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This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Davies, S. (2015). Defining Art and Artworlds. Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 73(4), 375-384, which has been published in final form at 10.1111/jaac.12222

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Defining Art and Artworlds – Abstract

Most art is made by people with a well-developed concept of art and who are familiar with its forms and genres as well as with the informal institutions of its presentation and reception. This is reflected in philosophers’ proposed definitions. The earliest artworks were made by people who lacked the concept and in a context that does not resemble the art traditions of established societies, however. An adequate definition must accommodate their efforts. The result is a complex, hybrid definition: something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. Meanwhile, artworlds—historically developed traditions of works, genres, theories, criticism, conventions for presentation etc.—play a crucial but implicit role in (b) and (c). They are to be characterized in terms of their origins.
Defining Art and Artworlds

I have written extensively on the definition of art, beginning with Davies 1990, 1991. Indeed, I helped to establish the framework and typology in terms of which the contemporary debate is most often conducted (Lamarque 2000, 10). But I have not previously defended a particular definition of art. In this paper I attempt to sketch the outline of the definition I favor.

—I—

Many of the late twentieth-century definitions of art were a response to the challenge of controversial avant-garde works. Of particular philosophical interest were artworks that impersonated what Arthur C. Danto (1973, 1981) called "mere real things," thereby leading us to ask why they were art when their doppelgangers were not. Such works include Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* of 1964 and Marcel Duchamp's much earlier readymades. These definitions aimed either to establish why such works qualified as art (as in Dickie 1974) or alternatively, why they were to be excluded (as in Beardsley 1983).

My definition is motivated not by works such as these but by the very earliest art. Attention was drawn to first art, as it has been called, when philosophers (e.g., Levinson 1979, 2002) defended recursive definitions of art, according to which something is art if it stands in the specified art-defining relation to earlier art. Though it was not usually explicit in early formulations of such definitions, clearly they required a different account of the earliest artworks, that is, of the first artworks (Davies 1997).

It seems to me that the earliest art was created by people who almost certainly did not possess the concept.¹ In one sense they did not know what they were making. They could not bring their activities and artifacts under the relevant concept. (I assume that similar states of affairs occurred repeatedly in

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¹ Lopes (2007) attributes to me the view that only those with the concept of art can make it. I was arguing (in Davies 2000) instead that the absence of a single word for art in some non-Western cultures does not entail that they lack the concept.
human history, as people spoke the first language, invented the first wheel, and so on.) Acknowledgment of the arthood of prehistoric works had to be retrospective. This is not to say that their status as art was conferred only long after their creation, which is a view presented in Carney 1994. Rather, they were art from the outset (Davies 1997), though their makers could not have called them that.

In discussing the issue, Jerrold Levinson (1979, 233) describes this case:

Consider a solitary Indian along the Amazon who steals off from his non-artistic tribe to arrange colored stones in a clearing, not outwardly investing them with a special position in the world. Might not this also be art (and note, before any future curator decides that it is)?

When I first encountered this suggestion I was not convinced. I asked rhetorically (Davies 2000, 216): just what can this guy think he is doing? But I now believe that our account of art has to concede the possibility of art being created in just this fashion. The solitary Indian cannot think he is making art, of course. But that is not to say that he does what he does by accident, as it were. I take it that he was trying to bring off certain aesthetic effects and that in doing so he created a work of art.

—II—

Can we identify the earliest artworks? There is disagreement about this, but I think that it is important to try.

Our hominin ancestors first began to use crude stone tools about 3.4 million years ago (McPherron et al. 2010). Beginning about 450,000 years ago, pre-\textit{Homo sapiens} makers of hand axes began to lavish special care on some their creations (Oakley 1981; Miller 2000; Mithen 2003). They finely worked about 2% of the axes to be symmetrical and proportioned. Sometimes they employed unusual stone or brought out fossils or mineral veins in the stone. Some axes
were of exaggerated size and some of the finest axes apparently were not used for cutting.²

A few people (e.g., Lumsden 1991; Kohn and Mithen 1999) have identified these special hand axes as the first artworks. For my part, I am not sure. I do think that these axes show their makers to have had aesthetic sensibilities. They found beauty in matching form to function or, alternatively, in the qualities of skill and grace displayed by these axes when viewed not merely as functional tools. And as will become apparent later, I also think that these steps go in the direction that led to art-making. But we might chauvinistically doubt that they are art given their extreme antiquity and their creation by another species of whom we have no first-hand knowledge. In any case, we can afford to be agnostic about the art-standing of these very ancient examples, because works made by our species many millennia ago have an art-status that is not regarded as controversial.

