

Picture art



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Probably everyone appreciates a representation of something dear, as their newborn babies? Though other than the child's relatives may not be attracted by the picture.



It is probably also common to appreciate photos of places that matter much.



Those who are not connected to Stockholm, however, do probably require more from the picture, to give them something positive.

A picture of the, probably in the eyes of many, fine houses in the Old Town may appeal to more than just Stockholm lovers, even if the houses are depicted on a cloudy day.



Adorable landscapes might give some observers a positive feeling, even if they have no connection to the place.



The theory is supported by the participants¹ in this study since they, in median, ranked landscapes the highest along with pictures of people (table 1).

Table 1. The participants' rankings of a number of scene modes for shooting.

| <i>What motive do you prefeer? Rank, 5= best.</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking |
|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| Landscapes | 5 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Flowers | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Naked bodies | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Towns | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| People | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 |

Though "artistic" photos, i.e. those sold in the photo galleries, rarely have beautiful landscapes as the motif.

Wonder why? Maybe because anyone who is in the picturesque location with a suitable camera, would take about as good pictures. Which in turn results in photographic artists who take pictures of landscapes have difficulty getting their pictures sold. Unlike if he/she takes photos of things that no one have thought to depict and somehow manage to make it beautiful.

For example, of the 261 photographic works that were sold at Stockholm city's art auction the May 4, 2011 only 5% depicted a landscape (table 2 in the Swedish original text). Instead most of them (49%) portrayed people. And photos of people were also best paid, at least if they depicted persons were famous or naked, although there probably were only very few of the buyers who had any personal connection to the photographed subjects.

¹. Four men and three women were asked to participate in the study, and all said yes. The average age was 43 years (median: 46 years, min - max: 37 - 50 years) and they had varying levels of education, occupation, income, family and housing conditions.

One reason could be that the art photography market does not reflect the general opinion. Participants in this study were asked to rate a selection of the photographs that were sold (table 3), with no other basis than copies of the pictures. The results indicate that this, to some extent, is true.

Table 3. The participants' rankings of copies of five selected photos.

| <i>Rank which of those pictures you foremost would like to buy (5= first chice)</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking | Final price- |
|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|--------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | |
| Ingrid Bergmans upper body without clothes . black/white foto by Åke Lange. | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 21 000 |
| Light throug a skylight in a factory taken by Emil Heilborn. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 18 000 |
| Broken glasses on a white back ground by Gunnar Smoliansky. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 15 000 |
| Naked body parts by Eva Klasson. | 1 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 9 000 |
| A can of soda and a bottle with a car in the back ground colour photo by Tunbjörk. | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 6 000 |

What does the general public think is an art photo? Participants were asked to rank a number of more or less commonplace images from an artistic perspective.



According to those interviewed in this study, photo number four and five are the most artistic (table 4) or in other words, perhaps the least un-artistic. The results indicate that an odd motive like cooked macaroni, loses against the standard motifs such as Stockholm a beautiful winter day (picture 4).

Table 4. The participants' rankings of the photographs above.

| <i>Which of those 6 pictures are the most artistic rank 6= best</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking |
|---|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| Picture 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Picture 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Picture 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Picture 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 5 |
| Picture 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 5 |
| Picture 6 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 |

73% of the photographic works at the studied public auction was black and white. Does that mean the photos are generally more artistic if they are black and white? The majority of participants in this study do not appear to believe that it generally is the case, because they found the three subjects below, looks best in colour (14 of a total of 21 votes were for the colour photos).



Some of the photos that were sold at the auction depicted only a small part of a larger object, such as a portion of a door with a little bit of the facade. Does that mean the detail images are generally more artistic than whole images? According to the results, it can be so because of the two pictures below, 10 of totally 14 votes was in favour for that the detail was more artistic than the "big picture."



What is it that the public consider to be the most important in a photographic work, and why does some people pay so much for them, even though everyone can take photos themselves? The majority of the participants (4 of 7) felt that the most important thing is the motive (table 5). But there was disagreement about why some people pay so much money for photography's that others have taken (table 6). The most common response (3 of 7) was that it's trendy/modern to have exclusive photography's.

Table 5. The most important thing in a photographic work, according to the participants in this study.

| <i>What is the most important in a artistic photo? Rank 7= most imp.</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking |
|--|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| Sharp details | 6 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| The combinations of colours | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| The colours | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| The motive | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| The feeling | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| The message | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 3 |

Table 6. The participants' answers to the question in the table header.

Why do some people pay so much for photographs?

Trendy.

Dont know.

Dont know, maybe because the motive is a celebrity or a celebrity has taken it.

Trendy.

Trendy.

Partly because they collect it and it has a value and partly because they like photos.

They have so much money, investment.

Jus as regarding photography, everybody can to some degree paint, but far from all can create paintings that appeal to others. What is needed to lift a painting to real arts?

According to those who participated in this study, the colour combinations, the colours and the subject are the most important features to consider, to determine if a painted work is good (table 7). This since they in median ranked the motive higher than the feeling and the message, suggests to some extent that they believe that it is relatively important that paintings depict something. Though they thought it is more important with feelings than photo-like images (because sharp details along with the message were ranked lowest).

