists. For example, the cultural revolution in China.

Hence, should there be complete freedom in the arts? **Freedom in the arts can provide more opportunities for arts to thrive and develop.** Singapore once launched a policy against males having long hair in response to the hippie culture. This resulted in some artists like Led Zeppelin having to cancel their gigs in Singapore because they refused to accommodate. **Freedom in the arts can also trigger positive changes as it can raise awareness of social issues.**

However, a complete freedom of arts can **ironically offend one's moral sensibilities and may contravene basic ethics.** Not everyone shares the same set of beliefs or values. What is seen as acceptable or uncomfortable is subjective. Japan's Space World once froze 5000 sea creatures into the floor of an ice rink. This made many uncomfortable and feel offended. Also, complete freedom of arts can be **divisive** in extreme cases. This can create tension in the society. For example, Andre Serrano's *Piss Christ* is removed for being anti-Christian. Moreover, complete freedom of arts can **result in the arts losing its meaning and value.** For example, in 2005 in London, 3 works by unknown artists were auctioned at a price of USD\$25000 but turned out to be created by an ape.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew once said, 'Poetry is a luxury we cannot afford.' This is based on the social and economic condition Singapore started out with. Nowadays, art is no longer a luxury, as it serves an **economic value** (e.g. Art Stage), it is **affordable** (e.g. MOE provides subsidies for school visiting art exhibition) and it is **accessible to the whole society** (e.g. ArtReach initiative). However, Singaporean may still regard arts as a form of luxuries in terms of time.

The followings are past year A-level questions on arts:

- Examine the role of music in establishing a national identity in your society. (2017)
- In your society, to what extent is it acceptable for public money to be used for the acquisition of works of art? (2017)
- To what extent should the arts in your society focus on local rather than foreign talent? (2015)
- 'For the majority of people, the Arts are irrelevant to their daily lives.' How true is this of your society? (2014)
- 'Unlike the Arts, such as writing or music, Mathematics lacks the capacity for creativity.' How far do you agree with this statement? (2013)
- 'People in the Arts, living or dead, receive far more recognition than those in the sciences, though it is less deserved.' Consider this claim. (2012)
- 'Only modern architecture and modern arts have a place in today's world.' How true is this of your society? (2011)
- Would it matter if all the performing arts venues in your society, such as concert halls and theatres, were closed down? (2010)
- "Contemporary music has no artistic value." Is this a fair comment? (2008)
- "The arts cannot change the world but they make it more beautiful." Discuss this view with reference to one of the following: painting, sculpture or music. (2007)
- Do the arts, such as music and literature, really play a significant role in the Singaporean society? (2005)
- 'A work of art can never be valued in just financial terms.' Discuss. (2002)