



THE ARTISTIC VALUE OF JUAN LUNA'S SPOLIARIUM

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This paper discussed the art appreciation technique using Jerrold Levinson's artistic value in arriving at the importance of aesthetic experience in artwork. Levinson claimed that artistic value covers aesthetic value and achievement value, specifically in analyzing Juan Luna's Spoliarium, which is considered the largest painting in the Philippines and is proclaimed as a national heritage. This paper argued that art should have aesthetic engagement from the viewer's point of view which would lead them to discover its artistic value. Thus, this paper used the contextualizing technique since it augments and strengthens artistic engagement.

Keywords: Philosophy of Art, Aesthetics, Spoliarium, Politics, Culture, Levinson, Artistic Value

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INTRODUCTION

This article analyzed what particular approaches in the study of arts can help clarify art appreciation or the experience of art. The question of, can art overlap the meaning as intended by the creator? Does the true sense only within the appreciator? What kind of value necessitates art appreciation? Art that has its roots in unknown beginnings attests to human ingenuity. It sustains the traditions of human creativity, closely formed in human expressions, and historical precedents that adjust to the taste of time. The ideas that comprise cultures may not be absurd but understand the messages they produce. The meanings that resemble time resemble the reality of what is known in human understanding. Unknown to some, arts have made reality expressive in forms that would help preserve the message for generations. The word “art” derives from the Latin “ars,” which means ability and skills. In other words, it is the ability to achieve craftsmanship with excellent skills in action. It covers a wide area of subject matter, including visual arts or fine arts like painting, sculpture, photography, architecture and installation art, or even performing arts or literature. Since it requires both imagination and skills in accomplishing art, it produces aesthetic feelings or experiences which delight our desire for art appreciation. Since art is everywhere, it wishes the appreciator to appreciate more the relevance and importance of art in the present. The message that it wants to convey may not be easy to understand by the ordinary viewer.

The first part of this paper traced the historical background of Juan Luna’s *Spoliarium*. It discussed briefly the social reality of his time in order to uncover the phenomenon of art that exceeds the grasp of ordinary viewers. In short, it explored the relationship between art and history. Thus, it tried to answer the provoking question

of what makes the *Spoliarium* different from other artworks. The second part of this paper explored Levinson’s idea of art. This particular section discussed the difference between artistic and achievement value, which prioritizes the economic value of the art. In this section, the paper mainly argued that the artistic value makes the work of art successful. Of course, the role of the viewers must be addressed. The last part of this paper is a critique of the relationship between art and politics, specifically between art and authority. Thus, it discussed the socio-political significance of Juan Luna’s *Spoliarium* in contemporary secular society.

JUAN LUNA’S SPOLIARIUM

The art itself may seem easy to understand and satisfy its aesthetic purpose or pleasure, as Leo Tolstoy once said, “The notions of beauty come down to a certain sort of pleasure that we receive, meaning that we recognize as the beauty that which pleases us without awakening our lust” (1995, 48). The idea of feeling that has evoked artistic forms is necessary for the human experience of art. It is the same experience, however, that art differs in practical ways, just like words are present in the verbal arts like poetry, prose, and drama, while musical compositions use notes. In the visual arts, such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, they use lines, colors, and tones or canvas. Operas and novels, on the other hand, tell stories, and so do music and dances. Nevertheless, it is faster and easier to understand and appreciate a song or dance than a painting or symphony. Since artworks express ideas or feelings of the people under a specific time, it calls for contextualism of art (2016: 20). There is a historical-embedded object of identity about the relation between the image and what it represents.





