U3A Online
A Virtual University of the Third Age

https://www.u3aonline.org.au/

25 Years of U3A Online

June 2025

Winter Edition

Snow on the Brindabella Ranges behind the Tuggeranong Town Centre, Canberra ACT
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Snow_on_the_Brindabellas_August_2012.JPG

Canberra or 'kanebera' in the Nugnawal language of the First Peoples is the Australian Capital. The Brindabella Ranges are part of the Australian Alps. The average daily winter temperatures in Canberra have a minimum of 1^{o} C and a maximum of 12^{o} C. Frosts are

common but snow is rare because Canberra is on the leeward side of the Brindabella Ranges.

Founded in 1913, Canberra was planned by the American architects Walter and Marion Griffin. It is the seat of the Australian Government and home to many national social and cultural institutions. Canberra is Australia's largest inland city and has been recognised as one of the world's most liveable cities.

Canberra has a population of almost 500,000 people. Compared with national averages, Canberra's unemployment level is lower, its tertiary education level and average income higher. While the Commonwealth Government is Canberra's largest employer, the city has other major employers in health, education, construction, retail and tourism.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canberra

From the President

Jean Walker

Dear Members

We are still in the throes of moving from the old website to the new one. As you will understand this has not been an easy process and we still have changes and improvements to make. We hope you will bear with us while this happens and let us know if you experience any problems, which we will try to solve.

I have recently returned from a 17-night cruise around Australia from Sydney to Perth. It was not entirely without glitches as firstly, three of the ports came on public holidays – Brisbane on Good Friday, Cairns on Easter Monday and Darwin on Anzac Day, so very little was happening in each city. And to top that, the ship was unable to dock in Broome due to high winds.

However, the really memorable part was sailing through the Kimberley Islands. I had no idea of the vastness of it – over 2,500 islands – yes, that is correct! These islands stretch from the Western Australia–Northern Territory border in the east to just north of Broome in the

west; the area is massive, larger than England and roughly three-fifths the size of Texas. The ship's Captain told us that some are inhabited and still working as iron ore mines while other have been abandoned. Apparently, there was a diamond mine on one, which was the largest in the world.

Below is one of the photos I took.

There is a lot more information on the web about the area and it is worth a read.

Jean Walker President

Vale Bev Tapper

It is with great sadness that we have to inform members of the death of Bev Tapper, our much loved and respected Course Co-ordinator, on the 29th May.

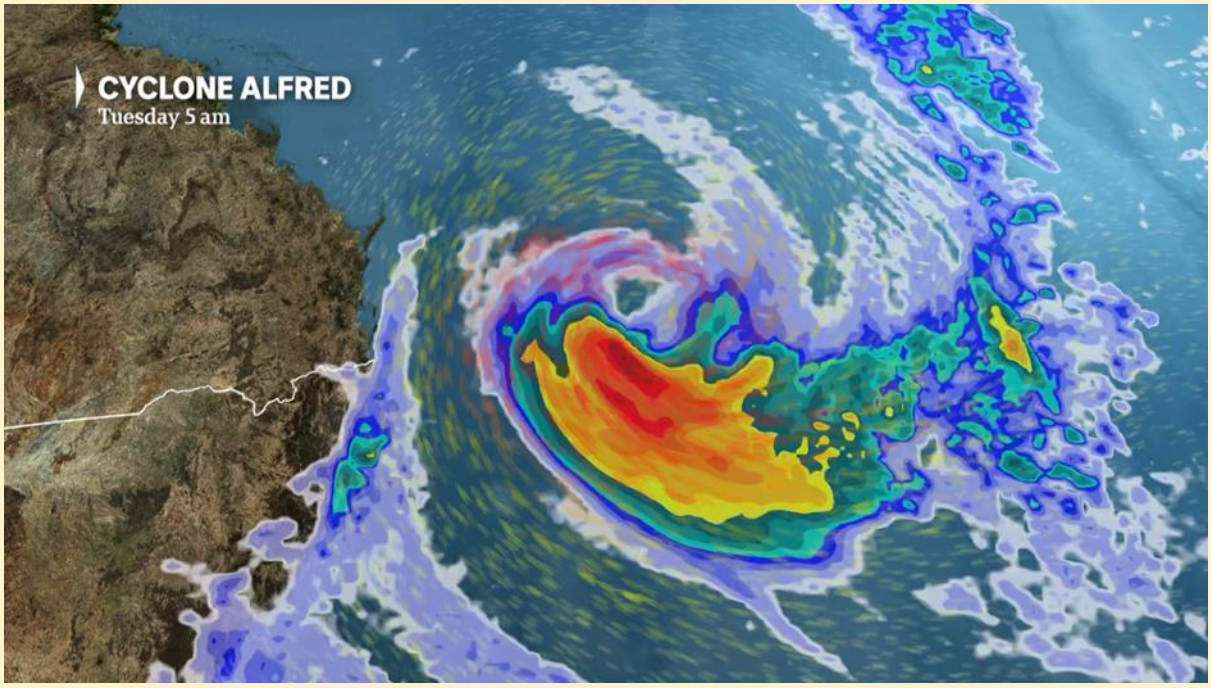
Many of you will have had contact with Bev who has helped members and course writers with their queries over a long period. Bev was one of the earliest members of the U3A Online Committee of Management and had a vast knowledge of the courses and the website. She was a warm and caring person who was always a joy to work with. She will be greatly missed.

