

## **“Reading Literature Through Painting: Understanding the narrative of Spanish civil war through a Novel by Hemingway and Painting by Picasso”**

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### **Abstract**

**Literature** as an art is a way in which we can capture and interpret what has happened and is happening to us personally and to the world, as a whole. The relation Art and literature had with reality in the past is missing today. If literature is the eye of the society painting could become its retina to form a clear image. But today the messages of an artist are either missing or confusing and so there is an urgent need to revive the perspectives.

‘**Narrative Art**’ as a technique is a way to revive Art and connect it to society and culture to understand literature and thereby the society in any period. Narrative in literature and painting creates a link between art and literature. It needs to be stressed today for; it is capable of communicating a clear picture of the society, as a ‘whole’, which is ‘missing’ today.

**Keywords-** Literature, Narrative art, Painting, communication, art.

## INTRODUCTION

*“I don't say everything, but I paint everything”- Picasso*

“Every piece of art like a painting is an invitation to delve into the imaginative world of an artist, in search of beauty and truth. Standing in front of great paintings, you cannot help but feel moved and not to mention immensely awed by the profundity of expression. To sail through a complex medium like painting it becomes important to understand the aesthetic value of an object (be it a text or a painting) which in turn opens the window of perception for us.”<sup>1</sup> Once these perspectives are built, it becomes an interesting and instrumental task to read anything anyway, even through the medium of painting. M.H Abrams traces the concept of Aestheticism with respect to its historical importance as follows:

“In his Latin treatise entitled *Aesthetica* (1750), the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten applied the term “aesthetica” to the arts...In present usage, Aesthetics (from the Greek,” pertaining to sense perception”) designates the systematic study of all the fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial.” (Abrams, p.3)

Since Aestheticism was a European phenomenon in the second half of the twentieth century having its headquarters in France, there are French writers who gradually developed the idea about the works of art. On such basis ,this research derive that any work of art is of the utmost importance because it is beyond any humanly experience and doesn't have any over-arching moral order on it, a painting therefore becomes an appropriate mode of study because of its

unconditional and subjective permanence. A rallying cry of aestheticism thus became the phrase—“art for art’s sake”. The scholars define aesthetics as "critical reflection on art, culture and nature." This paper throws light upon the idea of beauty based on our perception that we make after looking at a piece of art outwardly, as follows in this painting:



Now, the question is- What does this work means? What exactly defines beauty? Does it only strike me through its beauty or to the rest of the world too? Any artwork, which has the capability to evoke similar emotions in wider audience, is a work of aesthetics; a work of beauty because what ultimately seem beautiful are “attractive” and this attraction could come from a sensory experience that the onlooker undergoes. This project entails studying literary values of a piece of art through an aesthetic medium of painting. It is a belief that it would help in making the communication through literature better by creating a deeper understanding for humanity. The idea is to make the reader realise, why an artwork becomes a “Timeless Masterpiece”. Creating and expressing ones' self through various media, such as art and literature, has been a

desire of humankind since the beginning of time. As an art form, literature express humankind's deepest observations, most profound thinking and firmest beliefs, it encompasses many genres such as drama, poetry and novels. While both the physical arts and literature are a form of self-expression each has its own limitations .One might be good in reading literature but not as good in understanding other art forms like painting. So, communication through these mediums of expression remains limited to one who could understand it well.

The **first chapter** of this paper explores the relationship between different forms of art and how, one can study a narrative through painting. A belief, which is hold in this chapter, is that how a story can be told if we take paintings, which belong to a classical era in our Indian traditional context, and the painting that belong to Picasso's artistic tradition. The paintings themselves render a whole interweaving of cultures and speaking louder than words. A narrative only validates to its nomenclature once it is accepted as a text, which tells the reader a story, and if the text is replaced by illustrations, it can build a strong narrative. However, literature uses verbal signs to communicate whereas painting takes help of visual devices like icons and symbols. Each medium of expression has its own limitations but if we combine both mediums to understand each other it may help in understanding it better. Since there are different interpretations that exist pertaining to the same artwork, reading or understanding them in any one way is not possible .But a common understanding of it possible by comparing and contrasting these interpretations.

