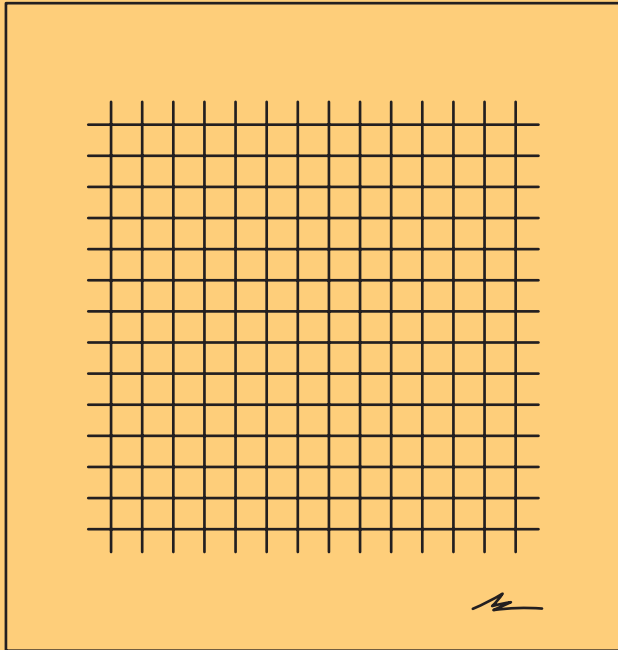


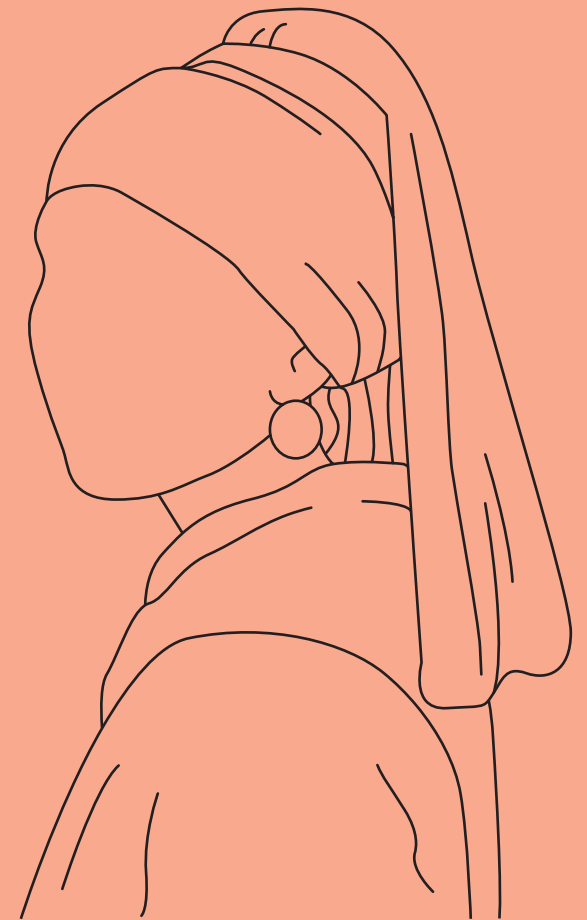
# What Adults Don't Know About Art



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## You and Art



You might not know it, but you have probably been interested in art for a long time.

Perhaps it began one afternoon when you were in the kitchen. You got some coloured pens and a big sheet of paper and you drew something like this:

Drawing by Stacey, aged 6



You really enjoyed colouring the clouds blue and you were pleased with the yellow house. Dad stuck it up on the fridge door. He said he liked his hairstyle in the picture.

Or maybe the first art you really liked was a picture in a book, like this one:

Judith Kerr, *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*, 1968



You thought it would be fun to be there with a big friendly tiger drinking from a teapot.

Probably no one told you these were art.

That is a pity, because they are art — and they are fun, interesting and important to you. Instead, when you first heard about art it was probably about things that seemed very different to these: more complicated and not really connected to you.

Maybe you went to a museum or gallery when you were on holiday or on a school trip.

A visit to an art gallery



The museum was huge and there were lots of people — you kept worrying someone was going to bump into you. Nobody said very much and when they talked they spoke quietly, as if this was a very special place where you had to be on your best behaviour. You were told you weren't allowed to run about or make a noise.

