

Beautiful books pamphlet

"The value of culture is its effect on character. It avails nothing unless it ennobles and strengthens that. Its use is for life. Its aim is not beauty but goodness." Somerset Maugham

Art can shatter as easily as it can create. Profane or obscene material shatters sensitivity to beauty. We need a way to judge art and to hold artists accountable for what they create. The intention of Beautiful Books is not to judge art. That is for each person to do on their own. Our goal is only to defend the idea that art has a purpose that is larger than itself.

Beautiful Books is a counterpart to Banned Books. Instead of selecting works because they had been banned, Beautiful Books has readings, discussion and performances of works that are considered beautiful by members.

Let us be a friend to beauty. Culture can lift and inspire, inform and transform. Let's make beauty visible to ordinary eyes.

Mystery

Do you believe beauty, good and truth exist, that it is possible to find out what these are, and to express them in your life and in society?

Is there room in the world for beauty? With the failure of grand ideological schemes, absolute moral standards are no longer admissible, and we are left with no sure way of distinguishing between good and bad, low and high. Any attempt to do so is seen as an assault on freedom. Yet we know of course that beauty does exist. Can we make a place for it, based not on authority but on freely chosen principles that we agree on collaboratively?

We are simply offering basic principles of meaningful art, not providing a list of works that we condemn or commend. That will always be subjective, and should be entirely up to individuals. We seek only obvious, self-evident principles that anyone would agree to. We invite all to contribute any piece they think meets these principles. Our goal is simply to provide a public forum for the shared attempt at discovering meaningful art.

How can we understand a work of art? Begin by observing how it affects you and how it makes you feel. Does it inflame your ego? Does it magnify what is fleeting? Does it make you compare yourself to something inane? Or does it recognize the part of you that you admire?

How do you know when it's beautiful? When it stops your heart and changes your life.

Banned vs. Beautiful books

Beautiful Books is a counterpart to Banned Books. Banned Books Week is a national event that celebrates freedom of speech and condemns censorship. Banned Books Week is an annual event celebrating the freedom to read and the importance of the First Amendment. The week highlights the benefits of free and open access to information while drawing attention to the harms of censorship by spotlighting actual or attempted bannings of books across the United States. Banned Books Week is September 25-October 1, 2016.

Freedom of speech is a good thing and we support that. But it's not enough. Even more important than saying what we want is having some sense of what is worthy of being expressed. Let us begin by recognizing that not all art is worthy of admiration. Ignorance is not the same as awareness. Brutality is not equal to compassion. Let us begin by at least trying to discriminate between beautiful and destructive art.

We don't advocate censorship and we are not calling for government action (nor do we wish for this). We support the free expression of ideas. And we recognize the danger of being moralistic and the difficulty of conceiving of any forum to explore what is good or beautiful. But we must remember that there is a place for goodness and beauty in culture and in everyday life.

The First Amendment guarantees freedom of expression, but only the external forms of freedom, political, economic, and artistic, are protected. The internal forms are ignored, but we have a right to that too: not a political right but a moral one, and this is just as important as free speech, freedom of religion, or due process under the law. [We have a right to carve out a place for sensitivity to life.]

Instead of selecting works because they had been banned, Beautiful Books has readings, discussion and performances of works that are considered beautiful by members.

Vision

Ask yourself: What diminishes and what elevates life? What is the good, the true, the beautiful? Of course we don't have any concrete answers to those questions. That doesn't matter. What's important is that we remind ourselves that such criteria, that this possibility, exists, and that it can prevail.

Visionary culture should encourage depth of emotion and understanding. It should make us think about matters of lasting importance. It should question assumptions and certainties. It should present perspectives and possibilities we are not aware of.

Is it really possible to distinguish between the hurtful and the helpful, the debased and the good, the mechanical and the human? Let us embark on this journey together. We can begin by at least agreeing to at least look for the good. Whether we find it or not, the journey itself is a work of art, necessary and beautiful.

I invite you to stop participating in illusion, idolatry, superficiality, and degradation. Stop being hypnotized by artistry, drama, or appearance. Stop being hypnotized by beauty. Aspire to the good, not the vile. Support culture that calls you to your higher nature – culture that lifts and inspires, informs and transforms.

We need art because we have to fight the demons of our nature. That's why we need courage. And why we need to encourage each other.

Understand what a work of art says

Think about how art affects you

Don't participate in harmful cultural activities

Develop the ability to discriminate between destructive and meaningful art.

Fight destructive, superficial, and nihilistic culture. Challenge whatever glories in baseness and vulgarity.

Demonstrate that it is possible to stand up for principles without being self-righteous or divisive.

Stand up for the idea that beauty, good and truth still exist, and find examples of this.

Put the fair and good into your mind

Put soul at the center of your concerns