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SEPARATE PLEASURES: interpretation and assimilation.

All art works can be interpreted. An interpretation often suggests a reason or reasons why we think we are affected by a work of art.

All the sights, sounds, and movements of art works are also things in themselves. As facts they require no interpretation. A sound from a musical instrument, a blue square, are just that, a sound and a square.

Sensory facts like these can be combined to produce complex visual or aural experiences, a painting ,a dance,a piece of music. Working to assimilate or master these perceptual complexities is automatic. We are not aware of any effort in doing so. However, the processing of complex stimuli can sharpen or refine seeing or hearing ability as Nina Krause has shown in relation to music. (1)

Greater perceptual acuity makes us fitter and so the brain which generally rewards behaviors that make us fitter gives us pleasure when we engage the arts. This is a separate pleasure not dependent on interpretation.

When we look at a painting that pleases us how do we know if our pleasure comes from our conscious interpretation or our unconscious mastery of its perceptual complexity?

(1) Kraus,N.(2011) Musical Training Gives Edge in Auditory Processing.  
*The Hearing Journal*. Feb. 2011 vol. 64 No.2