

Metaphors in "Treasures" Implications for

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Arts administrators, art teachers, art reviewers, artists, and others involved in the process of aesthetic education often are blocked in their efforts by conceptions and assumptions about art held by the public. These influence the type of interaction individuals have with art—frequently confining it to attendance at only certain types of art exhibitions, for example, or to the compartmentalization of art so that it operates only in one sphere of their lives. These assumptions can be very frustrating to attainment of art educators' goals, yet these same art educators and their institutions may be largely responsible for development of presuppositions held about art by the public. These assumptions create some of the very barriers to awareness of art that art educators are working to overcome. This study is an investigation of some assumptions about art using the concept of metaphor as an analytic tool.

Traditionally, metaphor was linguistic embroidery that substituted for more precise language. Metaphor was viewed as decorative language, ornamentation, and simply figures of speech or a stylistic device. This conception can be traced back to classical Greeks and Romans, such as Aristotle and Cicero, who in their study of rhetoric or persuasion treated metaphor as the concern of form and style rather than content of language (Aristotle, bk. III, chpts. 1-11; Cicero, bks. xxiv-xxvii). Contemporary studies of metaphor, however, are changing this traditional definition; metaphor now is seen as much more than a verbal and stylistic phenomenon. The starting point for this new understanding of metaphor is the presupposition that we cannot know and verify reality in any objective way (Rorty, 1979). Instead, knowledge about something always must be symbolic; we

know our world only through the symbolic constructs or language by which we describe that world (Brown, 1977; Rorty, 1979). In this view, knowledge about reality is metaphorical; metaphor is a medium of knowing (Brown, 1977; Osborn, 1967). Whatever perspective we select as means to view a phenomenon, it treats that phenomenon *as* something, thus creating it for us and making it an object of experience. Whatever vocabulary or metaphor we use to approach a phenomenon affects how we perceive it and what we perceive in it. Metaphor functions as a perspective upon its subjects; it shapes the way we see our world.

Not only is metaphor the means through which we come to have knowledge about something, but it also creates particular realities for us (Borrmann, 1972; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Cassirer, 1946). An example detailed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) demonstrates how a particular metaphor can affect the most basic concepts and activities in a culture and thus creates reality for those who employ the metaphor. The metaphor that "time is money," reflected in expressions such as, "This gadget will *save* you hours," "I've *invested* a lot of time in her," and "You need to *budget* your time," has led to particular views and practices—or reality—in our culture. Work, for example, has become associated with the time it takes; people are paid by the hour, week, or year. Telephone message units, hotel room rates, yearly budgets, and interest on loans are other examples of how time is money in our culture. Because we conceive of time as money, we understand and experience it as something that can be spent, budgeted, wasted, or saved.

Reality created from metaphor results not only in focus on a particular reality but also serves to hide other aspects of



People looking at King Tut's throne. From "Treasures of Egypt"

Treasures of Tutankhamen": Aesthetic Education

Anthony J. Radich



Credit: Larry Morris/NYT PICTURES

that reality. It keeps us from focusing on other aspects of a concept that are inconsistent with the selected metaphor. We tend to use, for example, the metaphor of a battle to describe an argument; thus, in the middle of a heated argument, we may become intent upon attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, losing sight of cooperative aspects of arguing. By becoming preoccupied with the battle, we may lose sight of the pleasures of cooperative argumentation.

Our metaphorical linguistic system not only enables us to know about phenomena and organizes and structures reality for us, but it prescribes how we act within that system of reality. It includes assumptions as to how we respond and behave and imposes certain actions on the basis of selected metaphors. Because of our metaphor that time is money, for example, we expect particular actions from others, such as paying us according to amount of time worked, and we decide whether to engage in certain activities according to whether the time spent will be worthwhile or sufficiently valuable.

If, in fact, particular metaphors we select encourage us to gain knowledge about phenomena, create a particular reality for us surrounding these phenomena, and suggest actions that are appropriate, the study of metaphors used in a particular discipline will reveal particular perceptions and perspectives employed by that discipline and its world view. Such was the approach taken in this study. Believing that metaphors used to describe the works of art and art exhibitions influence the public's perception of art, we attempted to discover these metaphors and their implications for art dialogue in the classroom and other places.

