What We’re Looking For: Art

To be technical about it, a work must have form and content to be art. These two requirements are supported by the creative intention of the artist and the ability to interpret the art by the audience. Form has three parts: elements of art (color, value, space, and line), principles of design (balance, contrast, emphasis, and proportion), and medium (painting, sculpture, photography, etc.). The question the artist must ask him or herself is whether the product meets these requirements. Additionally, the artist should be attempting to communicate a message to the audience. This is content.

If the work has form and content, the next requirement is to skillfully convey those items in a clear manner. An artist’s vision of what his work is meant to communicate can be significantly aided or hindered by his demonstration of skill. Conversely, a craftsman may be a highly skilled producer of a product that has no artistic value at all. Thus, skill alone does not constitute art. Skill is a tool the artist uses to produce the form that will communicate the content.

While there are numerous traditions in art and artistic tastes shift and change over time, the central point for art’s creation, cultivation, and consumption is that it holds a mirror up to life. Visual art, like any other art, is designed to show us something about ourselves. We see in art not so much the reality of life but the reflection thereof. The reflection is perhaps distorted, warped, slightly out of focus, or troublesome for us to see; it is an imperfect reflection. In the imperfection, we are reminded of the imperfection of life. We are challenged to see things as they are as well as how we wish them to be. Good art causes questions; good art makes us think and wonder.