

“Characteristic features found cross-culturally in the arts can be reduced to a list of core items [...] which define art in terms of a set of cluster criteria. Some of items single out features of works of art; others qualities of the experience of art. [...]

While the cluster-criteria approach to understanding art does not specify in advance how many of the criteria need be present to justify calling an object art, the list nevertheless presents in its totality a definition of art: any object that possessed every feature on the list would have to be a work of art. The definition does not exclude fringe art, avant-garde art, or other controversial cases. It only directs attention back to the qualities that works of art arguably must to some degree share, and it does this by enumerating the features of indisputable cases – Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*, Liszt’s *Spanish Rhapsody*, Brecht’s *Mother Courage*. Such canonical works, having everything on the list, will therefore stand at one end of a continuum that has at its other end non-art objects and performances such as ordinary passport photos and the accomplishments of skilled plumbers”

Dennis Dutton, *The Art Instinct. Beauty, Pleasure and Human Evolution*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2010, pp. 51; 61-2

“1. Direct pleasure. The art object –narrative story, crafted artifact, or visual and aural performances –is valued as a source of immediate experiential pleasure in itself, and not essentially for its utility in producing something else that is either useful or pleasurable” (p. 52)

“2. Skill and virtuosity. The making of the object or the performance requires and demonstrates the exercise of specialized skills.” (p.53)

“3. Style. Objects and performances in all art forms are made in recognizable styles, according to rules of form, composition or expression. Style provides a stable, predictable, ‘normal’ background against which artists may create elements of novelty and expressive surprise.” (p. 53)

“4. Novelty and creativity. Art is valued, and praised, for its novelty, creativity, originality, and capacity to surprise its audience.” (p. 54)

“5. Criticism. Wherever artistic forms are found, they exist alongside some kind of critical language of judgment and appreciation, simple or, more likely, elaborate.” (p. 54)

“6. Representation. In widely varying degrees of naturalism, art objects, including sculptures, paintings, and oral and written narratives, and sometimes even music, represent or imitate real and imaginary experiences of the world.” (p. 55)

“7. Special focus. Works of art and artistic performances tend to be bracketed off from ordinary life, made a separate and dramatic focus of experience.” (p. 55)

“8. Expressive individuality. The potential to express individual personality is generally latent in art practices, whether or not it is fully achieved.” (p. 56)

“9. Emotional saturation. In varying degrees, the experience of works of art is shot through with emotion.”
(p.56)

“10. Intellectual challenge. Works of art tend to be designed to utilize the combined variety of human perceptual and intellectual capacities to the full extent, indeed, the best works stretch them beyond ordinary limits.” (p. 57)

“11. Art traditions and institutions. Art objects and performances, as much in small-scale oral cultures as in literate civilizations, are created and to a degree given significance by their place in the history and traditions of their art.” (p. 58)

“12. Imaginative experience. Finally, and perhaps most important of all characteristics on this list, objects of art essentially provide an imaginative experience for both producers and audience. [...] This is what Kant meant by insisting that a work of art is a “presentation” offered up to an imagination that appreciates it irrespective of the existence of a represented object: for Kant, works of art are imaginative objects subject to disinterested contemplation. All art, in this way, happens in a make-believe world. This applies to nonimitative, abstract arts as much as to representational arts.” (p. 58)