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Art and Knowledge: Kant's Perspective

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ABSTRACT. There is an ongoing debate in contemporary aesthetics and philosophy of art on the question whether we can learn anything from art. Aesthetic cognitivism claims that artworks have an important cognitive value and that such cognitive value partly determines work's aesthetic value. Anti-cognitivism, on the other hand, argues that even though artworks might give us some kind of knowledge, such knowledge is irrelevant for a work's value as art. Cognitive merits do not constitute aesthetic merits. The aim of my paper is to express a critique of this view. I intend to show that aesthetic value is a species of cognitive value and thus artworks can have a distinctive cognitive value. I develop my proposal in light of Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas.

I. Introduction

One of the main debates in current aesthetics and philosophy of art concerns the question whether we can learn anything from art. On the one hand, cognitivists argue that art works are an important source of knowledge. The kind of knowledge that is often associated with artworks is either propositional knowledge (the truth of thematic statements being mostly of social, moral, psychological or philosophical kind), conceptual knowledge (art works can challenge our established concepts and facilitate their refinement), experiential knowledge (knowledge of what-it-is-like, say what it is like to be jealous, homeless, etc.) and axiological knowledge or knowledge as understanding or acknowledging (i.e. recognizing the significance, value and consequences that mere knowledge of something has

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in relation to human experiences).¹ What is common to all (aesthetic) cognitivists' is the belief that such knowledge is relevant for aesthetic value of an artwork.² That is, works of art are good or bad partly in virtue of the knowledge they give us or fail to give us respectively.

On the other hand, non-cognitivists deny that art can give us any knowledge, at least knowledge that is non-trivial (not known before the work appears) and unique (that cannot be obtained by other means).³ For example, they claim that truth of thematic statements in artworks (say the thematic statement that 'one's emotional state is determined by past events' as implied in Haruki Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*) is something that we know all along, the knowledge of what-it-is-like to be jealous is something that we can never really know if we have never experienced jealousy, the refinement of our conceptual knowledge can be acquired more effectively from philosophical texts, and knowledge as understanding or acknowledging can be attained through real-life experiences. Since art does not give us any distinctive knowledge it cannot be said that it is relevant for artistic value. The purpose of art, anti-cognitivists argue, lies in the imaginative realization of the theme, rather than in the theme itself and what it communicates. That is, what matters in art is the organization and structure of elements and how these elements cohere

¹ The main proponents of propositional knowledge in art are Weitz (1943, pp. 338-348), Kivy (1997, 120-139), Mikkonen (2014). The leading proponents of conceptual knowledge are Carroll (2002, pp. 3-26), John (2003, pp. 142-159), Elgin (2007, pp. 43-54). For experiential knowledge approach see Schick (1982, pp. 31-39), Kieran (1996, pp. 337-351) and Gaut (2006, pp. 115-126). The main contemporary proponent of knowledge as understanding or acknowledging is Gibson (2003, pp. 224-237; 2009, pp. 467-385). For an earlier version of this approach see Graham (1995, pp. 26-37).

² There is a distinction between cognitivism and aesthetic cognitivism. Cognitivism is the view claiming that art works are an important source of knowledge and thus they are cognitively valuable. Cognitivism merely holds an epistemic claim. Aesthetic cognitivism, on the other hand, holds epistemic and aesthetic claim. That is, it argues not merely that art works are an important source of knowledge, but also that this capacity of art works to facilitate knowledge contributes to work's aesthetic value. According to aesthetic cognitivism, an artwork is aesthetically better (gives aesthetic pleasure) because of the knowledge we acquire from it, that is, because of its cognitive value (cognitive pleasure). See: Gaut (2006, pp. 115-126).

³ For the non-cognitivist position see: Lamarque and Olsen (1997), Lamarque (2006, pp. 127-142) and Stolnitz (1992, pp. 191-200).

into a unified pattern or an aesthetic form, thereby producing an aesthetic experience of pleasure or displeasure.

Both positions have their own merits. Cognitivists are right in claiming that there is much more to an artwork than just being aesthetically pleasing. We often admire artworks for their insightfulness, while we criticize other works for being shallow and superficial. Thus, it appears that our vocabulary of artistic appraisal is charged with cognitive value terms. On the other hand, anti-cognitivists also make a good point. The kind of knowledge that a cognitivist claims art is supposed to give is something that is either already known or can be obtained by other means. But if knowledge can be obtained by non-artistic means then what is so special about the cognitive value of art?

