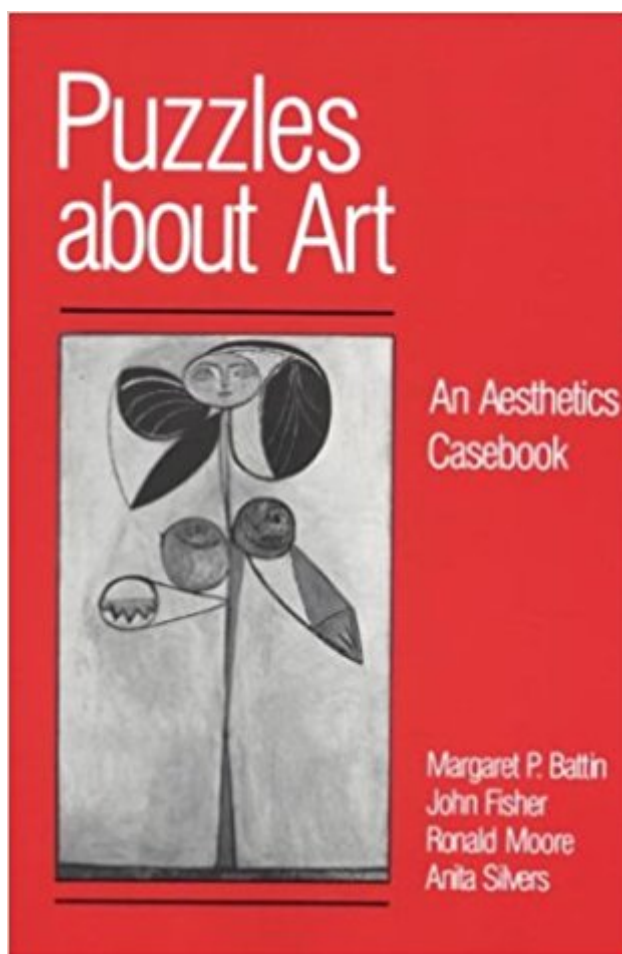


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# Puzzles About Art: An Aesthetics Casebook



## Synopsis

The first casebook for use in courses in aesthetics, *Puzzles about Art* provides more than 180 real and hypothetical cases that illustrate important principles and theories in the philosophy of art. With 25 illustrations as well as concrete examples from legal cases, museum experiences, newspaper articles and various media, including painting, sculpture, photography, music, drama, and film, *Puzzles about Art* helps students understand specific problems in the visual arts.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Puzzles About Art" is a welcome and refreshing departure from the standard approach to philosophical aesthetics which can often make the novice shake her head and wonder how philosophical debates could be relevant to resolving issues in art. Following trends in contemporary ethics, Battin uses both fictional and factual puzzle cases to introduce and highlight many of the problems which arise when making judgements concerning art. The puzzles are written in such a way that even the philosophically uninitiated can begin to take up and discuss the issues and to feel the tensions inherent in the puzzles. The puzzles cover a wide-range of aesthetic issues including the definition of art, interpretation, and conflicts between art and other values. Each section begins with a discussion of the main issues highlighted in the following cases and some of the ways in which philosophers have tried to resolve the issues presented. I came across this book while searching for a suitable resource to help introduce primary-aged students to philosophical aesthetics, but needed a more active approach that would capture the interest and curiosity of children. The puzzles are constructed in such a way that many can be stripped of their more

advanced concepts and adapted for this age group, yet retain much of their force and intrigue. If you are interested in issues in aesthetics or in teaching aesthetics, it is definitely worth looking at this book!

Thank you!

I love this book. Bought it for a class in college my graduating semester and I still own it to this day. A good read.

I will be using this for discussion questions to get college students thinking--a great casebook with relevant examples and thought-provoking situations.

This book has been helping me out a lot during my student teaching. It has tons of activities and prompts to keep your kids thinking.

This book is a must-have for art teachers who are interested in teaching aesthetics but are not sure how to talk about it with students. This book offers many scenarios (puzzles) involving aesthetic questions. They are thought-provoking and are sure to enliven many classroom debates. It also includes short and to-the-point explanation of aesthetic theories and the most common aesthetic questions.