Jean Walker

From the Secretary

Kerry Hamilton

"We Got Through It Together"



ABC News https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-03-04

I have lived on the Gold Coast for a long time. I've seen my fair share of storms—but nothing like the cyclone that hit us in 2025. I wanted to share a little of that experience with you, because I know many of us in U3AOL understand what it means to face life's storms—both the literal and the personal ones.

That night, the wind started howling like a beast. I remember standing in the kitchen, watching the trees thrash in the dark. Then came the rain—not just falling but flying

sideways, hammering the windows. It found its way inside, too. Even though the windows were shut, water seeped in and, in places, poured through like they weren't even closed. We spent hours laying down towels and trying to move furniture off the soaked carpet.

We lost power early on, and it stayed off for twelve long days. No hot water, no fridge, no way to cook unless you had a camp stove—but thankfully, we had a generator. My partner isn't one to ever sit back. The morning after the storm, he pulled on his boots, and big high viz raincoat, grabbed his chainsaw, and got out to the street. Huge enormous gum trees were down across the roads, blocking cars and driveways, and he spent days cutting them up and helping neighbours clear the way. I think he became a bit of a local hero, even if he won't say it himself.

It was tough—no doubt about it. But I was reminded of something important: we're never too old to make a difference, and community still matters. People looked out for each other. They shared batteries and food, offered helping hands, and checked in on those alone. In many ways, that storm stripped everything back to what's essential—kindness, strength, and good old-fashioned resilience.

We got through it together, and I think that's something worth sharing. Best wishes to anyone affected by the more recent NSW flooding. You are in our hearts.

Cheers

Kerry

Member Profile - Siew Kennedy

My qualifications include a BA (Hons) Degree in Philosophy (University of Singapore), Diploma in Librarianship (University of Wellington, NZ) and Certificate in Computer Studies, (Anniesland College, Glasgow, Scotland). These led to a career as Research Librarian in various libraries in Singapore and London.

After my husband and I immigrated from the UK to Australia in 1987, I worked as a Technical Writer and Documentation Consultant for banks, government organisations and mining companies.

On retirement, I joined U3A Highvale, Glen Waverley, Melbourne. I was soon nominated as Treasurer and subsequently as Secretary. I resigned from both positions after 10 years of service and became a volunteer for U3A Online. My experience in U3A matters covers a range of functions.

I enjoy volunteering in the U3A environment because it reconfirms the values of the U3A movement. It also nurtures my belief in lifelong learning, effective communication and documentation. I am motivated by the joy of learning something new each day and the exciting technological development into the future. There is great potential for online learning in the senior community. The challenge is to make it more attractive to a wider audience.

In a RMIT/U3A project which ensued from the U3A Network Victoria 2024 State Conference, I found a niche for my long-standing interest in Artificial Intelligence (AI). It proposes to use AI applications to enhance mentoring relationships and foster skills and knowledge transfer in U3A activities.

My spare time is spent on creative projects in multi-disciplinary fields, art appreciation, learning the piano and digital painting, reading, playing chess and board games.

Siew Kennedy

Third Age Life

BEYOND Goodbye: Reflections from the Edge

Colette Kinsella

A recent stint in the ICU at our local hospital has given me food for thought over the past month or so. Not realising just how ill I was, one of the doctors provided me with a sobering moment. When she asked me if I had an Advance Health Directive or Living Will, I replied in the negative.

Dr: “Well you really should have one done because we need to know whether or not to resuscitate you”

Me: “Don’t worry, I have no intention of dying just yet”

Dr: “Well remember you ARE eighty-two!”

If ever I felt an urge to slap someone, it was that moment! How dare this woman who was half my age tell me that it was about time I shuffled off this mortal coil - stage left? However, since I was in no position to slap anyone at that moment, confined as I was to the bed with a cannula in each arm and a ‘line’ going into my heart, I just closed my eyes.

A week later, when happily at home again and out of danger, I sat in the garden, looked up at the night sky and pondered my mortality. How good it is to be alive! The alternative did not appeal to me at all. No, I really did not want to die. But death is inevitable, sooner or later. Hmm… I suppose that this could be considered ‘later’?

What does it mean to be dead, I wondered. When I was a child, my vision of death meant that I would live on a cloud up in heaven, wearing a long white flowing dress and playing a harp. The dress and the harp appealed to me, but – wouldn’t I get bored? With maturity came questioning, research and consequently the dumping of all nonsense ideas about a romantic ‘heaven’ after death. This of course left a vacuum. Does this then mean that there is nothing, no existence after our death? Nobody has the answer to that. Yes, one can have ‘faith’ – but no hard evidence.