One way to defend the position that art has a unique cognitive value depends on showing that aesthetic value, essential to artworks, is cognitive. This is a difficult task to begin with, considering that aesthetic value has traditionally been distinguished from cognitive value based on the view that aesthetic experience depends on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and that feelings are essentially non-cognitive.⁴

The aim of my paper is to express a critique of this view and to show that aesthetic feelings of pleasure in the beautiful and displeasure in the ugly have inherent cognitive aspirations. I argue that the value of art lies in facilitating aesthetic experience of pleasure and displeasure due to the aesthetic form. Yet, in contrast to other aesthetic theories of art, I also hold that art works have a distinctive cognitive value. I aim to reconcile cognitive and anti-cognitive positions by claiming that aesthetic value is a species of cognitive value and thus artworks can have a distinctive cognitive value. I intent to show that apprehension of a meaning in an artwork is an aesthetic apprehension (i. e. meaning is apprehended through the feeling of pleasure or displeasure). I develop my proposal in light of Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas put forward in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

2. Cognitive Function of Aesthetic Ideas

In §49 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant puts forward a view

⁴ This is nicely pointed out by Pouivet (2000, pp. 49–53).

that the free play of imagination (responsible for experience of beauty and ugliness) can be stimulated not only by perceptual properties alone, but by ideas and thoughts as well. For example, he writes that beauty is “the *expression* of aesthetic ideas” (5:320, p. 197).⁵ Kant formulates an aesthetic idea accordingly: “by an aesthetic idea, however, I mean that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., *concept*, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible (5:314, p. 192).

It is suggested accordingly that aesthetic ideas are concrete sensible representations of imaginations (that is, images) and that these images are so rich and give rise to so much thinking that cannot be fully described by any determinate concepts. Aesthetic ideas are thus alike to ordinary images (such as image of a flower), but they are dissimilar to ordinary images in that no determinate concepts correspond to them (like an image of a flower corresponds to the concept of a flower). Since aesthetic ideas lack determinate concepts, they evade the possibility of cognition (they cannot be cognized in an ordinary sense, that is, by connecting intuition with its determinate concept). They are therefore called ideas.

Kant gives the following example of aesthetic ideas: “The poet ventures to make sensible rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, the kingdom of hell, eternity, creation, etc., as well as to make that of which there are examples in experience, e.g., death, envy, and all sorts of vices, as well as love, fame, etc., sensible beyond the limits of experience, with a completeness that goes beyond anything of which there is an example in nature” (5:314, p. 192).

As evident from this passage, aesthetic ideas can sensibly represent two kinds of concepts. On one hand, invisible beings, hell, eternity, god, freedom, mortality, etc., are *rational ideas (ideas of reason)*. They are: “concept[s] to which no intuition (representation of imagination) can be adequate”

⁵ References to Immanuel Kant are given in the text to the volume and page number of the standard German edition of his collected works: *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (KGS). References to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the standard A and B pagination of the first and second editions. References are also given, after a comma, to the English translation of *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000), which includes the “First Introduction” (KGS 20).

(5:314, p. 192). What is distinctive for them is that they can be thought, but not empirically encountered. For example, one can think of the idea of hell, but have no sensible intuition of it, that is, the content of the idea of hell cannot be experienced by the means of our senses. On the other hand, love, fame, envy, death, etc. are abstract concepts, feelings, emotions, and mental states which can be experienced (we can experience their concrete instances), yet they cannot be directly represented. For example, we can experience the state of loneliness, but one does not know how the idea of loneliness itself looks like, that is, one does not have an appropriate schema for such an idea (in comparison to the schema of, say, a flower as an abstract representation of essential features thought in the concept of a flower; petals, stem and leaves in a specific combination).

We see that what is distinctive for both kinds of concepts is that they have no appropriate sensible intuition. That is, they lack a determinate schema - a schematic image as to how these concepts ought to look like. They can be thus termed as *indeterminate concepts*.

