

## STUDY IN THREE

### courtesy of Harold Osborne in Aesthetics and Art Theory

In this business, at once so simple and so complex, of seeing the "work of art," Osborne distinguishes three types of approaches, which he identifies and describes as follows:

1. the formalistic theory of art: wherein the observer concentrates on "the formal properties of things rather than on their practical or scientific significance"

2. the instrumentalist theory: wherein the observer's interest attaches to the purposes (thence education or edification) of the work of art as well as to its likely effects

3. the naturalistic theory: wherein our attention focuses on some subject (-matter) or theme (sometimes alluded to as the "programme") outside the work of art itself

The "formalistic" emphasis (from which, incidentally, one can see derived the slogan, "Art for art's sake,") is noteworthy, argues Osborne, for its spotlighting of "direct perceptual or intuitional awareness without consideration of practical implications." In this it differs significantly from "our ordinary everyday commerce with our environment."

Finally, Osborne stresses throughout the inherent value in artistic contemplation of what he calls the "full exercise of a trained and mature sensibility." Is it perhaps the case, do you suppose, that we resist the implications of that "training" or "exercise," preferring instead just to "eat" works of art whenever, however, we like? In short, who wants to have to be "mature," especially in this business of looking at art? That's no fun!