We selected discourse about one particular art exhibition, "Treasures of

**In this article . . .
Foss and Radich
ask us to examine
how we talk about
art in our dialogue
with students and
others. The
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attainment of
educational goals.**

Tutankhamen" (shown in Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco between 1976 and 1979) in order to examine metaphors functioning in the visual arts. This exhibition was selected for analysis, and it is one with which much of the American public became familiar because of extensive publicity surrounding it. In fact, many individuals who generally do not view art exhibitions went out of their way to see it. Discourse used to describe this show seemed fertile ground for discovering how metaphors are manifest in discourse about art and influence general attitudes about art.

We collected as much of the discourse about the exhibition as possible, both reviews of the show and articles about it, from local newspaper reports, popular magazines such as *Time*, and art journals. We looked for metaphors implicit in descriptions of the exhibition and discovered six basic themes: art as entertainment, wealth, volume, antiquity, superlative, and technique.

ter in Daylight", *New York Times*, December 12, 1978.



Credit: Helen Thompson

METAPHORS IN "TREASURES OF TUTANKHAMEN"

Art as Entertainment

A major visual-arts metaphor clearly evident in writing about the "Treasures of Tutankhamen" is Art as Entertainment. The very terms used to describe presentations of art works, such as "show" and "exhibition", suggest a presentation for *viewing*, or something that an audience sits back and watches without participation. These two terms are joined by numerous others in discourse surrounding the "Treasures" show that further suggest Art as Entertainment: "parade," "hoopla," "extravaganza," and "show-stoppers." The term "draw" is frequently used to describe public reaction. The show is reported to attract in much the same way a barker might at a carnival, "drawing . . . crowds" and "drawing thousands."

Art as Entertainment is revealed clearly in use of the terminology of drama. The exhibition can be viewed in "cinematic terms" and is characterized by "showmanship." The "entrance . . . hushes the line of people," who feel "anticipation" about the show in which "theatricality" and the "close-up shot" are central. As the exhibit takes on the role of a movie star, the dramatic metaphor becomes even stronger. The show "sweeps from museum to museum," "trailing heavy clouds of hype," and delighting all with "its presence" through the duration of the "tour."

Whatever our preference for entertainment, it is provided by the "Treasures of Tutankhamen." There is "adventure," "mystery," and "magic"; the show has all elements necessary for an action-packed and violent adventure story. It is an "institutional body blow"

that must be met by a "battle plan," "extraordinary measures," "mobilization," and guards trained in "fire-fighting, in bomb disposal, in health care." There is lots of action, including people being "hit with something"; the show was described variously as "striking," "running," "capturing," "sparkling," and bringing "tension" and "sweat to the brow."

The show is not without sex, either. It makes a "debut"; is "sexy," "seductive," and "alluring"; its "wraps are taken off" and the result, of course, is a "spawning" of reproductions. Even those showgoers who want to feel spiritually uplifted are satisfied. The show "inspires" as it depicts a "miraculous" story of Tut "rising" with "blessing" and "grace."

The show does not disappoint the audience. It is a "stunning," "dazzling," "incredible," "splendid," "fabulous," "exotic," "overwhelming," "awesome," "stirring," and "spectacular" show that "begets . . . delight," "hypnotizes," and "thrills" the audience. This metaphor, then, urges acceptance of "Treasures of Tutankhamen" as entertainment at its finest.