Because aesthetic ideas are sensible representations of things that cannot be directly represented, they can be merely symbolic or metaphorical representations. Kant calls such symbolic presentations aesthetic attributes. Aesthetic attributes are "forms which do not constitute the presentation of a given concept itself, but, as supplementary representations of the imagination, express only the implications connected with it and its affinity with others" (5:315, p. 193). For example, Kant writes that Jupiter's eagle with the lightning in its claws is an aesthetic attribute of the king of heaven. Jupiter's eagle is not a logical attribute of the king of heaven, that is, it is not part of the concept of the king of heaven. When we think of king of heaven, we do not have in mind an image of an eagle. Rather, the image of a Jupiter's eagle merely expresses certain associations connected with the idea we have of the king of heaven (in terms of representing power, strength, freedom, being above the material world etc.). Accordingly, aesthetic attributes are certain thoughts, associations or mental links that hold between different concepts and objects (say, a concept of a lightning in the eagle's claws and the idea of power or illumination), and are stimulated by the perceptual form of the object.

It is the combination of these aesthetic attributes that yield an aesthetic idea as I will illustrate by the means of a more complex contempor-

ary video art work *Dead Sea* (2005) by an Israeli artist Sigalit Landau. Her work features hundreds of watermelons, joined together by a string forming a circle, floating on the Dead Sea. Between the watermelons, some of which are open thereby revealing the intense red colour of their flesh, lies the artist's naked body. One of her arms is placed by her side, while the other one is stretched out, touching the open flesh of a watermelon. The video shows, in slow motion, how the string is pulled, thereby rotating the artist's body along with it until the circle is completely untied and out of sight. Visually, this artwork affords a mesmerizing aesthetic experience. However, there is much to the artwork than its visual form being pleasing to the eye. Namely, each of these images work as an aesthetic attribute and it is the combination of these aesthetic attributes that constitutes the aesthetic idea of the work. For example, each watermelon might be said to be an aesthetic attribute standing for a year in one's life. The watermelons are pulled by an unknown source until the circle ends, the image of which might stand as an aesthetic attribute for the idea of powerlessness and determinism. The naked body of the artist, pulled along by the string, brings in mind the sense of vulnerability and helplessness. Open watermelons, revealing the intense red colour of their flesh, are like open wounds, symbolizing the presence of blood and pain in one's life. Furthermore, watermelons are half submerged in the sea which may be an aesthetic attribute standing for the life itself, yet, since it is the salt-saturated water of the Dead Sea, this in addition stand as an aesthetic attribute for the harshness of life itself. Taken together, these aesthetic attributes constitute an aesthetic idea of the artwork, that is, a concrete sensible representation of an idea, such as the idea of the inevitability of death or the idea of inseparability of life, pain and struggle.

One can notice that the relationship between an aesthetic idea, aesthetic attributes and indeterminate concepts is similar to the relation that exists between empirical intuition (say, a particular image of a flower), logical attributes (abstract representation of essential features thought in the concept of a flower) and a determinate concept (of a flower). Just like logical attributes constitute the content of the empirical concept, based on which we come to recognize a particular sensible manifold being of a particular kind (say, a flower), so too aesthetic attributes constitute the content of indeterminate concepts (say, of the king of heaven, or of the

idea of inevitability of death), and based on which we come to *recognize* particular aesthetic idea as representing a certain indeterminate concept.

As this example illustrates, an art work can be aesthetically valuable not merely due to its visual form alone, but because of the aesthetic idea it communicates to the audience. We appreciate the communication of aesthetic ideas, because they give us an intimation of the world of ideas and state of affairs that lie beyond sensory experience. For example, while we may experience our own state of hopelessness, there are limits to the degree of understanding of the idea of hopelessness itself that is available only from our own states. Through an artistic representation, however, we can gain a different perspective on this idea, for example, what the state of hopelessness and despair itself might look like, which can consequently contribute to a richer understanding of this idea. Such a view is implied in Kant's claim that concepts without intuition are empty (A51/B75). He refers to empirical concepts which need to be connected to empirical intuition in order to make sense of experience. Without empirical intuition, empirical concepts are mere words, without any substantive meaning. But the same can be said about indeterminate concepts (such as the concept of a heavenly being, hopelessness, vulnerability, etc.). Only by connecting indeterminate concepts with sensible intuition (by means of aesthetic attributes) can we truly say that we understand what indeterminate concepts mean.

