For my wife Hilda

“if we, citizens, do not support our artists, then we sacrifice our imagination on the altar of crude reality and we end up believing in nothing and having worthless dreams.”

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*
contents

Preface v

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE THE ARTS AND HOW DO WE RESPOND TO AND EVALUATE THEM? 1

Chapter 2
PICTURES: DRAWING, PAINTING, PRINTMAKING, AND PHOTOGRAPHY 27

Chapter 3
SCULPTURE 69

Chapter 4
MUSIC 91

Chapter 5
THEATRE 118

Chapter 6
CINEMA 141

Chapter 7
DANCE 159

Chapter 8
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE 176

Chapter 9
ARCHITECTURE 195

Chapter 10
LITERATURE 226

GLOSSARY 250

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 271

INDEX 273
Perceiving the Arts has a specific and limited purpose: to provide an introductory, technical, and respondent-related reference to the arts and literature. Its audience comprises individuals who have little or no knowledge of the arts, and the book seeks to give those readers touchstones concerning what to look and listen for in works of art and literature. That purpose, attempted in such a short text, presents challenges because of the complexity of most artistic terminology and concepts. Many characteristics of the arts change (sometimes subtly and sometimes profoundly) as historical periods and styles change. Further, most artists do not paint, sculpt, compose, or write to neat, fixed formulas. For example, widely used terms like *symphony* have subtle connotations that restrict accurate definitions to specific historical contexts. Nonetheless, understanding begins with generalities, and the treatment of definitions and concepts in this text remains at that basic and general level. When a course requires more detailed and sophisticated understanding than the basic definitions provided here, an instructor can easily add those layers.

We can approach the arts in a variety of ways. One of those deals with the questions of what we can see and hear in works of art and what we can read in literature. *Perceiving the Arts* takes that approach and relates the arts to the perceptual process. To do that, we adapt Harry Broudy’s formulation of aesthetic response. Specifically, we can ask four questions about an art, an artwork, or a work of literature: (1) What is it? (a formal response); (2) How is it put together? (a technical response); (3) How does it appeal to the senses? (an experiential response); and (4) What does it mean? (a contextual and personal response). These questions constitute a consistent and workable means and comfortable springboard for approaching the arts at a basic level. Like any categorical device, however, this one has weaknesses. People don’t always agree on definitions of terms and concepts. Also, choices of what to include and exclude, and how best to illustrate, remain arbitrary.

A truly meaningful experience with the arts depends to a large degree on skills of perception. Developing discriminating perception and getting the most from a relationship with the arts begins with knowing what to see and what to hear. Introducing the aesthetic experience through terminology gains credence from the College Board statement on “Academic Preparation for College,” which emphasizes use of “the appropriate vocabulary” as fundamental. Vocabulary isolates characteristics of what to see and what to hear in individual works of art and helps focus perceptions and responses. Knowing the difference between polyphony and homophony, between a suite and a concerto, between prints and paintings, and between fiction and poetry is as important as knowing the difference between baroque and romantic, iconoclasm and cubism.

Everyone can access the arts. This text illustrates the depth of approachability provided by our current perceptual skills. This step, however, comprises only the beginning.
Preface

I hope the understanding and confidence (empowerment, if you will) readers develop makes them want to study and involve themselves with the arts over a lifetime.

This book originated as a text for an interdisciplinary course in aesthetic perception. I designed the text as an information sourcebook and it should prove flexible enough to serve any course that examines more than one artistic discipline. Its information is basic and more easily presented in a text than in a lecture. Those with expansive backgrounds can read it rapidly, pausing to fill in the holes in their understanding. Those who have no or little experience with the arts can spend the necessary time memorizing. Thus, classroom time can utilize expanded illustration, discussion, analysis, and experience of actual works. This book should not affect readers’ or instructors’ personal philosophies about the arts and literature. For example, when theories, philosophies, or definitions differ, we provide an overview. We might compare this text to a dictionary in a writing course.

This eighth edition contains several obvious as well as subtle changes. To assist readers in approaching unfamiliar works of art, a feature called “A Question to Ask” appears several times in each chapter. Like the kinds of questions we ask new acquaintances in casual social settings, these questions provide a means of approaching a work of art in order to begin to know it more fully. A second feature, “A Question of Style,” replaces the feature “A Matter of Style” from the previous edition. The change replaces a full-page exposition on one style with several short pieces covering several styles and related to illustrations in the text. This allows a wider introduction to artistic styles than previously possible and does so with less interruption to the flow of the text. The Glossary also contains numerous additional descriptions of styles.

With regard to textual flow, I have given this edition a heavy edit in order to improve clarity and to reduce the passive voice so adored by scholastics and abhorred by readers. In addition, Chapter 11 moves to the Introduction, where it appeared in previous editions. Chapter 2 expands by additional text and illustrations in printmaking and photography. Chapter 4, Music, has several changes to the text and organization that should make the material more accessible. Chapter 7, Dance, has new text and illustrations as well. Chapter 10 comprises a major revision and reorganization that should enhance appeal, readability, and understanding. The Glossary has been expanded significantly and takes a unique step by providing pronunciation for every term.

When the first edition of Perceiving the Arts appeared in 1978, Ellis Grove wrote the chapter on film, and Don Girouard wrote the chapter on landscape architecture. Both gentlemen patiently adapted their ideas to my organizational scheme. Twenty-seven years later, the material in those chapters remains basically true to their original concepts. I have, however, made many changes in style and content. Thus, whatever faults may now appear in these chapters belong to me.

Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Hilda, to whom this book is dedicated, for her patience, editorial and critical assistance, and love.

D. J. S.