Art as Wealth

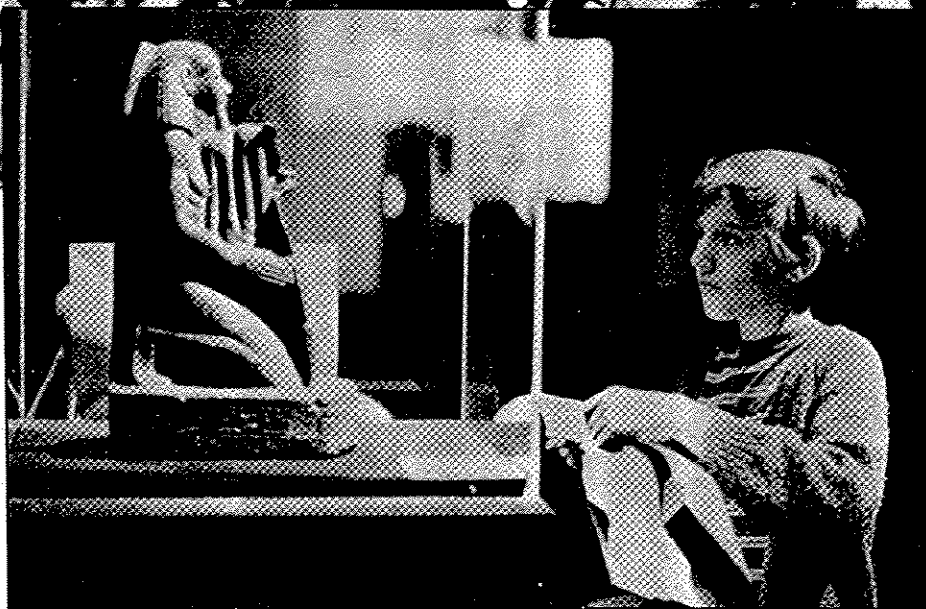
Discourse about the exhibition also assumes a metaphor of Art as Wealth. Like the previously discussed metaphor, this one encourages individuals to view the exhibition, and the visual arts in general, in particular ways. The title of the show itself suggests this metaphor; "Treasures" suggests wealth such as money or jewels. Some of the items in the exhibition did come from a room in the tomb called the Treasury, but frequent use of the term and synonyms in essays about the show indicates a metaphor that goes beyond the name of

a specific location: "treasure," "greatest treasures," "treasure hunt," "treasure-hunt quality," "wealth," and "jackpot."

Of all possible foci that could be used to describe objects in the show, writers frequently choose terms dealing with aspects of wealth, further developing the metaphor. The objects are "riches," "rich tokens," "richest jewels," "have the shine of gold," and are of "solid gold." Many of these terms are accurate descriptions of objects in the show, but there exists an almost infinite number of other characteristics that could be used to describe these objects. Their gold-related qualities often were selected over others, however, and frequent reference to gold reinforces viewers' perception of objects in the exhibition as "precious," "priceless," "valued," and "highly prized."

Even when direct reference is not being made to the materials of items, other descriptive terms suggest characteristics of gold and reinforce Art as Wealth: "gleam," "gilded," "glint," "golden gleam," "glitters," "shiny," and "resplendent." The metaphor of Art as Wealth also emerges in descriptions of the show's influence on cities in which it was shown. The exhibition is a "profit-making corporation" concerned with "cost," "economic impact," and financial transactions that include "borrowing," "loans," and "beneficiaries."

As a result of its connection with wealth, art is shown as the domain of an elite, upper-class, high-status segment of the population. The use of descriptors such as "homage," "sophistication," "class," "champagne prices," "majesty," "place of honor," and "respect" clearly set a proper scene



Credit: Fred Meredith, photographer

for the exhibition, appropriate attitudes and behaviors to be displayed, and maintain the connection between works of art and high status and wealth. Because the great popularity of the exhibition made maintenance of the images of exclusivity, elitism, and wealth impossible, an opposing metaphor developed to describe responses to and involvement of the general public to the exhibition.

This metaphor is less positive; it directly contradicts the metaphor of art as wealth and functions to tease or mock the general public caught up in the "Treasures." The metaphor used is one of physical disease or mental imbalance. Called "Tutglut," "Tutmania," an "outbreak of Tut fever," a "craze," or a "malady," public response was of "epidemic proportions." "Symptoms" included turning "pale," "madness," "headache," "passion," and "infatuation," and those in "dire need" were likely to "succumb." Finding a "cure" or an "antidote" for those who were not "immune," and therefore most "susceptible," was simple. This was the purchase of at least one of the many commercial products associated with the exhibition, although it was considered crass or

tacky; by those who could afford to participate in the paradigm suggested by Art as Wealth.

Art as Volume

Perception of art as either a large amount or having great physical size emerges from descriptions of the "Treasures" exhibition. The exhibition as a whole is described as the "largest exhibition," "large and important," and having the "largest selection." Various objects in the exhibition are described in ways that make their physical size paramount: "tall and large," "huge," "most monstrous," "massive," and "magnitude." One such description clearly pointed to Art as Volume with the implication that larger is better in use of a prefacing statement of "despite its modest size." The large amount of space that the show occupied is viewed as evidence of its value as well. "The exhibition occupies two whole galleries," exclaimed one writer, while another commented similarly that the treasures "fill an entire gallery."