But it is art in particular that deals with indeterminate concepts and themes that concern social, psychological, moral, religious and metaphysical questions. It is a unique ability of great artworks to provide a particular image, a concrete picture to such indeterminate concepts, that is, to connect an indeterminate concept with its particular and thereby to imbue indeterminate concepts with a more substantive meaning and understanding. To find a connection between indeterminate concepts and their particulars is in a sense a truth seeking process, since, as mentioned previously, we do not know how indeterminate concepts look like, that is, they do not have their own images. Truth seeking process consists in *recognizing* the many faces of an indeterminate concept or a theme, that is, how a particular indeterminate concept or a thematic statement looks like, how it manifests itself, not merely in the artwork itself, but in our everyday life as well. What is distinctive for great works of art is their abil-

ity to find the harmony between indeterminate concepts and a particular sensible manifold, that is, to express aesthetic ideas.

This is nicely illustrated by Michael Haneke movie *The Seventh Continent* (1989), an agonizing story of a well-situated Austrian family and their attempt to escape the feeling of emotional and social isolation in the modern world by choosing to commit a suicide. The mental state of emptiness and depersonalization that accompanies everyday life of this family is represented through images that are focused on objects, rather than on subjects. We do not see character's faces, but merely fragmented and isolated shots of their hands turning off the alarm clock, opening curtains, putting toothpaste on brush, tying shoes, making coffee. Through such a cinematic technique that emphasizes the state of imprisonment by our daily routines, Haneke managed to give a perceptible form to the feeling of emptiness of one's existence, and thereby provided us with a rare opportunity of *recognizing* certain mental states, emotions and ideas that cannot be directly represented. Through the depiction of emotionless and depersonalized performances of our daily routines, the film represents the idea of emotional emptiness, that is, how these emotional state themselves look like. We often experience such mental states, yet with a difficulty to have a clear look at it and therefore to properly understand it. Through the objectification of the idea of emotional isolation itself, we have an extraordinary opportunity to perceive this emotion in a formulated way. By giving us the possibility to recognize this idea itself, the movie confronts us with our own feeling of emotional isolation and with the reality of our own everyday lives. Accordingly, the cognitive value of artworks lies not merely in identifying or recognizing the harmony between indeterminate concepts or themes (say, emotional alienation in the modern world) and its particular instantiations (images that are focused on mundane objects and everyday rituals with no emotional interaction), but also in furnishing us with the opportunity for self-reflection and self-knowledge. Namely, through aesthetic ideas, art opens a dialogue between us, our subjective states (say, how emptiness is felt by me) and the objective projection of our subjective states (an image of the feeling of emptiness itself). A dialogue enhances a distance between one's subjective state and the objective vision of that mental state through which one's perspective can be revealed. In other words, in art as an expression of aesthetic ideas our own subjective exper-

iences become objects of our attention. Art thereby engages us in a cognitive process of identifying our own personal characteristics and information about ourselves, challenging our emotional, behavioural and intellectual patterns and acknowledging our inadequacies in our point of views and thoughts we attribute to our daily lives and experiences of ourselves. Accordingly, art as an expression of aesthetic ideas enhances one's self-exploration, by giving us the opportunity to reflect on the content of our own subjective experiences. It thereby fosters self-awareness and by giving us an objective vision of ourselves it facilitates self-knowledge and consequently self-change.

3. Aesthetic Ideas, Pleasure and Beauty

I argued so far that art works can have a unique cognitive value in virtue of the aesthetic ideas they express. What I want to consider next is the relation between aesthetic ideas and beauty. That is, what do aesthetic ideas, as sensible representations of indeterminate concepts, have to do with aesthetic pleasure of the beautiful? Kant does not give an explicit answer to this question, yet based on what he says about beauty and the notion of free harmony in general, a following explanation can be proposed.

In the previous section I argued that the relationship between aesthetic ideas, aesthetic attributes and indeterminate concepts is similar to the relation between empirical intuitions, logical attributes and determinate concepts. We come to recognize a particular aesthetic idea as representing an indeterminate concept in the same way as we come to recognize a particular object being of a certain determinate kind (say, being a flower). The difference is, as I will argue shortly, that in the case of an aesthetic idea this recognition proceeds by the means of pleasure and in making an aesthetic judgment, while in the case of recognizing an object being of a particular kind no pleasure is produced and judgment is cognitive.