In the second chapter, an attempt is made to form a link with the literary aspects from the novel 'For Whom The Bell Tolls' by Earnest Hemingway and Picasso's painting 'Guernica'. It focuses

upon elaborating the understanding of the Spanish Civil War by comparing the painting and reading of the novel, which would eventually explore the difference in the images that came to my mind after this comparative analysis.



**'Guernica' by Picasso**

In chapter 3, of my dissertation I have reflected upon the contemporary relation of painting and literature. I have tried to re-emphasize upon the importance of art and literary values in a culture and society, where art should be revived and needs to be looked at philosophically if needed. Therefore I have quoted some important writers (critical literary theorists) who through their

works have proved the significance of art to be righteous and a requisite for the society beyond time and space.

## **Chapter-1**



### **“Painting as a Narrative in itself”**

Meaning and form of these aesthetic mediums (literature as well as painting) has changed, from classical to post-modernism, from society to individual, from outside to inside. These are just individual perceptions and expressions are active and working well, but the flaw lies in the process of communication which has forgotten its role and responsibility, that is to present a clear and comprehensive image of society, to have a universal appeal (like in *Guernica* which I'll be discussing later) that it is missing in all artworks today. It is true that the art reveals the otherwise hidden ideas and impulses of a society and also many suppressed thoughts and feelings are vented through the various art forms like theatre, music etc. amid these mediums. Nevertheless, Painting is the one that stands out. Painting, in itself is a significant phenomenon, which very fruitfully helps one in reflecting beyond the already existing planes, because it creates a narrative of its own. A narrative in painting provides it a literary value and the illustration acts as a variable, which manifests itself into the mood, temporality, space and texture of the onlooker itself. A painting can be called an amalgamation of thoughts (be suppressed/expressive), desires (be them rational/fantastical), joys, sorrows, dreams (daydreams/nightmares) and the limit to which a human mind can work. Such a blend of these indispensable elements if are laid down on a white canvas, the product that comes out is called a painting, more precisely a painting having a narrative in itself.

In contemporary context, there is a need when Painting as a narrative should be revived. In the Sikh Cultural Tradition, there are paintings, which narrate a story to the beholder. In fact, it narrates a story, through a sequence of paintings. However, the use of narrative technique was evident in paintings much prior to Sikh paintings, as in Mahabharata and Ramayana., which becomes symbolic as they are today in Hinduism. For instance:



**The Riding chariot from Mahabharata**



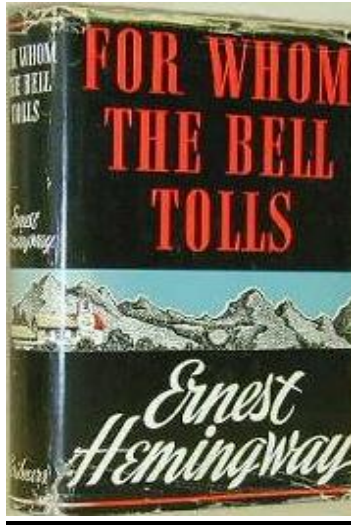
**Draupati "Cher Haran" from Mahabharata**



It is one of the best technique to understand the possibilities that exist in literature. In this manner, paintings did create the essential link between itself and literature. Moreover, today it needs to be revived, for these paintings just do not narrate only an incident but also becomes a representative of the historical conditions. Therefore, this medium does fill in the gap between the historical scenario and the mythical representation of it.

## CHAPTER 2

### Understanding the narrative of Spanish civil war through Literature and Painting



### **An Analysis of Hemingway's "*For Whom the Bell Tolls*" (1940)**

#### **Introduction**

Civil War Spain in May, 1937: The Mountains near Segovia. "For Whom the Bell Tolls" revolves around bombing of a steel bridge by Robert Jordan (a guerilla), to fight against the fascist army to get back their freedom, their territory, their land. It is filled with a number of themes and images which sketches the whole war. The narration successfully showcases the change that was coming in 'Human values' as a result of industrialization, technology and modernism. It expresses Hemingway's growing distaste for modern warfare. He explains this perspective using objects that we can easily associate with war. This connection makes this novel a true literary classic.

