
In Craft Objects, Aesthetic Contexts, author Sandra Corse seeks to lay the foundation for a aesthetic theory that can be applied to contemporary craft. Despite the widely-accepted notion that modern aesthetics address only fine arts, the author argues that there is room for craft in modern philosophy, if one positions aesthetic theories in their historical context.

Corse begins by analyzing the definitions of craft and art and acknowledges that delineating between the two is not always easy. Is craft fine art? Is it design? Where does it fit in the lexicon of art? These questions have long been asked and answered in a variety of ways that are not satisfactory for craft artists. Corse attempts to reconcile these issues by submitting multiple definitions. Craft may be defined as something in opposition to mass production by having a relationship to functionality and tradition. It also has a connection to the body as opposed to fine arts’ abstract association to signs and symbols.

It is commonly accepted that Kant’s distinction between useful objects and objects with no purpose is responsible for the exclusion of craft from the definition of arts in modern aesthetic theory. Corse’s careful analysis of Kant’s original text in its historical context leads to another conclusion; that Kant’s ideas of taste and genius have been slightly distorted in their current interpretation. This deviation has persistently defined craft as something other than art and kept it from being seriously analyzed in modern aesthetics. Corse places Kant, Heidegger and Adorno’s aesthetic theories in a historical context that allows room for addressing craft within their philosophies on fine art. The author argues that this newly-considered latitude for analysis should be the foundation for a contemporary aesthetic theory on craft. Corse concludes that the philosophy of art must continue to find new definitions and responses to craft and fit them into a new theory of aesthetics.

Aesthetic theory as it relates to craft is not an overly popular topic. Craft Objects, Aesthetic Contexts fills a gap in field, but the book itself is a fairly abstract philosophical work that is more suitable for the graduate level rather than that of the undergraduate. The book includes a comprehensive index and bibliography and there are notes at the end of each chapter.

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