It should be noted that I had to purchase this book (along with one other) for a class I took a few years ago that was the ICAP (Keystone) equivalent for my degree (respectively, illustration).

Thankfully, instead of purchasing this from the bookstore on campus (at an outrageous price), I was able to find a copy via that was much less expensive. Yes, I was required by the guidelines of the class to read this and while it was more interesting than the other text, it was still a far cry from being entertaining or 'good'. Again, I realize that this is a textbook of sorts that many art classes utilize, but that is no excuse for it to be written in such a boring format and make art and the world of aesthetics seem 'boring' to most. I personally would say not to buy this unless you are really dedicated to wanting to learn about aesthetics or because you have to.

One important fact about this aesthetics casebook is that it is sheer fun for anybody interested in art. Rather than making general statements about the 6 chapters and their introductory essays (other

reviewers have done this), I will note my favorite case study in each chapter.

**Creativity and Fidelity: Performance, Replication, Reading** -----We have the case of the horrible junior high concert where one night the conductor/music teacher wants his 8th graders to hit all the correct notes when performing Bach's First Brandenburg Concerto. And the students do, in fact, hit all the correct notes, since the conductor slowed the temp to super-slow and it took the 8th graders three hours to play their Bach. So, the question is: Did the parents who attended the concert hear Bach's Brandenburg Concerto? For me, this case is not only good for a lively discussion of music and the integrity of art but is also laugh out loud funny. I can imagine sitting through such a concert!

**Art and Artworks** -----Ben Vautier, performance artist, sits on a chair out in a city street with a placard on his lap reading, "Look at me. That's all it takes; I'm art." The questions raised by this case are: Was Ben right? Can a person be an artwork? If so, when will Ben stop being an artwork (perhaps when he goes home to shower)? Can Ben be an artwork without the placard? I find this a great case study for a very personal reason: years ago I performed 'Living Sculpture' after having extensive training in mime and physical theater. So, I have additional questions: Should my performance be considered art since I had the formal training in using my body as art and Ben did not? I did perform 'Living Sculpture' in a museum during a gallery opening. How is my museum performance different from performing on a city street?

**Beauty, Ugliness, and the Aesthetic Experience** -----According to Thomas Aquinas 'beauty is that whose mere observation is pleasing'. Reading this statement made by Aquinas, Jim reflects on his enjoyment of pornography. The author raises the following questions for our consideration: Is all pornography ugly, simply by being pornography? Does pornography's ugliness disqualify it from being beautiful? Is Jim merely observing? Is Jim's experience sufficient in showing Aquinas wrong in defining beauty in this way?

**Meaning and Interpretation** -----The authors pose the question: "Should we value art because we learn from it and use it to enhance our understanding of some aspects of the world in which we live?" With this in mind we have the case of director Michael Cimino filming a scene of American soldiers playing Russian roulette while fighting in Viet Nam. Although such a game was never actually a documented fact, Cimino said the game functioned as a symbol of the soldier's wartime fate. We are asked to agree or disagree on such cinematic devices being called a symbol.

**Art and Other Values** -----The authors ask the questions: "Does an artist have the right to offend the moral or religious sensitivities of a community? Should whatever aesthetic values we find in film, painting, literature, or any of the other arts yield to other societal values? With these questions in mind we consider the case study of Jean-Luc Godard's film Hail Mary. Many religious-minded people find this film offensive. Recognizing how censorship is a hot public issue, such a case study is fertile ground for reflection.

**Critical Judgment** -----The authors

present the case study of Richard Serra's Tilted Arc. This public work of art was praised by art critics and art experts. But business people who were forced to actually look at Serra's art and live with it in their public plaza hated the thing. So the question becomes: Should the work be removed? Or, perhaps, should the business people be educated on the artistic and aesthetic value of Serra's work? Again, such case studies can provide a fantastic jumping off point for reflections or discussions on what it means to judge a work of art.

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