## The 'Loss' in War

- Psychological or physical innocence to the war- Joaquin loses both his parents and which forces him to grow up quickly, while Maria loses her physical innocence when a group of Fascist soldiers rapes her. Similarly, Robert Jordan becomes cynical about the Republican cause and loses much of his initial idealism.
- Loss in the innocence of belief- Hemingway shows in the novel that the sides of right and wrong are almost never clear-cut. It is not as heroic as a war novel is expected, which makes the reader aware about the reality of war. There is no sense of glorious victory in battle, no sense of triumph or satisfaction that good prevails and evil is defeated.
- Loss of human values- Anselmo hates killing people in all circumstances, although he will do so if he must. Pablo, on the other hand, accepts killing as a part of his life and ultimately demonstrates that he is willing to kill his own men just to take their horses. Robert Jordan's position about killing falls somewhere between Anselmo's and Pablo's positions. Although Robert Jordan doesn't like to think about killing, he has killed many people in the line of duty. His personal struggle with this question ends on a note of compromise. It also gives an impression about 'loss of dignity' by showing the success of modern weapons like planes tanks, mortars and machine guns and horses as old weapon of weak and losers. It also highlights the fact that physical strength is no more required to win a war and that power should be there no matter in what form to win the war. Dignity, which marked the honest game and equality of strength, is no more left.

### **Hunters and predators**

Rabbit and squirrel as an Animal imagery appear most frequently in the novel. Robert Jordan calls Maria with nickname “Rabbit.” When Robert Jordan first meets Rafael, the gypsy is making traps for rabbits, which could be associated with the fragile position of the guerrillas relative to the Fascists, which Hemingway underscores. Throughout the novel, we get the impression. Robert Jordan and his band are prey rather than predators. Like rabbits, the guerrilleros live in close contact with the natural world: they are a small, vulnerable group, in sharp contrast to the well-equipped Fascists with their incessant industrial war machinery. The use of the plane in Hemingway's work is symbolic of the modern technology of today. They are used to contrast the old world with the new.

### **Closeness, attachment and relationship of a soldier with the land-**

For Whom the Bell Tolls opens with Robert Jordan lying “flat on the brown pine-needled floor of the forest.” Toward the end of the novel, Robert Jordan assumes his post as he awaits the start of the attack on the bridge. Once again he is “on his belly behind the pine trunk” .“His literal closeness to the earth highlights the natural, pre-civilized lifestyle that the guerrilla fighters lead in the wilderness. Robert Jordan takes this position one final time, at the very end of the novel, when he again lies behind a tree and feels “his heart beating against the pine needle floor the forest.” Comparing his position at the end of the novel to his almost identical position at the beginning creates a circular motion in the narrative. There is a new element at the end—his beating heart, he could feel at the end before aiming the last shot. This ‘heart beat ‘could be

related to as being close to nature ,close to oneself which reawakened his love for life, land and duty through his relationships with Maria.

### **Signs and Omens**

Robert Jordan's framing of other people's behaviors as good signs or bad signs in the monologues undermines his claim not to believe in omens. At the end of the novel, however, as Robert Jordan faces death and comes to terms with his life, he grudgingly admits that gypsies do indeed "see something . . . feel something."

**Spirit of Life Vs Suicide-** Throughout '*For Whom the Bell Tolls*', Hemingway characterizes suicide as an act of cowardice by associating it with characters who are vulnerable or lack strength of spirit. Robert Jordan's father committed suicide that Robert Jordan contemplates and connects to weakness. Maria carries around a razor blade for the same purpose. At the end of the novel, Robert Jordan contemplates suicide but rejects the idea, preferring to struggle to stay awake despite the pain. Robert Jordan's reliance on inner strength in his rejection of suicide

### **Absinthe**

Robert Jordan's frequent drinking of absinthe (a green liqueur flavored with anise, a substance similar to licorice) relates to a way to forget the dreadful reality for some time and enjoy life no matter how cruel or difficult it becomes.

