

# Preface

For centuries, the arts and life were interwoven. In fact, just as indigenous societies do not have a word that equates to “fine art,” ancient civilizations did not view the objects now on view in art museums as something separate from daily life. Despite the best intentions of museums, art centers, galleries, and art fairs, the contemporary art world often fails to engage the larger public. We use the word “museum” without considering its historical meaning—a place or temple dedicated to the Muses. As the patron divinities of Greek mythology, Muses were invoked and provided the inspiration for a work. To truly understand the arts, we must consider our historical beliefs, their role in life and civilization, and their continuing value in human experience.

As the arts are central to human life, there must be a return to the marriage of life and art. This is particularly important in a world where so many live largely virtual lives, interacting with the world through devices, allowing artificial intelligence to direct and advise us, and relating to others through avatars. Our communications utilize devices that allow for filters and tools to improve imagery, with our thoughts and feelings conveniently provided by pre-designed stickers and emojis. We connect with each other in cyberspace to share ourselves as we want to be experienced, more often than we gather physically, where our eyes and body language can reveal our truths.

Where music was once a means of human interaction, today we dance to computer generated beats and synthesized instruments, singing along with vocals that have been “fixed” with pitch-correction software. We view and create art through



the lens of smart phones and computers—experiencing masterpieces as digitally reconstructed surrogates. As physical beings dependent upon the natural world and sensual experience, the physicality of art is central to the feeding of mind and spirit.

This book exists to share the exceptional art that is being created today in media that humans have utilized for centuries in diverse cultures and civilizations. Paint, clay, wood, fiber, glass and metal have defined and expanded human identity

**ABOVE** Beatrice Wood, *Luster Chalice*, luster-glazed ceramic, 12" h × 10" dia, Permanent Collection: Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/Happy Valley Foundation. Gift of Robert Rheem

and the experience of life on this planet. For the most part, this book shares the arts through the voices of artists who continue to explore these creative approaches—some keeping traditions alive, and others adapting to new technologies and materials.

A number of artists have supplied not only images of works, but also insight into their processes and what drives them as artists. The presentation of these images and information might seem occasionally arbitrary, but this is out of necessity. Humanity is diverse, the realm of ideas is expansive, and the arts have a logic of their own.

In the pages that follow, we will explore how the visual arts have served humanity, how perception has changed over the centuries, and—most importantly—why it is vital that we are engaged with the arts, whether as viewer, participant, supporter, or creator. I hope that you enjoy this journey through art history, the contemporary art world, and our shared humanity.



**ABOVE** Beatrice Wood, 1908, Photographer unknown

**LEFT** Charles Meynier (French, Paris 1768–1832 Paris), *The Muse Erato Writing Verses Inspired by Love*, ca. 1797, Pen and black ink, brush and gray wash, heightened with white gouache over black chalk underdrawing; squared in black chalk, 18.125" h × 13.0625" w, Permanent Collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art

