

## Philosophy @ The Virtual Art Museum: Conceptual Art

### **René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe)*, 1929, Los Angeles County Museum of Art**

1. The text in this painting is written in French. It says, "This is not a pipe." That seems paradoxical since the image above it is of a pipe. Can you think of a way to interpret the statement that makes it true? What interpretation would make it false?



2. How many different things could the word "this" refer to? When you interpret the "this" in those ways, is the painting saying something true or false?

3. The image of the pipe is very realistic. Would it change the way you view the painting if the pipe was obviously drawn, say as a young child would?

4. Why do you think the painting is titled, "The Treachery of Images"?

### **Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965, Museum of Modern Art, New York**

Wall Text from "One and Three Chairs":

**chair** (châr), *n.* [OF. *chaires* (F. *chaire*), < L. *cathedra*: see *cathedra*.] A seat with a back, and often arms, usually for one person; a seat of office or authority, or the office itself; the person occupying the seat or office, esp. the chairman of a meeting; a sedan-chair; a chaise; a metal block or clutch to support and secure a rail in a railroad.

1. Are there really three chairs in this art installation? If not, how many are there?

2. Do you think one of the chairs is more real than the others? Which one and why? Or do you think they all equally real?

3. Why do you think the artist included three different types of "chairs" in this installation?



## Philosophy @ The Virtual Art Museum: Abstract Art

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**Mel Bochner, Language is Not Transparent, 1970, Mel Bochner Archive**

1. What does the sentence written on the wall mean?
2. Why do you think the black paint drips down the wall? Was the artist just careless or did he want to make a point?
3. This work is made on the wall of an exhibition, so it will be painted over when the exhibition has ended. Why do you think the artist created it this way?

### Philosophy Questions:

1. All three of these works contrast language and images. What point do you think the artists are making about the relationship between language and images? Are they all in agreement about the nature of the relationship or do their works register differing positions? Can an art work make a claim, say about the relationship between language and images? How does it do so?
2. Do you think there is a single relationship between words and images? What is it? Do any of the works convey that? Do you think that art is the best way to represent that relationship? Why or why not?
3. Can an image visually contradict what words say? Pay particular attention to the first painting and the relationship between the image of the pipe and what the words below it say. How does language function in each of these works? Does it always have the same function?
4. How do you like conceptual art more or less than the other types of art you have encountered on this website? Do you agree that conceptual art is about the ideas rather than the images used to convey them? Or do you think that the images you see are important to the works? How would you compare conceptual art to more traditional forms of art?

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