Cave art created by Homo sapiens dates to the Upper Paleolithic, the period spanning roughly 50–10,000 years ago. The creation of this art coincided (not by chance, according to De Smedt and De Cruz 2011) with the widespread appearance of symbolic behavior, functional items with elaborate decorations, personal adornment, and burial with grave goods. It was once held (e.g., in Pfeiffer 1982) that such behavior appeared rather quickly, about 30–20,000 years ago. Nowadays, the date is often pushed much earlier (e.g., in Sterelny 2012) and includes African, Asian, and Australian, not only European, developments. It is not obvious whether we should count as the earliest art, say, the engraved ostrich shell fragments of Diepkloof rock shelter dated to 65–55,000 years ago (as De Smedt and De Cruz 2011 do). Or whether, instead, we should reserve the term for the cave paintings and carved items that came later. But what is clear, I think, is that by about 40,000 years ago, at the latest, our human forebears were artists. More than that, much of the parietal art of the time is of breathtaking energy, elegance, and ability.

² About the same time—that is, five hundred thousand years ago—hominins first possessed the physiological, neurological, and socio-cultural capacities necessary for musicality (Morley 2013).
Though there is speculation aplenty, we do not know for sure what purposes were served by the cave art of the Upper Paleolithic. Yet hardly anyone seems to doubt that it is art. In the writing of ethologists, paleo-archaeologists, evolutionary psychologist, and the like, I have found only one person who claims we cannot know if these paintings are art, namely, Whitney Davis (1986). A few (e.g., Conkey 2009; Van Gelder and Sharpe 2009) use scare quotes in referring to them as "art." But scores, even hundreds, of others call these paintings art without the slightest hesitation or qualification. (For recent, detailed discussions of cave art and its makers, see Curtis 2007; Desdemaines-Hugon 2010; Lawson 2012.)

I think this is because we recognize immediately that these pictures were made by people like us. To look into them is to see, staring back at the modern viewer, people with the kinds of minds, interests, and feeling that we have. More particularly, it is to see people not only capable of aesthetic creativity and appreciation but driven to express this aspect of their character by skillfully creating items full of power and significance. Had I the ability and talent to do what they did it would have been art that I made. And if we uncovered comparable works painted by an otherwise unknown human group only a thousand years ago, there could be no doubt that they were art.

David Whitley (2009, 255) acknowledges how these paintings speak to us across the millennia: "As an archaeologist, I am accustomed to listening to the faint whispers of the past. My hope is to hear enough, from dim murmurs and barely perceptible echoes, to piece together some understanding of the human story. But I am overwhelmed by the sound trumpeted by this Paleolithic art. It is a shout, at full volume, that resonates and reverberates thirty-five thousand years later."

Notice that the claim is not that we can understand and fully appreciate the art of our primordial ancestors. It is possible, even likely, that it had symbolic significance of which we must be ignorant. Neither do I allege that we must be able to recognize all their pictorial art for what it is. Many caves contain finger flutings. These might have been meaningless doodles but it is also possible that they represent abstracta that were invested with considerable meaning.
might properly count as art in the latter case, where they are made to be significant, if not in the former, where their creation is idle and mindless.

—III—

The fact that we can recognize some Upper Paleolithic art as such, though we are not sure what functions it served for its makers, can teach us lessons about the form a definition of art should take.

For a start, many definitions make arthood relative to an "artworld," by which I mean a tradition that includes an historically ordered set of works, established styles, genres, schools, and categories of work kinds, as well as conventions, practices and/or institutions concerning the production, presentation, and reception of works, and also historical, biographical, theoretical, and critical commentaries concerning aspects of the tradition. I have objected (Davies 2000, 2013) that, given that there are many autonomous artworlds across humankind’s various cultures, these definitions are at best incomplete. We are owed an account of what makes something an artworld. Yet in any event, the case of the earliest art makes apparent that it is possible to create art more or less in the absence of an artworld context. Many cave drawings probably were made by solitary individuals acquainted with, at most, only a few similar paintings.