## COMPARITIVE ANALALYSIS WITH PICASSO’S PAINTING “GUERNICA”

*“Art usually implies no function other than to convey or communicate an idea.”*

### BASIC INFORMATION

“ On 26 April 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, the Basque town of Guernica was the scene of the "Bombing of Guernica" by the Condor Legion of Nazi Germany's Luftwaffe. The Germans were attacking to support the efforts of Francisco Franco to overthrow the Basque Government and the Spanish Republican government. The town was devastated, though the Biscayan assembly and the Oak of Guernica survived. Pablo Picasso painted his mural sized Guernica to commemorate the horrors of the bombing.”<sup>1</sup>

“Understanding Art is a difficult process and so needs careful and strategical analysis to interpret it, both in terms of meaning and function. In this discussion about understanding, Guernica by Pablo Picasso, **de la Croix and Tansey** suggests a method to examine what is visible in the painting. The transformation of visual information into conclusion about content is a richly complex creative process that is often behind the view as it is here”.<sup>2</sup>

“Let us try to understand the painting including all these parts in a comprehensive way by the following Method.

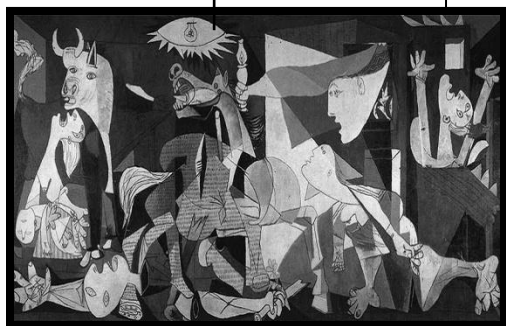
**AN APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND AND DECODE A PAINTING**

**BASIC INFORMATION:**

Picasso, Guernica, 1937 (size, medium and conditions should be listed) for the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris international Exposition.

**FUNCTION:**

To protest the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War (to persuade)



**CONTEXT:** External/About the Artistic Environment : reflects the current events of Spanish Civil War and the brutality of Fascism rising in Europe at that time.

Interpretative/about later Judgments': An indictment of the evils of modern totalitarian and a reminder of the atrocities of modern warfare.

Internal/about the Artist's psychology : registers a patriotic reaction to the bombing of Guernica, a protest and a desire to affirm the basic worth of individual human beings

**SUBJECTS AND IMAGERY**

**Factual And Expressive Aspects:** figures of a lead warrior, a horse, a bellowing bull with bits of recognizable architecture in flames; frenzied and bereaved townspeople with expressions of fear and grief; reinforced by exaggerated gestures

**CONVENTIONAL ASPECTS:** The bull drew from Spanish tradition of the bullfight and Mediterranean myths of the minotaur symbolizing the irrational makes the imagery into an allegory of Spain's plight at the hands

**FORMS: DOMINANT DYNAMICS/PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION**

Movement is emphasized through diagonal lines and repeated lines, yet the dominating central triangle; strong contrast in values and imagery as well as distortions pervade the work; complexity (variety) is emphasized.

**DOMINANT ELEMENTS:** an achromatic painting in black, white and grays; lines are not descriptive of natural appearance but are angular and distort features; many shapes of geometric planes appear throughout.

**FORMAL CONVENTIONS- CUBIST CHARACTERISTICS**

**Iconographic conventions.**

(imagery)

Fig.1 F of Fascists.

**MAIN COMPONENTS TO UNDERSTAND AN ARTWORK”<sup>2</sup>**

fig<sup>1</sup> - main components to understand an artwork (Gardner's Art through the ages

by Helen Gardner, Horst De la Croix, Richard G. Tansey. Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970)

## To better understand an Artwork

“Picasso said as he worked on the mural: “My whole life as an artist has been nothing more than a continuous struggle against reaction and the death of art. How could anybody think for a moment that I could be in agreement with reaction and death?. In the panel on which I am working, which I shall call *Guernica*, and in all my recent works of art, I clearly express my abhorrence of the military caste, which has sunk Spain in an ocean of pain and death.”<sup>1</sup>

”Picasso is one of those great artists, who never followed any ‘one’ conventional Art form for long. He Never ever created any one signature style but experimented new methods, techniques and styles to represent different phases and emotions in his life. It becomes significant to throw light upon the historical movement called Cubism<sup>3</sup> which technically was born under the strokes of Picasso. Cubism is not only a technique in which objects are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form , but also as successful medium to represent sharp ,edgy, deep emotions which were very well captured by Picasso in ‘*Guernica*’ .It depicts objects not from one but from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context. It successfully brings on canvas the horror, injustice, hope, cruelty, and many such dark emotions to portray the effects/consequence of war on “humanity.”