Spoliarium

Juan Luna, who is an illustrious painter of Badoc, Ilocos Norte, produced one of the most important works of art in Philippine history. The artwork which expresses his nationality as his award-winning *Obra Maestra* is the *Spoliarium* that arouses our sympathy and inspires hope for our country. Understanding his artwork requires skills to complete the aesthetic experience. These skills are usually introduced by the school and even from informal learning in arts. Hence, developing the fundamentals in art-making, which have created its distinct style while others continue the traditional style. The artists who are not schooled may lack the fundamentals, however, they come out as the most creative of all. On the other hand, the aesthetic experience of “artistic value” is a strong way to illustrate art values. There is one common element among the works of art, and that is basically concerned with the audience’s or reader’s experience. It produces different experiences among the viewers of the art, but all have the same delight. The work of art represents or reflects the individual character belonging to the period of history and the place where it has been produced. Goodman (1968: 241) gives us a clear and impressive view of how the experience of arts requires and creates better encounters that satisfy aesthetic experience. He says

...that we had to read the painting as well as the poem, and that aesthetic experience is dynamic rather than static. It involves making delicate discriminations and discerning subtle relationships, identifying symbol systems and characters within these systems and what these characters denote and exemplify, interpreting works, and reorganizing the world in terms of works and works in terms of the world. Much of our experience and many of our skills are brought to bear and may be transformed by the encounter. The aesthetic ‘attitude’ is restless, searching, and testing—is less attitude than action: creation and recreation.

The aesthetic experience involves more than just associating a work of art with personal experience if one has enough, or at least one has the necessary knowledge not only to see, view, and hear but also to interpret artworks. According to Wright (2003: 131), it includes “how to respond to it appropriately and sensitively; how to make discerning judgments about it; how to understand the history, techniques and many styles of painting and its major practitioners; and where to go to see good examples of paintings”. The aesthetic experience is arguably a personal experience, and with proper tooling, it will give the right amount of appreciation since it is made by our human creativity and imagination. As such, we inquire, “is it not art itself that we want to appreciate?” For every artist, the answer to the question refers to many things because every art form conveys meanings, insights, and wisdom that are pleasurable to the human experience. But what is the content of that pleasure whose meaning does not accomplish? Does knowing art require more knowledge, experience, and articulation, even if art appreciation may not attract interest from the appreciator? Or is there a kind of value that draws us to know the message of art?



LEVINSON AND ARTISTIC VALUE

Jerrold Levinson, in his book titled *Aesthetic Pursuits*, fairly examines the component of artistic value. He writes (2016: 48):

I will understand artistic value as the value an artwork possesses by virtue of its proper functioning as art or its fulfillment of proper artistic aims. So understood, the artistic value will cover aesthetic value and achievement value, will most likely cover some sorts of cognitive and ethical value, and may perhaps cover some sorts of social value and religious value, to mention no others.

Based on this statement, Levinson claims that artistic value is far greater than aesthetic value, or other than achievement value, which is about the idea of the possession of arts in value. With this claim, this paper shall discuss Levinson's thought of artistic value in relation to aesthetic value, and achievement value. For him, aesthetic value and achievement value are "inaccessible" to someone who engages in a work of art. Understanding is of prime interest in this mode of engagement if one is to experience the work of art. It is "inaccessible" since artworks are extraordinarily created similar to the installation art of Jose Tence Ruiz's *Pabitin*. The aesthetic value may produce an imaginative experience because the physical qualities of the image are strongly recognizable. The idea is to experience aesthetic worth, even from the novice's point of view. Here, art must be seen objectively whether it is pleasurable or not with all the experience of beauty. This is a radical point of view that leads to subjectivism in accordance with Immanuel Kant's intuition, which is rooted in representations and experiences of the subject (1929, 87). However, he has made the emphasis that universality goes in the judgment of the activity of the self.

