

# **ESSAYS ON ART**

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Essays on Art by Max Weber

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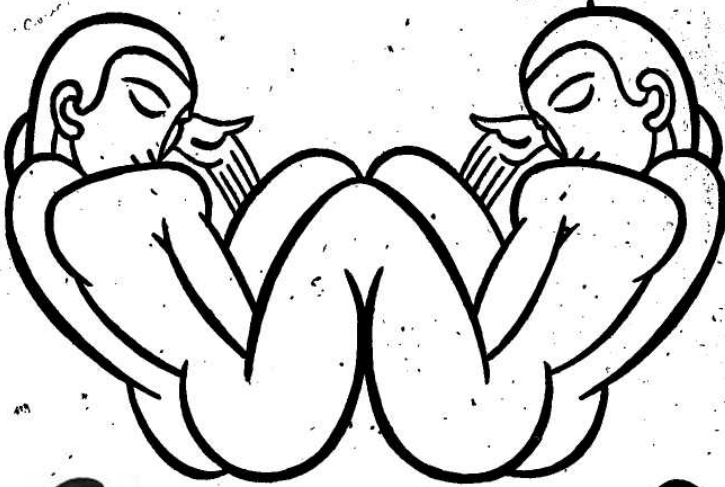
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**MAX WEBER**

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THESE essays were written in the autumn of 1914 as part of a series of talks on art appreciation. In committing them to writing, my purpose was to help the student to recognize and to live the principles of art and to apply them in his work according to his own discernment. I am happy to be able now, to give these short essays a wider field in the hope that they may help to foster the love of art and its significance in life.

At no better time than this, could I express my appreciation of the encouragement given to me to write, by my friend, Leonard Van Noppen, whose wise counsel I gratefully acknowledge.

M. W.





## Quality



ONE of the most spiritual and significant phases of quality is intimacy. It is a state of awareness, of knowledge, of the presence of things outside of ourselves; we mean here, inanimate things. Anything that has been shaped or constructed possesses a part of the life of the maker of that thing. It is that of his life which makes the existence of that thing possible. The maker lives in the things he makes. Even his tool becomes warm in his hand and palpitates with his very pulse. Then too, the moment I behold an object, an art work, it becomes more that very moment, for I put part of myself into it along with the life of its maker. For matter is of more worth when it is embodied with the spirit of the maker. A work binds its maker to the universe. Though the maker cease to be, the work he has created keeps on pulsating and rhymes his personality on on into infinity. Often it occurs to me that objects of quality wait for us; and when once we succeed in knowing it intimately, the object is more and we are more because of each other, or because art chooses us. It seems to me one of the most important functions of our daily breathing or living, this spiritual communion with objects—with works of art. We pray in belief,

but this art consciousness or plastic consciousness is belief in proof. The reality of art is its mystery. This brings us back to the principles of taste, mainly the power to discern through knowledge or by instinct.

Analysis	} Both are plastically intellectual, i. e. —	
		Using the hand-mind;
Synthesis		Using the eye-mind;
	Using the feeling mind, or the emotion.	

A way to commune with the unknown is to imagine one's self being in the unknown. To find the quality in a work one must invest it with personal quality already acquired by him, the spectator or student. One's own quality will draw forth, will call out, will attract or magnetize the yet unseen quality in a work. This is almost as true of the spiritual as of the physical. To perceive quality is to possess quality. And even when we find quality in works, then the process of assimilation must begin. Food must first be digested. Simply to possess it one might starve. To possess art is to live it. It enhances every human faculty.

Analysis is more the act of the spectator; synthesis more with the creator. Appreciation is an analytic function—it is placid. Creation is synthetic—is the active participating. There are infinite avenues to the understanding of quality in a work. Its means, what is commonly called technique, may be said to be the mechanical side; its construction, its material side—the concrete. Then there are the qualities abstract. That which, regardless even of means, makes for rarity, for distinction; its intensity to evoke and to empower, or overwhelm, its spirit. Or it is that

indescribable something that makes for quality — that something which is in a work of art independent of its means — we might call it the soul of a work. That quality which is beyond words — it is feeling. Or too we might call it the artist or maker in the work.

The building is the architect, the picture is the artist, the symphony is the composer, the poem the poet. Not as some would have us believe that it is the dress or the mannerism that makes the artist. Detecting or sensing quality in a work of art is like finding an answer to one's seeking self. Such consciousness of growth is the great revelation in life. It is then that we feel our relationship to this great universe. It is this revelation which makes for that inquiry so essential to higher achievement and for better understanding and which therefore means a fuller and more inclusive life.

Finding finds and the found always seeks for more. That which makes for individual art is in a whole people, but it is he who can best reveal and voice that which would otherwise lie dormant in a people who is the artist. And the people find themselves in their great artists. The environment, religion, tradition, the very physical features of the country of a people, determine to a large degree the character of their art. Natural adaptability, sequence of time, thought and substance make for quality. Thus time has given us the variety of quality or character — Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Saracenic, Chinese, Indian, Renaissance, French, Spanish, Dutch, etc.

Quality is a certain purity, or distinction, in a work of art. That which makes for quality is the natural