There might have been lots of different pictures on the walls that you couldn't make much sense of.

Maybe you saw one like this:

Andrea del Sarto, Madonna of the Harpies, 1517



Looking at this picture, you might wonder why that little boy's mum is standing on a carved stone, or why the children with wings are holding her legs. Is she going to fall off?



Or perhaps you saw something a bit like this:

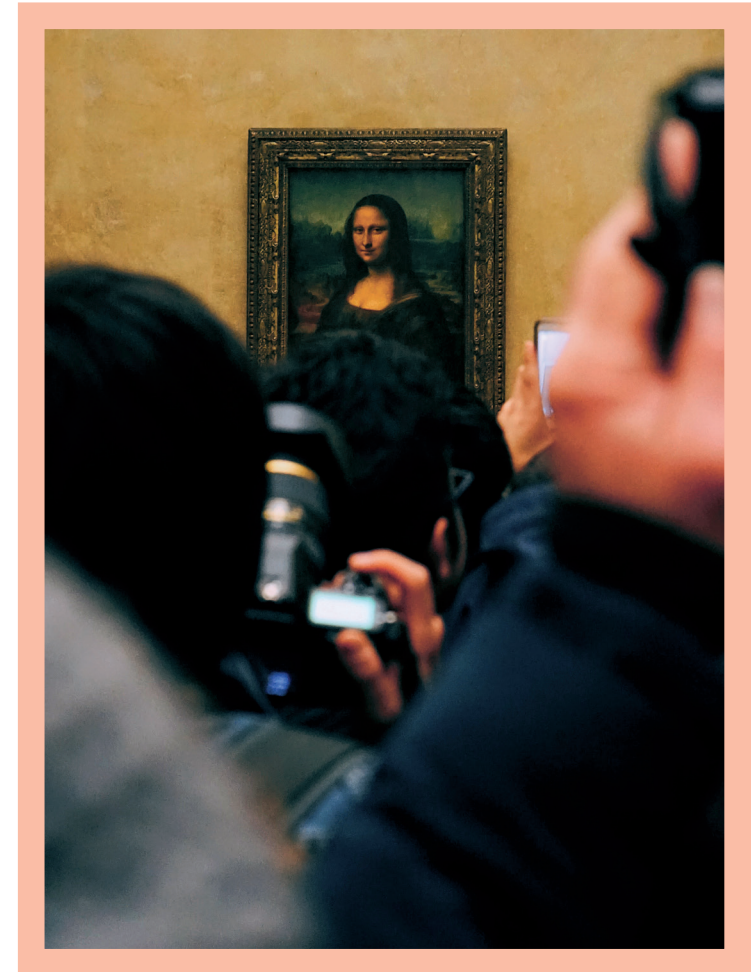


Constantin Brancusi, *Fish*, 1926

It sort of looks like a table... but don't try putting a glass of orange juice on it or else an alarm will ring and the guards will be very angry!

Though it looks like furniture, this is art, too. A lot of art is pictures and paintings, but there are plenty of other kinds of art too, like sculpture and textiles and installation.

Most of the time, though, when you were in the museum, you just saw the backs of people who were standing in the way.

