



Integral Art:

Spirit – aspects of aperspectivalism

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Introduction

Any commentary on Integral art speaks only to the simplest truth of what we understand to be our experience that “Great art transcends.”.

As the emergent genre that is Integral art (which has existed for as long as Spirit) comes into our conscious way of interpretation, we find a new way of seeing our own perspective on artistic perspectives.

It is these aspects within an aperspectival frame that encompass the experience of the observer, the creator and their object of creation at all the levels of existence; all as experiences of the one Spirit made manifest. It is the holding of these Integral perspectives that allows us to discuss Integral art.

Integral art asks the question – “*What is the good, the beautiful and the true?*”. This commentary makes no truth statements about the answer, acting instead only as a gallery guide to parts of the question. The perspectives indicated are not explained, merely located, for later contemplation.

Principles

Our experience of art is always individual. What it has in common is never commonplace. Said perfectly here:

“When I directly view, say a great Van Gogh, I am reminded of what all superior art has in common: the capacity to simply take your breath away. To literally, actually make you inwardly gasp, at least for that second or two when the art first hits you, or more accurately, first enters your being: you swoon a little bit, you are open to perceptions that you had not seen before. Sometimes, of course, it is much quieter than that: the work seeps into your pores gently and yet you are changed somehow, maybe just a little, maybe a lot; but you are changed.” (Wilber, K. (1997) ‘Eye of the Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad’.)

However, Integral art is not simply about the consensus opinion on the object of our experience. It is the experience around the art in all its forms.

Integral art follows the three principles that generally apply to an integral inquiry:

1. Non-Exclusion
2. Enfoldment
3. Enactment

Non-exclusion is the principle that all perspectives are valid. Enfoldment is the principle that some viewpoints may transcend and include others. Enactment is the principle that that where you stand determines what you see.

Integral art as a process of inquiry therefore includes all art forms, all experience of art, and respects all perspectives of that experience.

While many aspects of art are known to all of us and commented on by many, there are subtler forms of artistic expression and knowing which form important aspects of any aperspectival inquiry of the artistic realms.

These are spiritual art, soul art, transcendent art, transpersonal art and transformative art. To understand these we need to first understand how they relate to a holarchy of spiritual experience.

The Great Holarchy

We know art transcends and includes the experiences of artist and observer. We see the work and know that it represents something that has gone beyond the physical object. It is the act of perception that has made it so.

However, we can, by using an Integral frame, think about art by also looking at levels of transcendence. A simplified description of four levels of Integral art is provided by Ken Wilber (1998).

These are the sensorimotor, the mental, the subtle and the causal spirit. As they exist in an emergent holarchy, each transcends and includes the former, giving each level of art a very distinctive stamp.

The first level is the eye of the flesh; objective, representational and realistic art that depict the object as physically perceived.

The second level is the eye of the mind; the visual expression of the internal experience of the perceiver.

The third level is the eye of contemplation; the expression itself being referent to directly perceived illuminations that are transpersonal to the artist themselves.

The fourth level is the eye of I-I, the domain of pure nondual formless Spirit. It has no referent as it has no domain, able to take its referent from any or all levels. (From *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (1998) pp 192-193).

We already know these forms, but we know them by different names and different experiences.

Some of those experiences as perceived and explained by Integral theory are portrayed below. They appear across levels, within levels and as the transition between levels – together describing in parts, that which is an Integral whole.

Spiritual art

A common shared experience of spiritual art is that it evokes a sense of wonder such that we forget ourselves.

“The viewer momentarily becomes the art and is for that moment released from the alienation that is ego. Great spiritual art dissolves ego into nondual consciousness, and is to that extent experienced as an epiphany; a revelation or liberation from the tyranny of the separate –self sense. To the extent that a work can usher one into the nondual, then it is spiritual or universal, no matter whether it depicts bugs or Buddhas.” (Extracted from “In the Eye of the Artist”, Foreword to *Sacred Mirrors: The Visionary Art of Alex Grey* – republished in *The Simple Feeling of Being*, 2004)

Spiritual art is then art that issues from an awareness of spirit, whatever the “object” that it portrays. The direct experience of the artist is communicated by them through the work. Spiritual art is art that speaks directly to us with that voice.

Soul art

Our reflection of sacred art is often understood from within our own perspective and within the limitations of our own conscious experience. Soul art serves, not simply as a communication, but mostly as a support for contemplation.