A variation on the theme of Art as Volume, but one that continues the basic metaphor, is the perception that

success of a show is determined by the numbers of people who view it. "Treasures of Tutankhamen" was the "most successful" exhibition because it produced "packed museums," "crammed buses," "large crowds," and "long . . . lines." The fact that the show "numbered more persons" became the criterion for judging its success to the exclusion of a number of equally valid options.

Art as Antiquity

Discourse surrounding the "Treasures" exhibition reveals a fourth metaphor that in turn affects perceptions of readers about and viewers of the show. Heavy emphasis placed on the objects' connection with history and antiquity suggests that art must be old and that anything contemporary is not as good or worth as much as art that is old. The fact that the objects in the show are "old," "ancient," and "historical" seems to give them a special value as works of art, reinforced through the frequent clustering of terms such as "antiquity," "time immemorial," "ancient history," "glorious past," and "remoteness in time." Because the objects are old, they become "classic," suggesting the criterion for judgment of an art form as whether it has survived through time, whether it is "permanent," "imperishable," in a "state of preservation," and "immortal." Discourse about the exhibition, because of its emphasis on age of the objects it contains, operates out of and prescribes the metaphorical assumption that good art is old.

Art as Superlative

Art is that which, for whatever reasons, surpasses or is superior to normal, everyday objects or experiences,

discourse about the exhibition suggests. That art goes far beyond the realm of the mundane can be seen in terms by which the objects are described: "masterpieces" and "masterworks." They are eligible for such titles by virtue of the fact that they are "famous," "great," "major," "important," "significant," and "outstanding." In addition, they are deemed superlative because they are unique or different from other objects. The exhibition is a "singular event" and "an experience they will not have again in their lifetime," in part because it is "phenomenal," "unusual," "unprecedented," and "unparalleled." At the root of the Art as Superlative metaphor lies the assumption that art is something rare, exceptional, unique, and divorced from our usual concern and experiences.

Art as Technique

A final metaphor that emerges from publicity about "Treasures of Tutankhamen" deals with Art as Technique. A basic assumption conveyed is that art is equated with craftsmanship and workmanship, and the best artist is one who best demonstrates technical skill in his or her particular endeavor. Content or creative aspects of the work of art are deemed of secondary importance by this metaphor. Descriptions of objects in the exhibition extol virtues of "exquisite craftsmanship," "extraordinary skill," "objects skillfully rendered," and "skill of the modeling." Two basic ingredients are seen as essential to Art as Technique: the work should have "delicate" and "precise" detail and should be a "lifelike" representation that conveys "exact likeness" and is, if at all possible, even "lifesize." Art becomes, in this metaphor, a duplicate of the real thing, and the closer an artist comes to copying the original in exact detail, the better the art is assumed to be.

Implications of the Metaphors for Perception of the Visual Arts

The six metaphors identified as operating in the discourse surrounding "Treasures of Tutankhamen"—art as entertainment, wealth, volume, antiquity, superlative, and technique—are assumed in and emerge from writings about the exhibition. Writers clearly saw the exhibition in terms of specific concepts and events, and thus their reviews

and reports reflected their metaphors. The influence of these six metaphors, however, goes beyond simple manifestation in publicity about this particular art exhibition. Metaphors assumed in and emerging from talking or writing about art create, or at least encourage, development of particular realities or perceptions of art in general, suggest to their audience methods of action with regard to art, and provide insights into individuals' motives for their actions concerning art. Examination of each of the metaphors for the "Treasures" exhibition illustrates possible effects on the public.

Art as Entertainment suggests that art is pleasing, enjoyable, and preferably beautiful; it is not something that should challenge or tax the viewer or make him or her question. It is best, then, if its message is obvious, as in a television show or a popular play in which the theme is clear and easily comprehended. When art is viewed as entertainment, the appropriate response for the audience is passivity and non-involvement. Art is something that other people put on; it is not something in which the average person participates, and it is encountered only on special occasions.