According to Kant, our ordinary perception and recognition of objects proceeds by the means of a conceptual harmony between the imagination and understanding. The faculty of imagination gathers together or apprehends the manifold of intuition in order to bring it into an image and the faculty of understanding unifies this manifold under the concept of the

object. For example, we recognize a certain object as a flower by the application of the concept of the flower to the manifold of intuition. This harmonious activity between the faculty of imagination and understanding is required for ordinary cognition of objects. Kant claims that our perception of the beautiful proceeds in the same way, but with one substantial difference. Namely, in the perception of the beautiful the harmony between imagination and understanding is in free play because “no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition” (5:217, p.102). That is, there is no determinate concept that we could apply to the representation (for example, we do not have a concept of beautiful flower; the concept of a flower by itself does not determine what a beautiful flower is, we simply find the perceptual feature in a flower aesthetically pleasing). The relation between imagination and understanding in the perception of the beautiful is merely subjective, Kant claims, since it refers only to the mutual relation between cognitive powers in the subject, without its relation to the object. Accordingly, while the harmony between cognitive powers in cognitive judgments is not merely subjective, but ends in the application of the concept to the object, and therefore in a cognitive judgment, the harmony between cognitive powers in perception of the beautiful is merely subjective (it does not apply concepts) and it results in a feeling of pleasure alone.

Now, an aesthetic idea meets the conditions required for the notion of free harmony. Namely, aesthetic ideas are sensible representation of indeterminate concepts (such as concept of hopelessness, loneliness, king of heaven, etc.). But we do not know how these concepts look like, that is, we do not have determinate rules in accordance with which to produce a manifold for such an idea. But if there are no determinate rules for the combination of a sensible manifold then this means that imagination and understanding are in a free play: “The powers of cognition that are set into play by this representation are hereby in a free play, since no determinate concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition” (5:217, p. 102). Such a free play between imagination and understanding is constitutive for judgments of the beautiful (when the play is harmonious) and judgments of the ugly (when the play is disharmonious). Thus, the harmony (or disharmony) between imagination (responsible for the combination of aesthetic attributes in an aesthetic idea) and understanding (responsible for

applying an indeterminate concept) results in the feeling of pleasure (or displeasure). In other words, it is the same harmonious activity between imagination and understanding that necessitates recognition of a particular aesthetic idea as representing an indeterminate concept (i.e. recognizing the meaning of an artwork) that also necessitates a feeling of pleasure. Even more, it is feeling of pleasure itself that serves as a means of recognizing harmony between imagination (combination of aesthetic attributes in an aesthetic idea) and understanding (an indeterminate concept). Namely, since an indeterminate concept does not have an adequate sensible intuition, there is also no determinate way to demonstrate why and how an indeterminate concept and a particular aesthetic idea fit together. This is different in the case of a determinate concept, such as the concept of a flower and its empirical intuition, the image of a flower, since in this case we can demonstrate clearly for why they are in harmony by simply pointing out some of its features, such as having a stem, leaves and petals. But no such evidence can be given in the case of indeterminate concepts and aesthetic ideas. For example, we cannot explicitly point out as to why the image of watermelon's floating on the Dead Sea is in harmony with the idea of the inevitability of dead. Nonetheless, we do still recognize that they are in harmony, the difference being only that this harmony is recognized through the feeling of pleasure alone.

In sum, recognition of a meaning in the case of an aesthetic idea is an example of an *aesthetic recognition* (i.e. recognition of a meaning through the feeling of pleasure). It is the same features that give rise to the feeling of pleasure that also give rise to the meaning of the artwork. These features refer to the specific combination of aesthetic attribute, namely to the combination of aesthetic attributes that is internally coherent, consistent and purposive in respect to the idea it aims to express. This is nicely illustrated in Sigalit Landau's artwork, where the idea of inseparability of life and dead is carried out and represented through the combination of aesthetic attributes that nicely complement each other and where each thought and association, prompted by the perceptual form of the work, is connected with another, lightly building up, until it reaches the concluding idea. It is the aesthetic aspects that give rise to cognitive aspects of an artwork.

4. Further Implications of Kant's theory of Aesthetic Ideas

Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas has further implications for contemporary aesthetic theory. Namely, it can give a solution the problem known in philosophical aesthetics as the 'paradox of ugliness' in art, that is, how it is possible that we like, attend to and value art works that evoke in us intense feelings of displeasure and ugliness?