Another widely held view that must be questioned is that art must be intended for an audience’s aesthetic contemplation. Much cave art is comparatively inaccessible and was unlikely to have been frequented often or by many people. Christine Desdemaines-Hugon (2010, 187), an archaeologist and cave guide, writes: "Was the art intended to be seen? It is now thought that it was meant to be seen by very few, if at all. Recently discovered caves, where great care has been taken to avoid trampling on the soil, show few traces of human visitors. In Chauvet, for instance." Plainly, the artists involved aimed to achieve dramatic aesthetic effects, and did so admirably, but this was apparently more for their own satisfaction than for the sake of an audience’s pleasure.

Another common view that should be rejected maintains that art, to be properly appreciated, must be approached for its own sake alone, deliberately
putting aside any interest in its kind or function. But, when we look at art through history and in other cultures, it regularly serves or enhances some function and it should be recognized as doing so (Davies 2006; Parsons and Carlson 2008). As ethologists (e.g., Dissanayake 1988; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1988) are often keen to stress, art dramatizes or illustrates creation myths or religious stories and it adds power to ritual, thereby making that ritual more efficacious. The idea that art should be valued only for its own sake alone emerged comparatively recently with the Enlightenment and presupposes a separation of art from life’s other aspects that is uncharacteristic.

—IV—

I believe (Davies 2012, 28–9) that we need a multi-stranded account, because something can qualify as art in more than one way. I propose that something is art (a) if it shows excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals, and either doing so is its primary, identifying function or doing so makes a vital contribution to the realization of its primary, identifying function, or (b) if it falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, or (c) if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. Though the definition is disjunctive in form, (a) does the important work of getting the art-ball rolling. (b) and (c) are to be fleshed out from the actual historical development of different ways of treating the various initial arts and artworks.

The first condition allows the possibility of something being art even if it falls outside all artworlds and publicly recognized art categories and even if it has the primary function of being for some purpose other than contemplation for its own sake alone. The need for this condition is apparent when we recall that the makers of the first artworks lacked the relevant concept and that they did not work against the backdrop of an established art tradition. Such works pre-dated artworlds and publicly established categories of art. For them, skill and achievement take the place of intentions, traditions, and genres (Dutton 2009). When we are accounting for the art-status of first art, it will be to (a) that we
must appeal. The second condition allows that an item's artworld location can be sufficient for its being art, whatever the goals of its creator. The third condition acknowledges that, typically, art making is self-conscious. And it makes room for the idea that artworlds can establish art-making practices that, when deliberately followed, result in artworks that need not show excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals. Implicit in these last two conditions is the idea that different cultures may have distinct artistic traditions—artworlds—that might not include all the same art forms (though we would expect a considerable overlap).

This account stands in need of further elaboration, though I only sketch the issues here.

First of all, what does "significant aesthetic goals" cover in (a)? Certainly more than formal beauty or unity in variety, though including those. Expressions of powerful emotions, compelling narrations, realistic or evocative depictions, dexterous or difficult to realize actions, vivid enactments of historical or imagined scenes, and complex abstracta, all executed with exceptional expertise, are also on the list.

Meanwhile, in the second half of (a), the reference to functions is intended to rule out the case in which an item's aesthetic aspects are incidental to its identity-defining practical function. If an aesthetically pleasing pattern is used to decorate a jug, usually the jug is not thereby made into a work of art. The exception arises only when the aesthetic decoration is no longer incidental because it overtakes and replaces the practical function. Then one of the item's primary functions becomes that of bearing the decoration. For instance, a sword might be made from expensive, beautiful materials, with a heavily jeweled handle. As a result, it could be for purely aesthetic contemplation, or could serve, say, as a ceremonial sword, and in either case it might thereby qualify as an artwork.3

3 If we think that the sword qualifies as an artwork and that the special hand axes that were mentioned earlier do not, this should be because the sword displays a higher level of excellence of skill and achievement in realizing significant aesthetic goals than do the axes.
As just indicated, some artworks have the primary function of being contemplated solely for the sake of their aesthetic achievements, construed in the broad sense indicated above. Others, however, have important practical functions: illustrating religious myths, enhancing ritual, preserving the group’s history, and so on. Apart from the transformation of function described for the ceremonial sword, there are two other, more common, ways in which a work’s aesthetic character might relate to its function such that it has the potential to qualify as an artwork.