Table 7. Participants' rankings of a number of properties for painted artwork.

| <i>What is the most important in a painting? Rank 7= most imp.</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking |
|--|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| Sharp details | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 2 |
| The combinations of colours | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| The colours | 6 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| The motive | 4 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| The feeling | 3 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 3 |
| The message | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 2 |

A review of the first 150 art pieces at Auktionsverkets auction of contemporary works April 13, 2011 (table 8 in the Swedish original text) showed that most of the paintings depict something, without being "photographic" images. The 18 works that did not depict anything (the non-figurative) was on average cheaper than the figurative, which also indicates that a painting should preferably depict something. In contrast to my speculation above, the photo-like images were more popular than other categories because they were on average sold for more money than all other types, except paintings of a city/house and those who depicted flowers.

A reasonable assumption is that the higher the price the painting reaches at the auction the better/more meaningful it is. To investigate the hypothesis, the participants were asked to rank a selection of ten paintings in different styles, with a large spread in the final price, without any information on the works, in addition to a picture of each of them. They, however, ranked several of the cheapest paintings higher than much more expensive ones and the most expensive was by the majority ranked the lowest or second lowest (table 9). It suggests that some paintings are not expensive because many find it particularly appealing.

Table 9. The participants' ranking of the ten selected pieces from the auction and their final price.

| <i>Rank the following 10 paintings so that 10= the best</i> | Participant number | | | | | | | Median ranking | Final price |
|---|--------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----------------|-------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | |
| Simply painted upper body of a boy, by Sigrid Hjertén. | 5 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 5 | 320 000 |
| Naive Stockholm motive with sailing ships painted by Einar Jolin. | 9 | 3 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 360 000 |
| Un-descibable, a number of pieces in different colours by Gösta Adrian-Nilsson (GAN). | 6 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 220 000 |
| Old Stockholm view over the roof tops by Carl Einar Fredriksson. | 8 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 14 000 |
| A few things on a zink painted by Einar Jolin.. | 7 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 16 000 |
| A few trinagles in different colours by Olle Baertling. | 4 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 650 000 |
| Many trinagles in different colours by Bertil Öhlund. | 3 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 13 000 |
| Naked woman in a couch by Isaac Grünewald. | 2 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 7 | 75 000 |
| Skater who looks weird painted by GAN. | 1 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 350 000 |
| An "impossible" geometry of squares by Oscar Reutersvärd. | 10 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 27 000 |

One explanation for the differences in ranking between participants and between participants' median ranking and final prices, could be that there are different aesthetic values. Take these five cups for coffee as an example:



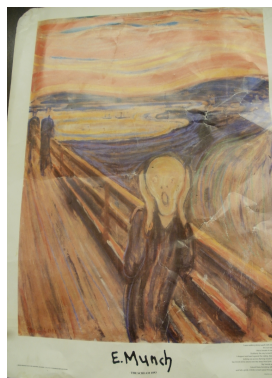
Person A is delighted by the naive style and therefore considers the first of the examples to be the finest. B is, perhaps for nostalgic reasons, fond of 50th century aesthetics and therefore thinks that cup # 2 is the most beautiful.

C likes to follow what is fashionable and thus, in the current situation, consider number three to be the hottest.

D thinks that frailty is nice and therefore he/she considers the thin-walled cup with a flower to be the most beautiful one.

E likes flowers and the colour blue, and therefore he/she prefer the fifth cup.

Alternatively, our perceptions of various works of art are rooted in feelings that they generate. As Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream", which probably can give anyone anxiety.



And judging by the responses to the issue described in table 10 of the Swedish version of this book, it seems like painted works convey different emotions to different observers. Perhaps it was so that those who participated in the bidding at the auction, for some reason, felt more affected than the average person by the object they bought.

Another possible explanation is that more expensive works has other qualities that make them more meaningful. But the participants in this study had a far from common view of the possible qualities that the works had (table 11 in the Swedish version).

This suggests that also the perception of paintings qualities is highly personal. Additionally another possible explanation for the price difference is that those buyers who pay a lot are looking for investments that they think they can recoup in a number of years.

But in general, investments in Swedish art are no brilliant deal². Since they only generate an average return on a few percent per year from the mid 80's and some 20 year thereafter. An investment with related risks such as that it can be stolen, bleached by the sun or degenerate in other ways.

Perhaps those who buy art, has realized that it is not a brilliant investment. Though they ignore it because they believe that a painting fits so well with the rest of the decor that it's worth the money.



Selection of image details in Dagens Nyheter residential annex 2012-01-05.

Which to some extent was confirmed by the participants in this study, because two of them said that the purpose of art is to decorate (table 12). Several, however, gave answers meaning that it shall touch the viewer, and it can't reasonably be in line with the idea that it shall match the rest of the decorations.

Table 12. The participants' answers to the question in the table header.

What do you think is the purpose of picture art?

Memories, it shall be beautyfull.

That it concerns.

It shall make you happy, one shall get happy when looking at it.

Decoration, something to rest your eyes on.

Affect society and the beholder, decorate.

It shall touch the beholder.

It shall be beautyfull and have a message.

². Andersson E, Bjorkman H (2007) KONST SOM INVESTERING – En studie av investeringar i svenska kvalitetsmålningar under perioden 1985-2006, Examensarbete på Handelshögskolan i Stockholm.