

wants to pay for a given work at a given time. Such dollar values only loosely correlate with either the historical importance of an artwork, or its degree of innovation, and is not a likely indicator of whether a work of art is great.

So what is the answer to the question? The most obvious one is, "It's great if you think it is!" And everyone has their own personal list of great artworks. However, with our three theories in hand, we can now say how a work of art comes to be regarded as a "masterpiece," and command the place of honor in a museum (or appear in a book such as this). Some degree of innovation, important cultural meanings, and a recognizable personal statement are key ingredients. Not all three are necessary, but at least one must be strongly present.

Most works hanging in museums have been selected by the specialists on the staff because they embody at least one of the three theories. Your judgments may not agree with theirs, and that is fine.

But to go deeper is rewarding. The three theories of art criticism presented here give us three standards of quality, and three ways of judging artworks. Often we apply one or more of these without thinking, and we say something like, "I like art that I can relate to." Well, why do you relate to it? What are you looking for? A little self-examination should help you to uncover what values are motivating your choices, and can help open an interesting discussion about art with other viewers.