As Wilber says: "The point is that soul art, of any variety, is not metaphoric or allegorical: *it is a direct depiction of the direct experience of the subtle level*. It is not a painting of sensory objects seen with the eye of the flesh, and it is not a painting of conceptual objects seen with the eye of the mind; it is a painting of subtle objects seen with the eye of contemplation. That means that artists and critic and viewer alike must be alive to that higher domain in order to participate in this art." (Wilber, K. "The Marriage of Sense and the Soul" – p 193)

While we can all be participant observers, the eye of contemplation provides an insight into what is otherwise not seen with the eye of the flesh or the eye of the mind. It is the eye of contemplation that views this art. We may sometimes be unable to see what we cannot ourselves reach. How then do we reach this?

Transcendent art

Another aspect of Integral art is art that is transcendent. This may be transcendent to the way of being of the artist or transcendent in its effect on the observer. Transcendent art reaches beyond ourselves into another domain that is beyond our present self - and in connection with the higher Self.

Wilber describes this in his Foreword to '*The Mission of Art*' by Alex Grey as:

"When an artist is alive to the spiritual domains, he or she can depict and convey those domains in artistic rendering, which wrestles Spirit into matter and attempts to speak through that medium. When great artists do so, the artwork then reminds us of our own higher possibilities, our own deepest nature, our own most profound ground, which we are all invited to rediscover. The purpose of truly transcendent art is to express something you are not yet, but that you can become We are confronted with the best that we can be, the deepest we can feel, the highest we can see, and so we go away ... a little better than we were a minute before." (extracted from *The Simple Feeling of Being* p219)

Transcendent art may not be from a different place. It may be simply from a place we presently are, but cannot quite reach. It is art that takes us to another place we already know.

Transpersonal art

Transpersonal art is art that is beyond the ego-self. It is not transcendent, but an expression from the realm occupied by one who has transcended, and in great art, leading the perceiver to their own transcendence.

“What characterizes this art is not its content, but the utter absence of the self-contraction in the artist who paints it, an absence that, in the greatest of this art, can at least temporarily evoke a similar freedom in the viewer.” (Wilber, K. “The Marriage of Sense and the Soul” – p 193).

The act of truly great transpersonal art is in the transformation of the perceiver, where levels merge and layers are universally transcended in all realms. The art speaks not only directly to us, but to everyone.

Transformative art

In a 1995 conversation between artist Alex Grey and integral philosopher Ken Wilber they had this to say about transformative aspects of Integral art:

“Ken: The human mind can potentially develop through emotional, rational, psychic and spiritual modes of awareness. The higher spiritual stages are also progressive and unfold with spiritual practice. So art can express any of these stages or levels of awareness, from sensorimotor reflections of the world of matter, to the feelings and ideas of the ego-self, to the sociocentric or worldcentric self. But this is still not transformative spiritual art. A spiritual art must transform the artist and the viewer. In order for art to be transformative, it has to undo you.”

Alex: “Transformative art must express something beyond where you are, it demands that you grow beyond your current self. This is where an artist’s angst and the pain of transformation coincide. You reach toward the true, the good and the beautiful and become a better person through the struggle.”

We see here the most important aspect of Integral art. It is not about the art object. It is not about the observer’s opinion of the art. It is not about the artist’s experience. It is not about the artist’s intent. It is about all of these things. It is about all of these things, and more.

From these pictures at an exhibition we understand that it is not the pictures, but the exhibition itself, that is the art. The curator of the exhibition is manifest Spirit, and we are merely the humble artists.

Conclusion

Expression in the form of art can represent any level of experience depending on the levels that the artist themselves are alive to in the moment of contemplation or creation. That art is itself accessible at different levels of being and understanding, depending on the observer of that art. Who then are we to say what good,

beautiful or true art is? Integral art may have its referent from any level, in any form.

Wilber summarizes: "Art then is one of the important dimensions of every level of the Great Hierarchy of Being. Art is the Beauty of Spirit as it expresses itself on each and every level of its own manifestation. Art is in the *eye* of the beholder, in the *I* of the beholder: Art is the *I* of Spirit." (Wilber, K: "The Marriage of Sense and Soul" p194). All this is art.

Integral art therefore has many truths. The one we find as being central to our experience of art is the ever present conjunction of body, mind and the spirit: as the eye, the I, and the ever-present Witness, mutually create and together allow us to appreciate the art in our own emergence.

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