First, it might have a secondary aesthetic function that not only sits alongside the primary one but also assists it. For instance, the beautifully elegant form of a jug’s neck might also make the jug pour more precisely. The item is *beautifully functional*. And if it makes the grade as an artwork, this is because the beauty of its neck makes a crucial contribution to its identifying function, as a merely decorative addition would not. In the second case, the manner in which the primary function is achieved displays aesthetic quality. For example, perhaps many complex factors are exquisitely coordinated in achieving maximal functional efficiency. A mechanic could hear beauty in the quiet hum of perfectly functioning equipment. In other words, the item is *functionally beautiful*. If the result is an artwork, the art-making feature is the beauty with which certain features of the machine combine in achieving its identifying function.

Of course, not everything that is beautifully functional or functionally beautiful in the manner described automatically qualifies as a work of art. As claimed in (a), for art created independently of an artworld context, there must be excellence of skill and achievement in generating the item’s aesthetic character and in harmonizing this with its practical function. Where the practical function is mundane and remains dominant—as is so for cars, furniture, clothes, buildings, and the like—probably only the most superb examples are

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4 Excellence and skill admit of degrees and it might not be obvious on the continuum precisely where art-status is achieved. Experience suggests that this level of imprecision is not antithetical to the project of definition or to the practical usefulness of the concept.
accorded art-status. The Lamborghini, Saarinen’s tulip chair, Armani suits, and the Sydney opera house are the kinds of works that make the grade.

The first condition, (a), has one obvious advantage over (b) and (c): it avoids the circularity that seems to be invoked by talk of art genres, art forms, art traditions, and art-making intentions. Note, for instance, that not all pictures are artworks (for example, rough sketch maps), not all dramatic enactments are artworks (for instance, a game of charades), not all musical pieces are artworks (for example, clock chimes), etcetera. So we could not easily characterize art forms non-circularly in terms of their constitutive media.\(^5\) If the definition is to be viable in parts (b) and (c), it needs to defuse the suggestion that this circularity is vicious.

Let us now focus on (c): something is art if it is intended by its maker/presenter to be art and its maker/presenter does what is necessary and appropriate to realizing that intention. What is the import of the "necessary and appropriate" clause here? It reminds us of a point stressed by Danto (1981): the self-conscious art-making intention is not some pure act of will, but one that must be scaffolded by suitable historical circumstances. Not everything could be made an artwork at every point in the history of art. The past direction of the art tradition constrains what can be art in the present. (Or it does so, at least, up to the time that anything can be made art.) Rauschenberg could intentionally create an artwork by painting his bed but da Vinci could not. And the point is not that the idea could not have occurred to da Vinci, but that it could not have been successfully enacted, because the artworld of that time had no space prepared, so to say, for accepting a painted bed as a work of art, even if the paint was

\(^5\) Dominic McIver Lopes (2014, especially chs. 7 and 8) takes on the challenge of characterizing the arts non-circularly in terms of their media and the aesthetic practices to which these are put. He argues that, where non-artworks employ the same media to aesthetic effect, nevertheless they differ from artworks in that medium in terms of the modes of appreciation they require. I am happy to enlist his arguments, but, rather than rehearse them here, I make alternative suggestions.
applied by a famous artist. For many eons, the art-making intention had to be cashed out in terms of prominent aesthetic goals, skillful achievement, and the like. But in the early twentieth century, and with the circulation of Dadaist ideas, it became possible—though this took a few decades to become apparent—for Duchamp to appropriate readymade, quotidian, unaesthetic objects and to turn them successfully into art and also to create a new art-genre in doing so. In other words, the artworld context gave rise to a way of deliberately creating art other than by satisfying either (a) or (b). As was observed earlier, most art-making is self-consciously intentional. This intention targets what is to be done to achieve the desired outcome, not the history of art. But the history of art plays a crucial hand in settling whether the desired outcome could be art and what is kosher as a means to achieving it. Or, to be more specific, it is the history of art for the artworld within which the artist operates that is important here. (c) highlights the agency of the artist, but apart from that, what does the work here often will be (b), with its reference to art traditions.

Something similar can be said for art genre and art form in (b). These are to be analyzed as materials, practices, or kinds with a recognized standing within established art traditions, that is, within continuous and connected art-making and art-appreciating practices that can be traced (if only in theory) back to their prehistoric origins in first art.

