

What art expresses is not actual feeling, but ideas of feeling; as language does not express actual things and events but ideas of them. Art is expressed through and through – every line, every sound, every gesture; and therefore it is a hundred percent symbolic. It is not sensuously pleasing and also symbolic; the sensuous quality is in the eservice of its vital important. A work of art is far more symbolic than a word, which can be learned and even employed without any knowledge of its meaning; for a purely and wholly articulated symbol presents its important directly to any beholder who is sensitive at all to articulated forms in the given medium.

An articulate form, however, must be clearly given and understood before it can convey any important, especially when there is no conventional reference whereby the import is assigned to its as its unequivocal meaning, but the congruence of the symbolic form and the form of some vital experience must be directly perceived by the force of Gestalt alone. Hence the paramount importance of abstracting the form, banning all irrelevances that might obscure its logic, and especially divesting it of all its usual meanings so it may be open to new ones. The first thing is to estrange it from actuality, to give it “otherness”, “self-sufficiency”; this is done by creating a realm of illusion, in which it functions as Schein, mere semblance, free from worldly offices. The second thing is to make it plastic, so it may be manipulated in the interest of expression instead of partial signification. This is achieved by the same means --- uncoupling it from practical life, abstracting it as a free conceptual figment. Only such forms can be plastic, subject to deliberate torsion, modification, and composition for the sake of expressiveness. And finally, it must become “transparent” --- which it does when insight into the reality to be expressed, the Gestalt of living experience, guides its author in creating it.

The earlier notion of imitation this coincides with Susanne Langer’s assertion that a “picture” is essentially a symbol, not a duplicate, of what it represents..... All that it shares with the ‘reality’ is a certain proportion of parts”. Langer, who holds that “symbolization is the essential act of mind”, builds a convincing aesthetic upon this idea of congruency of fundamental structure. In *Feeling and Form*, she presents what we may take as the center of her theories of art: “Formal analogy, or congruence of logical structures, is the prime requisite for the relation between a symbol and whatever it is to mean. The symbol and the object symbolized must have some common logical form”. According to *Feeling and Form*, for example, “Music is a tonal analogue

Suzanne K. Langer: Expressiveness

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of emotive life”, and this work further explains that articulate form, the center of all the arts, has as a characteristic symbolic function “logical expression” --- the expression of relations. Her emphasis upon logical expression next leads her to a definition of art: “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling”. Langer’s carefully worked out theory that art creates symbols of feeling which parallel the original emotion solves the problem of expression in art. She used the notion of congruent structure of explain how art creates recognizable images, extends this theory to a notion of expression and meaning.

With roots in logic, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, Susanne Langer sought to explicate the meaning and cognitive import of art works by developing a theory of symbolism that located works of art at the centre of a network of relations based firmly on semantic theory. Art works were nondiscursive, presentational symbols that expressed an artist’s ‘life of feeling’, by which observers, through a process of immediate apprehension (or intuition) came to acquire knowledge.

In Problems of Art, a collection of essays originally delivered as lectures, Langer refined her views: a work of art was a form expressive of human feeling, created for our aesthetic perception through sense or imagination. Emphasizing the role that artistic intention played in creative activity, she traced the unity of the arts to their semblance of organic form. Insight (understanding of the essential life of feeling) designated the aim of art. Reflections on Art, a collection of twenty-six essays ranging over music, art, dance, poetry, film and architecture, focused on two main issues: expressiveness and semblance. Her list of contributors included artists and ‘lay aestheticians’, as well as professional philosophers. Her final work, Mind, ambitiously sought to explicate the role feelings play as the mind functions uniquely in humans, and in particular how an artist projects an idea of feeling by means of art.