

SPORT AS ART

Reading: Through artists’ eyes

Read the text and choose a sentence from A-F to complete the gaps.

We could identify 1766 as the year in which a legitimate art form called sporting art emerged. It was primarily through the work of the British painter George Stubbs whose portfolio *Anatomy of a Horse* was published in that year. His work is generally considered to have defined a new direction for artists. While Stubbs gave new shape to sporting art, he was by no means the first artist to have focused on sports.1

Wall paintings and reliefs of men wrestling and lifting weights have been discovered in Egypt and dated to the second millennium BC. In later Cretian and Greek cultures there were engravings and frescos that suggested the presence of an athletic spirit: depictions of combative activities or bull-leaping indicate an interest in dangerous competition.2

Sculptures were characteristic of Greek art and, in this form, there is a pantheon of heroes, the most celebrated of which is Myron’s *Discus Thrower* in bronze from the 5th century BC. For Greeks, sport, education, and culture were all involved in the cultivation of the whole being; the mental and the physical were not dualities but part of the same unity.3

By contrast the Romans were indifferent to sports and to art as well. The only sporting activities encouraged were those that contributed to the preparation for war. The Roman fascination with fights manifested itself in gladiator conflicts and chariot racing. Without doubt the most memorable reconstruction of such a chariot race is in William Wyler’s 1959 epic *Ben Hur*.4

The fall of the Roman empire in the 5th century introduced a period of 1,000 years that became known as the Middle Ages. Artistic evidence of *les tournoiments* was preserved in the form of great medieval tapestries that told stories of chivalry. Contemporary visualisations of tournaments are common thanks to the popularity of films, such as Jerry Zucker’s *First Knight* (1994), starring Richard Gere, Sean Connery and Julia Ormond.

In the 18th century it became clear that the natural world was governed by laws and so sports too underwent a revision.5
We find the scientific tendency to analyze, quantify and record in the art of the period, art which became known as “sporting art“. As we have noted, George Stubbs’s *Anatomy of a Horse* was published in 1766: it was not only work of great aesthetic beauty but of scientific precision.

In the 20th century photography became popular and artists of sport were adventurous in their use of the medium to portray sports in entirely new ways. The photo-collages of John Heartfield introduced satire. For example, his *A Specter is Haunting Europe* features a runner made up of industrial parts, the head a stopwatch, pistons for limbs and a clock card in place of a chest.6

- A) Races took place over prescribed distances, times were measured, results were recorded.
- B) Apart from combat sports, which seem to have existed through several different cultures and epochs, racing of some sort is found in the decoration of ceramics.
- C) The work satirizes the effect of industrial production on sports.
- D) So, sport, as we understand it, did not exist: it was not a separate sphere of activities away from other parts of life.
- E) Indeed, artistic impressions of sporting events and competitors are as ancient as athletic competitions themselves.
- F) It is probably one of the most exciting pieces of dramatized sport ever.

(Adapted from Cashmore, E. *Making Sense of Sports*. London: Routledge, 2000)

Exercise: Connectors

Read these notes. Then fill the gaps in the sentences below – and then write a CONTINUATION for each sentence using some of the phrases in the box.

These phrases are used when making generalisations:

As a rule broadly speaking everyone would agree that generally speaking
in many cases in most cases in some cases it is often said that
it is sometimes said that many people believe on the whole

These phrases are used when explaining exceptions:

but now and then but in other cases but in this one case
but there are exceptions to every rule except for however
on the other hand to some extent to certain extent

1.artists lead a good life: their hobby is their profession, but.....
2. Hollywood movies are short-lived..... you see one you can't forget.
3. watching TV is rather a waste of time,
4. reading is a wonderful source of pleasure;
5.people work because they have to, not because they want to,
6.I enjoy all kinds of music,

(Adapted from Jones, L. *New Progress to Proficiency*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.)

Exercise: The arts

Which branch of the arts do you think these people are talking about?

1. 'Animation does not have to be just Disney, you know.'
2. 'It was just pure movement, with very exciting rhythms.'
3. 'It does not have to rhyme to be good.'
4. 'Oils to me don't have the delicacy of water-colours.'
5. 'Her design of the new shopping centre won an award.'
6. 'I read them and imagine what they'd be like on stage.'
7. 'The first chapter was boring but it got better then.'
8. 'I was falling asleep by the second act.'

(Adapted from McCarthy M., O'Dell F. *English Vocabulary in Use. Upper-intermediate and Advanced*. CUP 1994, unit 42.)