To make my position clearer, I contrast it with those of Levinson and Noël Carroll. Levinson (1979, 2002) avoids circularity by defining art_now as intended for the same regard as art_past. For him, the defining connection is between individual artworks, rather than between them and the tradition in which they share. Carroll (1988, 1990) also proposes relations between artworks—of repetition, amplification, and repudiation—as structuring the unified narrative of art's history. My proposal makes the identity of the art tradition more central. Artworks other than the first ones occupy a shared line of descent from their

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6 The kind of account of art appreciation presented by neurologists and other scientists typically ignores art's socio-historical nature. For commentary and a corrective, see Bullot and Reber 2013.
first art ancestors and that line of descent comprises an art tradition that grows into an artworld. Different art traditions latched onto different prehistoric art cohorts. Where they were not self-consciously set up alongside and in competition with an existing art tradition, what makes them all artworlds is their origins in first art. Call this a *cladistic* theory of art.⁷

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This, though, is to put the conclusion before the argument. As I explained earlier, we need to know how artworlds or art traditions are to be identified as such. As I observed then, definitions appealing to conditions such as my last two are incomplete if they do not address this question.

One possibility that I will reject maintains that an artworld necessarily contains a core set of art forms: fictional narrative, drama, poetry, picturing, sculpting, music, song, and dance. This approach faces three difficulties. Definitions of these various art forms may prove to be elusive. And, as already observed, even if we adopt a humble view of art, it is far from clear that it will be appropriate to count every picture, say, as an artwork. Drawings showing how to assemble kitset furniture, illustrating the progress of vehicles before a crash, or in a field guide for local mushroom identification probably will not qualify. Finally, widespread though such art forms are, it does not seem conceptually necessary for all, or even any of them, to be present as a condition for art’s creation. (It is not obvious that the Indian’s stone artwork falls squarely in any of them, for instance.) In fact, it is conceivable that separate art traditions could follow quite distinct historical trajectories, so that they come to overlap very little.

This consideration draws us back again to the first artworks, as the cladistic account implies. It may be that the only thing that human artworlds share is a genesis in the production of the kinds of artworks made by the first

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⁷ In biology, a *clade* (from the Greek word for *branch*) is a group of organisms and the common ancestor they share. A clade is a segment of the tree of life.
human artists. These rely on skillfully achieved vivid aesthetic effects and appeal to elements of perennial and universal interest, such as depictions of the human body and of game animals. To elaborate further on (a), we can reasonably speculate from what is known of present-day hunter-foragers that other forms of art were present from the outset. Our distant ancestors would have told narratives and enacted dramas concerning birth and death, war and peace, good and evil, health and illness, love and hate. Their stories reinforced the group’s shared values. Their singing and dancing entrained the group’s movements and emotions. It is the expert, creative pursuit of these absorbing goals and behaviors that leads us to see them as resulting in art. As I noted earlier, though we do not know exactly what purposes art-creation originally served, we acknowledge the outcome as art. The makers of the earliest art plainly had sensibilities, minds, and feelings like ours, including our penchant for aesthetic appreciation and for the skillful creation of items displaying aesthetically appreciable qualities that invest them with significance.

Mathematics begins with counting and measuring, not calculus or string theory. Physics initially is concerned with simple principles of motion, mass, and causation, not with Einsteinian relativities. In a similar fashion, I maintain, art begins with skillful works that display easily appreciable aesthetic features and/or realistic depictions of what is not immediately present and/or straightforwardly grasped emotional power and/or graphically presented narrative interest. And just as such art is cross-culturally recognizable as art for the prominence it gives to such elements and the expertise with which they are demonstrated (Davies 2009), it is also recognizable in the distant prehistoric past of our Upper Paleolithic forerunners.

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8 I allow, however, that works of art might be made by aliens. To the extent that these aliens’ senses, cognitive biology, and evolutionary history differ from ours, what will strike them as vivid aesthetic effects, emotionally evocative ideas, compelling narratives, and the like, will be correspondingly different. In that case, we are likely to be incapable of recognizing even their first art for what it is. And we will be blind also to the artiness of the traditions and artworlds to which their first art gives rise. In any case, from here on my emphasis is on human art.
To repeat, this is not to say that, at the beginning, artists did not employ symbolisms and make references that we could not get. They may have done so, with the result that our appreciation of their art is partial at best. That we can recognize the first art as art does not mean that we can fully understand it.