We already have seen how Art as Wealth leads to perception of art as the domain of an elite, upper class. The perceptions fostered by this metaphor continue even beyond this juxtaposition. Art is something that can be possessed only by wealthy people; in order to be art, it must cost a lot. In fact, good art becomes something with a high price. A fine print that costs only \$25.00, this metaphor suggests, cannot be of very high quality. Concomitant with this perception is the notion that art must be guarded carefully and kept in a secure place, which narrowly restricts the definition of art and excludes as possible forms of art the visual environment of buildings, streets, neighborhoods, and cities.

The metaphor of Art as Volume has several implications for perception of the visual arts. One often finds the conception that the larger a work of art, the more valuable it is. In a one-person show by a contemporary artist, for example, higher prices generally are accorded to larger works. While such a practice might seem natural, it does so only as a result of acceptance of this metaphor. Other metaphors, perhaps originality of the insights conveyed or

the place of the work in the artist's creative or professional development, would suggest ways other than size for determining the value of a work of art.

Art as Volume has other implications as well. The show that takes up the most space generally is regarded as more important than one that occupies less space. A show in the largest gallery of a museum is considered the major show, while one in a small gallery is seen as less important, although its quality may be superior. Finally, shows are judged by volume of responses they generate. If a show draws large crowds, it is successful, whether or not it is of high quality or affects viewers in any way. Even arts funding agencies rely on this metaphor when they ask, in their applications for grants, how many people will view the institution's shows or when evaluations of exhibitions and programs are based on the number who attended.

Art as Antiquity posits negative notions about the value of contemporary art. When art must be old to be good, no contemporary work can be seen as having as much value as art that comes from earlier periods. This conception is accompanied by the idea that just because a work of art has survived over many years or centuries, it is good. An object may exhibit poor skill and limited originality, but these are overlooked if it is old; it still is regarded as good art. Finally, Art as Antiquity elicits the view that good art must be rare and inaccessible. If one can buy a work of art easily, it certainly cannot be valuable since it has not demonstrated its survival capacity to show that it must be hoarded and guarded.

In Art as Superlative, art is removed from the everyday life of individuals. Set on a pedestal apart from the ordinary, art cannot be integrated into playing an essential function in life; it is a remote and rarely encountered aspect of life. This metaphor discourages consideration of aesthetic aspects of all things in our lives. In addition, this metaphor allows particular art objects to be promoted easily and billed as spectacular to the exclusion of others that may be of much higher quality. Many visitors to the Louvre, for example, bypass all other works of art to view the Mona Lisa, an exceptional work of art largely because it has been made famous through promotion. Response to art, as a result of this kind of activity, is dictated by others and develops outside of

the viewer. We thus tend to ignore or disbelieve our personal responses if they are not in accord with those of promoters of art.

Perpetuation of the metaphor of Art as Technique clearly affects responses of the general public to the visual arts. "What is it supposed to be?" viewers often ask as they stand before an abstract painting. The question arises from a context in which art is supposed to be a technical representation of something familiar. Such a view, of course, denies the value of non-representational art since it is not lifelike and detailed. In addition, the more realistically an art object captures a subject, the more highly it is regarded.

Art as Technique has other implications as well. It encourages a focus of attention on style and parts of a work rather than on content, response, and the gestalt of a work. A viewer whose attention is focused on the myriad of tiny dots in a Seurat painting, for example, often will have difficulty seeing or responding to the work holistically. Finally, an emphasis on technique celebrates time and self-discipline in art over the thought and creativity of the artist. If a work obviously took a great deal of time to complete or required self-control and discipline to fashion in a precise manner, its creative vision is overlooked or not even considered when making judgments about its value.

If we accept that metaphors create a frame of reference and structure experience, art teachers and others may want to examine carefully the metaphors used in their discourse about art. Some realities being created about the visual arts may be inappropriate to explicitly professed educational goals about art and may make achievement of such goals virtually impossible. By carefully directing our discourse (and thus the metaphors and thoughts of others) about the visual arts, we well may see a change in attitudes and actions of our students and the general public toward the visual arts. The results would have implications for aesthetic awareness in all aspects of life. ■

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Footnotes

¹The number of terms cited in this essay generates almost 200 items. Even with severely abbreviated citations, the end result appeared so unwieldy that the decision was made simply to list the articles and books that formed the basis for the classification scheme in the References section. Specific citations may be obtained from the authors.