

Imaginativeness

To be imaginative in the artistic sphere is to be adept at transforming daily experience into fresh and organically lively new versions. Artists, musicians, and poets are often said to be imaginative, meaning that they take the materials of ordinary seeing, hearing and speech, pass them through the imagination, and reproduce them as, for example, Durer self-portraits, Beethoven quartets, or Milton's Lycidas. These reproduced versions of daily reality are in some sense the essences of daily reality, bringing out that, in daily reality, which is not yet fully capable of expressing itself.

Examples

1 Albrecht Durer

One of my favorite painters, Albrecht Durer, while still young created four startling self-portraits. In each there is some of the grimace of the tortured Christ and some of the broken man—although Durer was himself not much over twenty at the time of painting. (His insight into the extremities of the human condition was astonishing.) Durer was in his painting transforming himself from within, and portraying a vision of his transformed self. He found that transformed self deep inside him and once within it he had nothing more to do than paint it. His great self-portrait painting was not the expression of extraordinary skill—techniques, types of canvas or paint; mastery of a style—but rather of extraordinarily deep access to his own inner nature. His imagination was literally the image of what he was within.

2 Imaginary travels

I have always imagined places where I would like to travel. When I was in college, it was Iceland. I had a vivid imagination of glaciers and fjords. When I was in graduate school, it was Paris—because I imagined (but didn't know) the world surrounding the guy I was writing my dissertation on. Now that I am older, it is Zaire, because I am imagining a fascinating trip on the Congo River. So far I have gone to each imagined place, and will soon be going to Zaire. As I realize each imaginative projection, by actually going there, I replace it by another, or several, which are created by my imagination. My imagination is right there with possibilities. Apparently my imagination will require more feeding until I run out of life to project it.