—VI—

So, artworlds are to be characterized in terms of their origins. Once a tradition of art making is established, with a body of works, practices, conventions, and the like, art creation comes to be guided by that tradition. The tradition may be very conservative, with the goal being that of emulating past masters. Or it could value innovation, originality, and even self-subversion. Over time the art practice might become arcane and sophisticated. In other words, an artworld could transcend its origins step by step until it no longer emulates its foundational works. As a result, different art traditions might come to share little in common and it may be that cultural outsiders can no longer recognize the artworks of those artworlds for what they are. Perhaps their avant-garde artists abandon all the accessible, representational forms of art and create only readymades and conceptual pieces.

Curiously, it is possible to put some of these claims to a kind of empirical test. In Chauvet cave, as well as drawing great artworks, humans apparently positioned European cave bear skulls and bones at prominent locations. Within six meters of one skull, which was placed on an altar-like stone, a further 45 skulls were haphazardly scattered (Curtis 2007, 210–11; Clottes 2009).

The proximity of so many large skulls is impressive but has no special aesthetic character (at least in its current configuration). This is not like the Indian’s artwork of arranged colored stones. But consider this question: could

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9 European cave bears (*Ursus spelaeus*) hibernated in Chauvet cave and many died there. As well as their excavated sleeping hollows, their skeletons litter the cave’s floor. The cave includes pictures of these bears. European cave bears became extinct about 25,000 years ago, ten millennia after Chauvet was first painted.
this be a conceptual work of art, a readymade artwork installation created by an Upper Paleolithic Duchamp?

Among the archaeologists who all confidently identify the art on the cave walls, not one has proposed that this unusual arrangement of skulls could be an artwork. I think they are right to dismiss the idea. This is because of the directionality of art’s history, to which I alluded earlier. That is to say, the skull arrangement is not art because the possibility for conceptual art is not present at art’s origins, but comes much later. At the very least, it is only when the concept of art has been made explicit that the kinds of challenges to it mounted by avant-garde art became possible. If the people in Chauvet lacked the concept of art, then it was not possible for conceptual art in the form of a readymade installation to have been created in the cave. Skull movers of the time could not have formed the art-making intention necessary for conferring art-status on the skull-and-rock combination qua readymade.10

—VII—

Just now I contemplated the possibility that, over time, an artworld tradition could depart so far from its origins that its artists made only conceptual and readymade art in a form that would be unrecognizable to outsiders to the tradition. In practice, artworlds producing what we might think of as high end Fine Art stop short of this, however. Consider the most sophisticated art traditions of Japan, India, China, and southeast Asia, with their long histories, distinctive art forms such as paper folding, elaborate formalizations, distinctive art forms such as paper folding, elaborate formalizations,

10 Using a different argument, Alessandro Pignochi (2014, 432–3) arrives at a similar conclusion: that a person of the time could not have the appropriate intentions to create readymade art. He then suggests, however, that an "incredibly intelligent mutant" who could envision the tradition to which Chauvet paintings would give rise might create a conceptual piece that could not be appreciated by his contemporaries. I'm not sure that I share this intuition, though it is plain that if people really could predict the future lots of things would be different.
institutionalization, and historical self-consciousness. The artworks in these Fine Art traditions are often no more easily accessed and understood than those in the category of Modernist Western Fine Art. But the art status of these works is, nevertheless, usually apparent to cultural outsiders. Besides, a culture's most sophisticated art rarely replaces its less elitist forms of art, those that I call lowercase "a." These are the popular folk arts. Nowadays they include mass entertainments such as movies and TV shows. Such arts typically seek prominent aesthetic effects, engagement with perennially fascinating themes and topics, and emotional stimulation. In other words, they do for us what first art probably did for its creators and, if there was one, for its audience, and they are functionally valued in the same way.

Moreover, I have been, so far, concentrating on the origins and development of artworks with artworld status. But I have not explained why these particular works of art are, in fact, as they are. To do so requires a fresh investigation into how artworlds have originated and developed. I shall return to this topic in Part II after the general philosophical analysis of the artworld is completed.
is prepared to accept as art readymades and conceptual pieces on this count.\textsuperscript{11} Not all recent theorists adopt such an inclusive notion of aesthetic properties and experiences, though. For instance, because of their non-sensorial character, Nick Zangwill (2007, 73–4) has reservations about the art-status of literary fictions that are not concerned with beauty.