Based on my interpretation of Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas an object can be beautiful, that is, occasion the free harmony, not merely due to its perceptual features, but due to the combination of aesthetic attributes or thoughts as well. This implies that one and the same object can have both, perceptual beauty (or ugliness) and beauty (or ugliness) of an aesthetic idea. I argued that an aesthetic idea is constituted by the combination of aesthetic attributes, that is, by the set of associations or thoughts between different concepts and objects, and as such it cannot be simply identified with perceptual form of the object. While perceptual form of Sigalit Landau's artwork is constituted by the image of watermelons floating on the sea and the naked body of the artist, an aesthetic idea, on the other hand, is constituted by the combination of thoughts that are prompted by this perceptual form. Aesthetic ideas are accordingly certain kind of mental pictures or "inner intuition[s] of the imagination" (§:342, p. 219) that are provoked by the perceptual form of an object (such as the idea of powerlessness and determinism stimulated by the image of watermelons pulled by an unknown source).

The distinction between perceptual beauty (and ugliness) and beauty (or ugliness) of an aesthetic idea can help us to explain different kinds of aesthetic experiences we have when confronted with different kind of art works. For example, how we can appreciate aesthetically those types of art works, such as works of narrative art, poetry or conceptual art, whose value does not lie in the perceptual properties alone, but in the ideas, concepts and meanings that they evoke. What we find beautiful in such works of art is the structure of aesthetic attributes and how it harmonizes with the concluding idea or a theme, the set of associations that a work conjures. A work can have a beautiful aesthetic idea, even though it has no perceptual beauty (or ugliness).

Furthermore, this distinction can also explain how it is possible to find

certain artworks aesthetically displeasing and ugly, yet aesthetically valuable at the same time. Namely, what we find displeasing in such an art work is its perceptual form (perceptual ugliness), but what we find pleasing is work's expression of an aesthetic idea. So while the feeling of displeasure caused by the perceptual form of the artwork causes us to withdraw our attention from the work, the pleasure of aesthetic idea nevertheless holds our attention. This is nicely illustrated by Willem de Kooning's painting *Woman I* (1950-52). The painting is a representation of a woman's body. One can distinguish certain features of a female's body, such as her invasive breasts, bulging eyes, teeth spreading into a grinning smile, while the rest of the body - her arms and torso - is disintegrated, dismembered and dissolved into the spontaneous and dynamic brush strokes, with frantic lines and garish colours. The combination of colours and shapes seem inappropriate, incoherent and chaotic arousing the feeling of discomfort, frustration and displeasure. The painting fits well into what might be called Kant's category of genuine artistic ugliness – it is not merely the subject matter that is ugly, but the artistic representation of the painting itself.⁶ Nonetheless, even though the artistic representation of the painting is itself chaotic and displeasing, it can still be expressive and thoughtful, but this differs from beautiful works in that such conflict produces instability in the expression of ideas, contrary to a unified expression of the beautiful. For example, one can notice that De Kooning's *Woman I* has no straightforward interpretation, but it motivates an interpretative exploration of its meaning. The physical destruction of a female body might symbolically represent the destruction of the classical notion of a woman as a beautiful, virtuous and sensitive human being. This idea is suggested by the violence of the brushstrokes, the chaotic and aggressive combination of colours, the idea of sexual dominance expressed through the accentuation of the women's breasts, and the maliciousness, hostility and pretence conveyed by her grinning smile. Through the juxtaposition of two conflicting ideas, that is, the classical idea of a woman as a morally and aesthetically ideal

⁶Kant defines artistic beauty (ugliness) as a beautiful (ugly) representation or expression of a (beautiful or ugly) thing (5:311, p. 189). That is, an art work can present ugliness, but as long as this presentation itself remains pleasing, the art work can be positively aesthetically appreciated. But if the artistic form or artistic representation itself is ugly, then we have a case of genuine artistic ugliness.

human being and the directly opposing idea of a woman as an ugly, harmful and vile human being, the artist managed to express a new idea, namely the idea of a critique of a social, aesthetic and moral idealization of femininity. The expression of this idea is stimulating, thought-provoking and for this reason aesthetically significant, even though it is perceived with displeasure due to its visual form. This shows that also perceptual ugliness can be aesthetically significant, meaningful and a cognitively valuable experience because it is a unique way through which certain ideas, concepts and emotions, for which we do not have a full empirical counterpart, can be expressed.

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