*“I was able to feel all such emotions when I first saw the painting without knowing “what” and “why” of it. I think this makes it what it is. ”*

As today, we have moved from classicism to post modernism, purpose of painting has been shifted from serving society to showcasing ones identity and individuality, from clear to abstract



images, from outside to inside expression and the real function of Art has been disguised, what remains behind a successful artwork is clear portrayal of emotions and thoughts.

Guernica despite of being an abstract art proves to be a successful medium to evoke those emotions in an observer through **cubism**, making it a “timeless-masterpiece”. Observing Guernica ,one can see sharp and edgy images all over the canvas but sharpness at some places is quite striking. For example, in the neigh of horse, the pain, the shrieking noise it might be carrying at that point of time in war, the pointed triangular tongue of horse, bull and women crying for the child sensitizes about it very well.

### Reading the Images in ‘Guernica’

The whole scene reflects the destructive power of civil war.

is the Guernica shows suffering people, animals, and buildings wrenched by violence and chaos.

#### 1. Position of hands

A. Mothers hands, on the left of the painting- Besides the grief, which can be felt through the posture the body is in ,she seems as if trying to figure out the ‘why’ behind the unexpected for the loss of her child . Sharpness of the tongue could be seen as sharpness of emotion and pain trying to reach to god ,just as one might see the top of the temple which joins the whole architecture , however vast it may be at one point which highest .It seems creating a connection between human and god and reaching high. and is thus symbolic of soaring high.

- B. The man, probably a soldier lying flat at the bottom of the painting- he has a weapon in his hand, which is crossing the other body or is broken because of war. Both assumptions clarify the length of war, in which those who died also killed either, for anguish or under the burden of their mere duty.
- C. Image of a 'helpless person' struck in the moment of war - Near the centre of the painting, with both the arms wide apart.
- D. Person on the right side of the painting- arms distance apart calling out for help but being in the a shape which could be correlated with the mouth of a crocodile, the hopes seems just the last thing one could imagine before dying. It looks as live scene of war, of a person about to die hoping for some unknown power or magic that may save him. The only small window just above his head is a symbol of hope.
- E. An image of a person flowing in from a window with a flame lit lamp, not candle, may be because a candle is weak and can be blown out easily, flame lit lamp cannot be. So is presents the horrible images of war as a event, as a shock that will be not be forgotten easily and will be remembered.
2. Image of Bull- Picasso lived in Spain, which is famous for bullfight, and so, it had an impact on his mind and many other paintings many painting of Picasso uses this image. Bull is an animal fighter, and when he is angry he does not think about right or wrong before killing, but man has proved to be worse than animal for despite of the power of

intellect, not ever does bothers about the impact, a war could have on a layman's life. The conclusion is that, man is the most harmful of all creatures that is insensitive to the society of which he himself is a part.

3. Two "hidden" images formed by the horse appear in Guernica:
  - A. A human skull is lying under the horse's body. – In the Centre, there's a horse falling in agony as a spear had just run it through or javelin .Horse is seen crying out of pain, which is very well depicted by the flair of hairs and tail.
  - B. It seems as if he overrode a soldier not in anger but in pain, unwillingly because his eyes are close. A soldier, who must had killed many, is now experiencing what it means to be killed.
  
4. A light bulb blazes in the shape of a shocking eye over the suffering horse's making it a live painting, an eye witnessing the scenes.

### **IMAGES OF WAR IN NOVEL AND PAINTING**

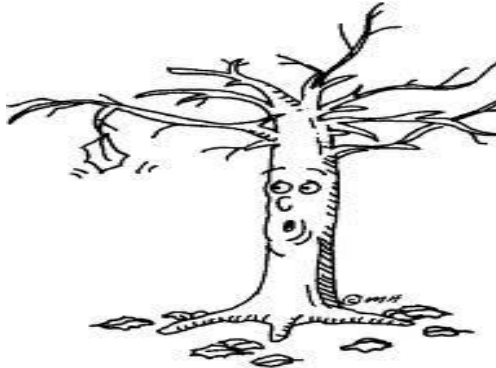
The war in addition to all destruction ( physical, mental, social etc),it is also responsible for rendering 'silence' as its product. Throughout the novel, Robert Jordon is engaged in a monologue. Sometimes it is because of the confusion regarding his mission, at other times it is because he is missing Maria, or when he is doubts Pablo. However, the malady is that he fails to share his anguish with others. His monologue, in a way, is an internal conflict, which every common person in modern society experiences at one point of time in life, when one feels detached and hopeless. It is perhaps the authoritarian attitude of the war masters, which is

responsible for this condition of Jordon. One's duty sometimes leaves one paralyzed, unable to take right decision despite of knowing 'what is wrong'.

