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### “A Woman Pouring Milk”

In Ways of Seeing by John Berger, the way we have been taught to observe, learn and analyze art is criticized. Berger describes static images are an appearance that has been taken out of context, out of its original time and setting. He states that any image encompasses a way of seeing. The way we see a specific image is based on perspective. A piece of art can be interpreted in various ways; it is relative to every person. Throughout the text, Berger illustrates the different types of arts. Each one is a perfect example of the phrase “Use your own interpretation.” If looked at closely, one gets different ideas and understandings than others of the same image. Another way that paintings are interpreted or misinterpreted is through reproductions. Reproducing original pieces of art has been a large controversy as well, even a “political issue,” which is discussed by Berger. Berger places a painting by Vermeer in his book, but does not offer an explanation on the painting. He does this so we ask ourselves about the painting. The painting, “A Woman Pouring Milk”, is a simple, self-explanatory image, yet simultaneously symbolizes much more.

Most of Vermeer’s work involves women performing daily chores. In his stated painting, we see how the woman is focusing intently on pouring the milk. She does not look at the artist painting her, she does not look around the room as if bored, but staring at the task. The woman is using all her effort into producing an exquisite meal, so that it

is not lacking in any aspect. She takes pride in the preparation of the meal; her goal is to please.

There are many ways to analyze this painting. One way is to ask why the woman is doing all of the cooking. Why is she the only one in the room, as if she is isolated specifically so that she may complete the task at hand? Another way to look at the painting is that she is performing the everyday duties of a woman's life. A woman's role in society has typically been to take care of the home and whatever entails. With this view, we see the woman cooking with all her love to satisfy her family. We cannot understand the painting for a few reasons, we do not know her intentions, why she is cooking or for whom.

Berger talks of reproductions and how it affects different aspects of art. Reproductions are sometimes different than the original. This poses an immediate problem because the message that is revealed to us could be altered from intended message because of the differences. Reproductions pose another problem. The value of viewing art has been lowered. "[I]mages of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free." Art is not being valued for its authenticity and rarity. We now can walk into a corner shop and purchase a copy of "A Woman Pouring Milk." However, this does not allow for the feeling the painter wanted us to feel while viewing the original; the "[E]ffect of closing the distance in time between the painting of the picture and one's own act of looking at it." Reproductions erase the very essence and purpose of art from us.

Art itself is a mystery. We are fascinated with forms of expression as everyone's differs from another's. As in "A Woman Pouring Milk," we are intrigued by the fact that

we do not know the reason she is painted or what Vermeer is trying to tell us. The only thing we understand is how we perceive the image, how it relates to us and our own experiences. Our attraction to art is based on how it makes us feel. Through art, we can express ourselves differently than before, maybe in a way that is not understood by everyone in the way intended, but always understood.