AESTHETIC VALUE AND ACHIEVEMENT VALUE

The very idea of aesthetic value is always congruent with any form of aesthetic experience. The appreciators are always the center of assessing the arts. It is more on understanding and clarifying the thoughts in the arts and then finding the best of all forms that manifests its qualities as valuable in experiential experience. Hence, art is, in a special way, appreciation. Another aspect of aesthetic value is the achievement value which is comparable and interesting in terms of being representational in some artistic objectivity that may be fulfilled. For example, the experience of an appreciator visiting a museum, talking to an artist in his studio, or looking at the bust sculpture is valuable because of the experience produced. Levinson (2016, 50) has proposed artistic value that is consistently essential in the achievement value where it does not depend on the experiential value, namely, originality (novelty); influentially (fecundity); skillfully (craftsmanship); inventiveness (creativity); solving a problem in a medium (ingenuity); expressing something in a novel way (imaginativeness). Among the essentials, originality is the primary image in the expression of skills and creativity. Moreover, it is solely experience-based fulfillment in its own discovery as Levinson (2016, 52) states, "the viewing experience aimed at is crucial to the value of the achievement admired, to why the work is ultimately valuable artistically." The personal experience of arts makes great importance in achievement value. This achievement from personal experience is greatly an art that is valuable in judgment. It is because it allows the uniqueness of innovation that brings a whole new range of subject matter, the appreciative experience expresses a total value. Artists should not stop innovating and introducing new conceptualized art. They must look at art as a creative endeavor that results from experience





both in the level of understanding and level of feeling.

The imagination of artists is crucial to any creative work since it all depends on their thinking. This also resonates as well with the experience of art appreciators which may greatly affect, deepen and broaden their enjoyment. Let us consider this painting with an abstract idea with lines common to its elegance and style. Artists need design because beauty follows a specific pattern, which makes art beautifully crafted. Any new design, such as those lines, is an expression of beauty and originality. With the expression of beauty and originality, what makes art appreciated? This is an aesthetic concept that is needed in art expression. The originality of art that has never been copied proposes engagement and aesthetic achievement. If there is originality in art, then skillfulness plays a major role. The artist's great skills are improved with years of tenacity. Such artistic skills are necessary to create new art forms. It is inventiveness or creativity that has made art exemplary, that is, seeing and understanding the reasons may give the appreciator revealing concepts of life and beauty which indicate the creative consciousness contained in the artist's work.

The artwork's subject matter is very much affected by the artistic style. It resides in the subject matter and style before doing the formal analysis of artwork. As Sporre (2006, 14) observes, "[t]he manners in which artists express themselves constitute their style. The style gives us that body of characteristics that identifies an artwork with an individual, a historical period, a school of artists, or a nation, for example, realism, expressionism, abstract, and so on." It means that art may change through time, which gives birth to a new one. This change in art forms reflects what the experience is. Moreover, it also reflects in the experience of the concepts and judgments.

The depth of judgment or how the artworks will afford us depends on how the problems are solved. In the same manner, the artist can choose the right paraphernalia for painting, such as using oil, watercolor, or acrylic. In sculpture, there are other paraphernalia, too, including clay, wood, metal, and bronze. And in visual arts, any sort of paraphernalia can do.

In general, aesthetics is debated on which properties may entail subjective perceptual or observable properties, which are important to any aesthetic value. These objects are possessed by subjective experiences. Although evaluative in nature may also create a dispute in the aesthetic property as follows: the gestalt character, standardizing its taste, pleasure or displeasure, and the lower-level perceptual properties may require aesthetic experience brought by imagination (2006: 321). Likewise, art scholars suggest that there is considerable convergence happening on what has perceived properties which have an open-ended list—taste, beauty, ugliness, sublimity, grace, elegance, delicacy, harmony, balance, unity, power, drive, and so on. However, aesthetic experience is not just or plainly a state of mind. It requires an analysis of knowing the disinterestedness, desire free, and pleasure concerns. What Immanuel Kant observed on Adler by "disinterested" is that the object "falls outside the sphere of our practical concerns. It is an object we may not desire to acquire, possess, do use, consume or in some other ways incorporate into our lives or ourselves" (Adler 1981: 105). The perceptions, emotions, or distinctive experiences mark those practical concerns. Since it has mental activity as an aesthetic, just like the "disinterested."