In the painting, the war is 'Silencing' pain, anger, shock and all loud expression symbolically- in the noise of war. Today, the war is not just extrinsic, but within oneself. The individual is at war with himself. He is struggling to prove himself in the world and make an identity by any means possible - right or wrong.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **“Art- Losing its Purpose”**



#### **“ITS A MAD WORLD WHICH WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD TO ITS OWN DESTRUCTION”**

A revolt started in modernism that what is bigger art or life? People started saying that life is bigger because they wanted to challenge the authority of art. For them life has more authority than representational art. In order to destroy the aura of art, anti- art was given birth. This anti-art wasn't the representation but the parody of life and Post Modernism went steps ahead and made the parody of the parody of life. In post modernism there is no line between reality and parody. The post modernists are working on the existing patterns and modifying it. What is happening is that there it is collapsing in the conventional and modern hierarchy. The old boundaries are getting collapsed and everything is getting mixed up, and this collapsing is done in such a manner that representation becomes a commodity.

All those paintings, which are as abstract as a cloud and cannot be interpreted, are result of this ambiguity. Therefore, post- modern society is loosing its grip to direct any control in a purposeful manner. Art should reach out to people and it should not limit itself within the confines of literacy. It should make an impact on society, should transform history, and demolish hurdles that hinder the growth of society.

The great literary canon **T.S.Eliot** in his essay, '*Creativity and Individual Talent*' says that an artist should strive to achieve something beyond the limitations of his personality in his /her work. One might be creating new things, in various mediums to express the desired message or idea, but it is not contributing to the society to the level it should, which will ultimately leave no mark in history. Presenting and understanding society through different aspect is good for a critical observer but when these part don't contribute to a comprehensive whole ,such artworks become superficial, have limited effect and are likely to die soon . When the future generations would look back to understand the nature and ideals of this society, literature or any form would not be useful for them .

**Roland Barthes**, in his essay '*Death of an author*', says that once an author writes a piece of art ,once a text is written it should be left free to be interpreted by the reader, his role finishes with the write up and remains nowhere important in the understanding of a text. This thought leaves a very deep meaning. He is concentrating more on the ability of the text to communicate itself the idea, which an author wants to introduce to the reader. He believes that if a message is capable of sensitizing some idea or issue to the reader, there is no need to understand the "who" and "why" about the author. Such should also be the focus while presenting an idea of an

artwork today, in any form. However, what will one do when neither the artist nor the observer is interested? Emotions are missing today. Everyone is living for a living; people just want money, be it anyway. Art, today is Informing but not evoking anything new in us thus making it boring and usual.

### **Viewpoints of Deconstructionist and Post-Modernists:**

M.H Abrams in the essay '*deconstructive angel*' stresses on deconstructing the layers within an artwork to help understand the meaning and politics behind it more clearly. Layers are being deconstructed, all interpretations are correct and so it has become like a flood of information, which has no limits and "no benefit" as well. But a common understanding of it possible by comparing and contrasting these interpretations.

### **Viewpoint of post modernist**

In the essay '*capitalist, modernist and post modernist*' by 'Terry Eagleton'

It commented on modernity for its novel ideas, collage images, advance lifestyle and creativity for being superficial and living at a surface level, without any commitment, without any depth, without any ideology. If this continued, the art will just remain alive for a limited period and will ultimately die. The purity and essence of art has lost its grounds and when there is 'no base' for art to stand upon how can it be expected to shed the ideals of a welfare society under its roof?

There is an urgent need for literature and art to revive the same narrative technique to awaken the masses to the core about the destruction of art, which is near. In wake of proving ourselves better

and advanced, today's generation has gone far ahead from the traditional wealth of our society, from the old, which was gold. If only it could succeed in bringing mankind close to being "human", in building up the some basic ideals of trust and honesty, of a collective identity and prosperity, can it save Art and its purpose in society.

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