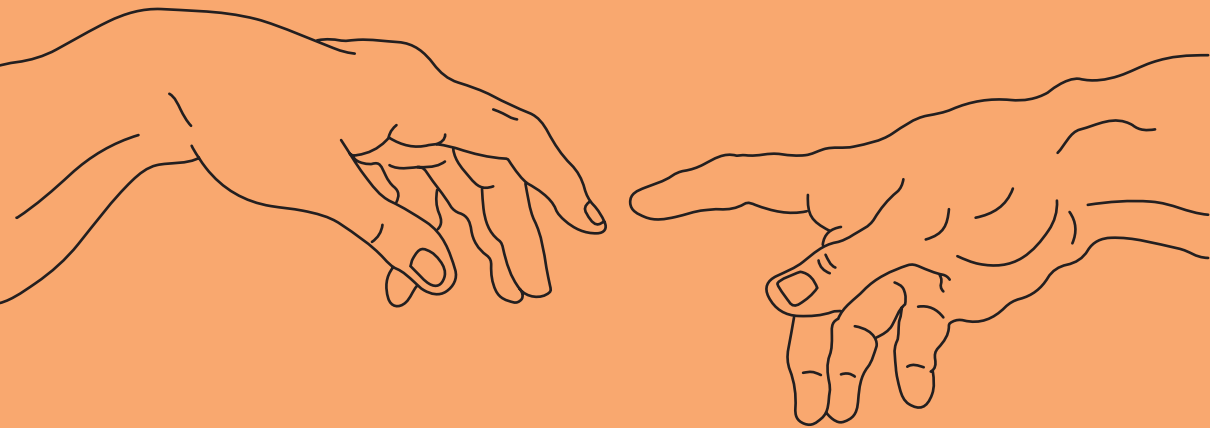


Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c.1503–1519  
At the Louvre, Paris

Grown-ups want you to go to art galleries and museums — even if they do not go to them very often themselves. They like it if your school organises a trip to a museum.

# The Big Question No One Answers

[Until Now]



If you ask a grown-up, ‘Is art important?’ they’ll probably say:

Yes, it’s very important.

But suppose you ask a *big* question. Suppose you ask:

**Why is it important?**

What might an adult say if you ask this question? Perhaps they might say:

Because it’s very old.

But this is not a very good answer, because a stone is very old too — actually much, much older than any work of art — and they don’t ask you to go and admire a pebble. They might say:

Because it looks so real.

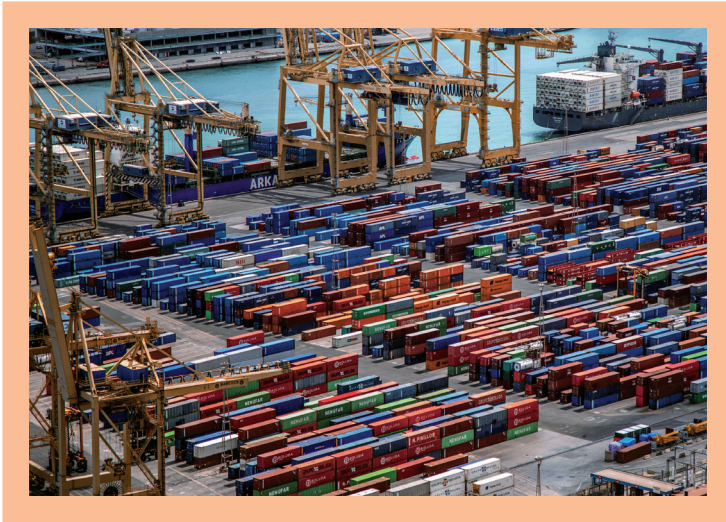
But that is not a great answer either. All the photos on your phone look real too, and they’re always telling you to get off your phone. And anyway, lots of art doesn’t look very real at all. Or they could say:

Because it costs a lot.

But that’s not convincing at all: the most expensive art in the world costs about the same as an oil tanker and most art costs much less than that. But grown-ups don’t go around saying

how wonderful oil tankers are or have special places in the middle of big cities where you can go and look at them, and they never worry that your school doesn't spend enough time teaching you about container vessels.

Parc de Montjuïc, Barcelona, Spain



In short, if you really ask a grown-up *why* art is important, they probably wouldn't be able to give you a very good answer.\*

But maybe it's not very fair to expect all grown-ups to know why art is important. There are lots of things the grown-ups you know don't understand, but that doesn't mean there is not a good answer. They don't know (really) how their phone works, but someone, somewhere, knows perfectly well.

\* An adult might be surprised if you ask this because hardly any one does ask this question, even though it's a pretty obvious thing to ask, once you think about it.

So perhaps, instead, the answer could be in a book about art. There are lots of books about art, so surely one of them must cover it. But actually, most art books do not tell you why art matters. They tell you: *what the famous pictures are*.

But this isn't a huge help. Just because something is famous doesn't mean you should be interested in it. It would be a bit of a surprise if the grown-ups said:

We have to take some trips to visit famous airports!  
We'll start with Heathrow and then maybe go and see Schiphol, it's one of the most famous airports in Europe.

Or imagine if your mum said:

I want to go to Chile so I can see the Escondida copper mine, it's the most famous copper mine in the world!

Escondida copper mine, Chile