It is not my purpose here to evaluate the overall success of such theories in general. It is apparent that they meet counterexamples in the form of deliberately anti-aesthetic art, some conceptual works of art, and art driven by theories that pay no heed to the aesthetic. But what is clear, I hope, is that, provided they are of the broad variety, these are the kinds of theories that might explain the arthood of first art, that is, of art that is created outside the context of an established art tradition.

A rival to aesthetic theories is the institutional approach to art’s definition, an exemplary version being by George Dickie (1974). Institutional accounts hold that something is a work of art as a result of its being honored, dubbed, or baptized, as such by someone who is authorized thereby to make it an artwork in consequence of their position within the informal institution of the artworld. The institutional theory is well designed to account for the art-standing of works such as Duchamp’s readymades. It cannot provide an account of the first art, however, since that had to be made prior to the development of institutions that self-consciously identified themselves with the production and appreciation of art.

Given their respective features, it is not surprising that a successful definition might involve the disjunction of the aesthetic and institutional approaches. This is one way to interpret my earlier definition. Part (a) corresponds roughly to an aesthetic definition and covers the case in which an art-maker need have neither a concept of art nor an artworld location. Parts (b) and (c), depending on how their detail is developed, might come into line with an institutional approach. That said, however, neither the aesthetic theorist nor the

\textsuperscript{11} James Shelley (2003) has argued that, on a sufficiently broad construal of the aesthetic, so that it includes, for instance, daring, impudence, and wit, even non-perceptual artworks display aesthetic properties.
institutionalist needs to be much interested (as I am) in art's historical progress or origins. Meanwhile, the multiplicity of artworlds and the need to account for their common identity plays no part in the representative versions of these theories.

There are respects in which my definition of art is like one defended by Robert Stecker (1997, 50), according to which an item is an artwork at time $t$ if and only if it is in one of the central art forms at $t$ and is intended to fulfill a function art has at $t$, or it is an artifact that achieves excellence in fulfilling such a function. Like mine, Stecker's definition invokes a functional consideration, as well as mentioning established art forms. And though the time indexing here is used to avoid the obvious challenge of circularity, it opens the way to making the historical unfolding of art traditions central in the way that I think it must be. Meanwhile, Stecker (2000) acknowledges that the explanation of the art-status of first art is likely to be in terms of aesthetic excellence. But he does not explicitly consider the earliest artworks and he does not attempt to answer the question embedded in such accounts: what makes something an artworld?

I have already contrasted my view with Levinson's (of 1979, 2002), which defines as art$_{now}$ as art because it is intended for a regard accorded to art$_{past}$. His focus is on relations between artworks rather than on the tradition or artworld in which they are jointly embedded. He is not especially interested in characterizing the form that first art must take or in explaining what the multiplicity of artworlds have in common, such that they are artworlds. But there are aspects our theories share. I accept that both the historical unity of each artworld and change within it might be explained in terms of a tradition of art regards. (As with Stecker's account, the time-indexing creates the possibility of making the historical telos of artworlds important in the definition.) And as I acknowledged at the outset, Levinson explicitly indicates that the art-making intention can be opaque. In other words, it can be an intention to bring off a certain effect, and this effect achieves art-status for the item made, without the goal being to make art as such. Under this view, someone who lacks the concept of art could create art nevertheless.

My account of the nature of artworlds is perhaps closest to one that has been proposed by Carroll (1988, 1990). He suggests that an historical narrative
ties art to its origins and that the earliest art qualifies as such in terms of the aesthetic function it performs. But Carroll claims to be identifying the extension of the word "art" rather than defining the concept and his focus is solely on the Western art tradition.

By contrast, and here I recapitulate this paper’s beginning, I am interested in explaining how we can identify some of the earliest human art and I am struck by differences between the many art traditions there are. I focus on attempting to explain how the most ancient artworlds qualify as such in terms of their common origins in the earliest art and the features that were characteristic of it. And I emphasize that, though artworlds are autonomous and can take quite different directions, in each case what can become art at a given moment depends on what has been made art earlier in that tradition.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) For their helpful comments I thank Tom Adajian, David Davies, Andrew Kania, Larry Shiner, Robert Stecker, and anonymous referees.
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