In the early part of this paper, it discussed the evolution of art in general. This experience requires a great attitude of artistic appreciation for the formulation of concepts in the arts.





Whether the concept of art is good or bad, sublime or not, physical or mental, abstract or concrete, singular or multiple, then art is still art, and so it necessitates raising questions properly. I will consider a question on artistic value. As Levinson argues, it is more of proper functioning as part of fulfilling artistic aims. What artistic value of Juan Luna's *Spoliarium* can it produce? Why is it generally important that artworks possess artistic claims? Can we arrive at the proper artistic claim in the *Spoliarium*? To create this spectacle is to use Levinson's instrumentality in the artistic claim of achievements and later recommends basic artistic adaptability. However, this is the limitation of this study. The observation of Levinson to Malcolm Budd is an experientialist view that "a work of art is made to be experienced" as it holds what the artist wishes to experience since experience is crucial to understanding. In contrast, what Descartes initially claims about the experience will fail any conceivable experience. Descartes (1984: 21) shares that:

I remember that, when looking from a window and saying I see men who pass in the street, I really do not see them, but infer that what I see are men, just as I say that I see wax. And yet what do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines?

It is not suggesting or initiating an original style, solving a problem in choosing a medium, or exercising a positive or negative influence on art—this paper seeks the important piece to consider making reference to valuable perceptual imaginative experiences, or the aesthetic experiences, that the work of art affords or makes possible to experience and appreciate. The *Spoliarium* shows wide perceptions of experience from the original viewer, up to the present Filipinos, and from the master Juan Luna himself. Since it pictures a political situation relative to that period of Spanish colonization.

That is, the beaming religious autocracy, the political independence turmoil, the marginalized Filipinos in their local languages, the religious animosity, and so on. For experientialists like Budd, any aspect of the artwork that entails artistic meaning can result in an artistic claim that of course brought by proper engagement or aesthetic achievement. *Spoliarium*, if properly engaged artistically, thus creates and may result in an artistic claim. A total artistic value of a kind.

Moreover, one aspect of consideration is the historical understanding and how the artwork is related to it. Thus, *Spoliarium*'s artistic claims in the manners of experiential-historical thoughts: (1) the requirements of political injunction; prior to the Spanish presence was an organized Balangay (Barangay) the injunction of political leaders of the Datu's powers of the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary above the communities and supreme commander of any territorial disputes. As the Spanish colonizers introduced a highly centralized form of government that lasted for 300 years, it was vulnerable to abuses, and many Filipinos were involved in reforms. The *Spoliarium* gladiatorial scenarios depict the "fate" and the "plight" of Filipinos as it covers the entire oppressive rules of Spain. Any viewers would see it as the result of cultural problems, the ethnic identity has been put to an end in favor of a more powerful race. Why would Juan Lunas use the representation of the gladiators? This is noticeable in the painting where two dead gladiators in ropes are being dragged by two men. Experts are suggesting the colors used by Luna are expressly Filipino: hues of yellow, yellow ochre, orange, red, and brown. As a romanticist and reformer himself, he strategies political motives and expresses them indirectly upon which political opponents will not be directly scandalized. Just like Jose Rizal made use of literary fiction to



describe an actual situation. His novels with real characters substantiate a real scenario. It would only be understood with careful analysis until the real message has been unraveled by the UST faculty. So, the intention of gladiatorial representation unfolds two ideas. First, it tries to hide the message from the Spaniards who have vehemently castigated traitors of the crown of Spain, and Filipino people were at all odd victims. Second, it tries to hide the message until Filipinos at that time learned and were enlightened about Spanish autocracies against Filipino mediocrity. The above-mentioned converged the contextualization and experiential paradigm to arrive at my artistic claims on the Spoliarium since it created a paradigm for artistic value as the most used medium at that time Luna chose oil on the canvass to express his nationalistic sentiments. The oil brought out the brightness of the main figures and made the less important ones recede through dark shades. The Spoliarium was finished in March of 1884, in time for the preview of entries to the National Exposition of Fine Arts in Madrid. The social content exposes Filipino people under the Spanish colonizer. The artistic adaptability: (2) the general adaptability may allow us to explore and enable us to stretch the potential of Spoliarium, and see through the objective part of the artistic work. Overall, since it is dynamic in composition, there are 17 figures on the left side of the frame and only two on the opposite side. Juan Luan perfected the control of lights, it shows his artistic skills.

The light soaks the corpses, with draggers pulling them while the two onlookers stand. The light diminishes at the left side, while darkness conceals one-third of the frame, with only the back and foot of the seated woman illuminated with some light. So, it will lead to the viewer's eye or viewer's experience that he or she can see the human dumping site (Spoliarium) and

hear the crying crowds for their dead loved ones, and may likely smell the decaying corpses. Thus, Spoliarium's artistic claims are far more relevant today since it calls Filipino people about the political and historical representations of the message of the artwork, and its functions serve as enlightenment for any future social-political upheaval. Also, the importance strikes the claim of its major achievement in its aesthetic achievement, especially on how the figures in the artwork were placed and the connections. Understanding the artwork should entail artistic vocabulary to properly interpret, understand, and appreciate. It comes with experience and the knowledge it produces. The illustration on which the contextualization exhibits a manifold valuable experience that if afford us to do; hence, it added an experiential narrative point of view.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Levinson has discussed the experiential approach in the artistic understanding of the claim of any given art as it covers aesthetic value and achievement value. In the meantime, this artistic value above all is a communication of establishing aesthetic accomplishment. The famous Spoliarium may constitute a fundamental means of access to the historical context, but its essence, however, lies mainly in the, and thus, it is nothing beyond perceiving, of course, without the concern for its historical integrity. The so-called contextualization-experiential analysis of the Spoliarium gladly shares the same manifest form. It may, in fact, have the same state, content, or value if only shooting the object from the human context. In addition, the aesthetic qualities that an object possesses in any artwork, in general, differ from something that is indiscernible or discernible. Spoliarium as a great work of art is strongly discernible—a call for an in-depth analysis.



Arts have been a medium of political protest among those who call for reforms. In the case of Luna's Spoliarium, it opens up a reality of society in the past and in the future. It calls for equality, justice, freedom, and democracy. An action only that Spain can grant; for Rizal, only assimilation, but for some patriots, a call for total independence. However, it can also be used as a means of communication by those in power. The signs and symbols of power in the Spoliarium warn of a potential revolution. Only when those in authority can assure equality for a totally just society.

Art is a message of hope. A dream that can overcome only an appreciation of the message it revealed. Art appreciation can only be the result of subjective appreciation of arts that is experiential in nature. The artistic value is an appreciation of the experience, which is a great goal for any art viewer. The viewer led to the past as it formed the future in art appreciation technique. The political message is closely important as the link of both past and present conditions of which society share similarities of issues. Men, through time, challenge those in authority to give a message of hope. That's why art is a result of protesting the social conditions of men standing for a legitimate cause. The social condition in which it lies in recent history still exists today. Society may have not learned the artistic value of any art. The message it possessed at that time can attest to how the arts correct the mistake of history. In the Spoliarium, it's a challenge how to discover the message at the time, but for now, it has been revealed, however, that the message persists and is not properly addressed. The call for the liberty of the reformist from the tyrants is a sincere manifestation that is long overdue, and it has spread all throughout the centuries of oppression. Filipinos can never be treated as slaves again when the reforms are implemented. The reforms mark the beginning of new history.

Arts justify the forms of any political protest. It gives a legitimization of the medium in use. This elevates the artist's imagination and conveys the message to society.

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