Thinking of death from an emotional perspective, the word ‘grief’ is uppermost in my mind - anticipatory grief. The grief of the loved ones I will leave behind; grief for myself because I will leave them behind. Regrets? Not too many. Despite some difficult times and the deaths of loved ones, I can say that I have had a fortunate life, for which I am very grateful.

Looking at death philosophically, I know that death cannot be escaped. We are born, we live, we die – that is the cycle. But what was the meaning of my life? Did I make a ‘difference’ to those around me and did I contribute in some small way to making the world a better place? These are things I need to ponder further in order to mak e sense of my death. But of this I am sure – I have loved and been loved.

I am not afraid of dying. I just don't want to be dead! If I can prove to myself that my life had some meaning, then I will go in peace. There is still some thinking to be done! In the meantime, I am learning to live in the moment – each moment of life being precious.

Colette Kinsella

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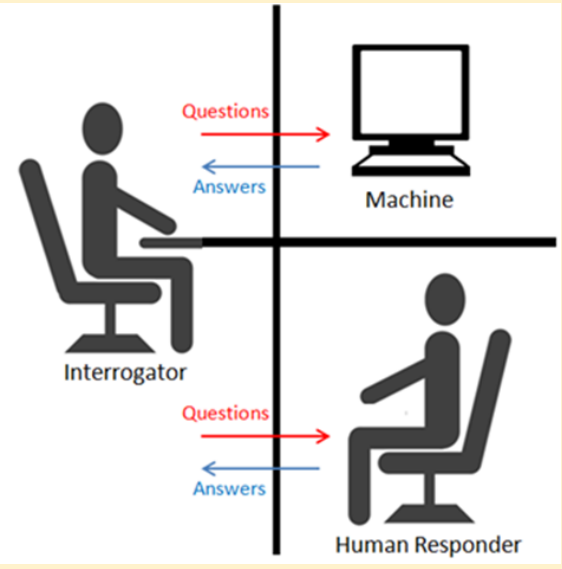
Getting to Know Artificial Intelligence

Siew Kennedy

When we wake up each day, there is bound to be some news about Artificial Intelligence (AI). The topic is increasingly pervasive across nearly every aspect of daily life and business life. AI's rapid rise has been prompted by the availability of large datasets, more powerful computing hardware and above all, improved algorithms (set of rules to determine program steps).

So what is AI? It is technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, creativity, decision making, problem solving and even autonomy. AI applications and devices can see and identify objects, understand and respond to human language and perform tasks that typically require human intelligence.

While AI's current prominence is relatively new, the concept has been around for decades. It 1950, British mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing proposed what is now known as the Turing Test.



TURING TEST

His aim was to determine whether a machine could exhibit intelligent behaviour indistinguishable from that of a human. In this test, a human interrogator would question both a human and a machine, without knowing which was which. If the interrogator could not reliably tell them apart, the machine was said to have passed the test.

Since then, AI has made incredible strides. While the Turing Test remains a historical milestone, contemporary discussions about AI's capabilities often draw on more nuanced frameworks. One such perspective is inspired by American psychologist Howard Gardner, who proposed that intelligence is not a single entity, but rather a combination of multiple types—such as logical-mathematical, linguistic, visual-spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential. Although not a formal test of AI, this framework encourages us to think more broadly about what it means for a machine to be "intelligent".

There is no denying that AI is now a powerful tool used in fields such as agriculture, analytics, data security, e-commerce, education, healthcare, manufacturing, transport and many more. Examples of everyday applications include:

- AI generators of art, images, music, poems, text, videos, etc.
- AI tutors and personalised learning platforms
- Customer service chatbots (simulation of human conversations)
- Document creation and review
- Navigation devices
- Robots in domestic environments, delivery services, hospitality
- Search engines e.g. Bing, DuckDuckGo, Google, Yahoo
- Smart phones and home devices
- Streaming service recommendations
- Virtual assistants: ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and

The following is an instance of an AI-generated image. Just for fun, I added the U3A Online logo to the man's T-shirt.

While the advantages of AI such as 24/7 availability, automation of repetitive tasks, faster data analysis, improved efficiency and better decision-making, the disadvantages of AI should not be overlooked. These are outlined below with their mitigating factors:

Likely job loss. Rather than make people's jobs obsolete, AI can help to augment work by helping people work faster and more efficiently. New categories of work could result from the need to improve and maintain AI systems.

Emergence of deepfakes and misinformation. To prevent potential damage, AI providers have expressed their commitment to assuming responsibility for intellectual property (IP) infringement claims that their clients might face. AI giants, such as OpenAI, Alphabet, and Meta have already voluntarily committed to watermarking their AI-generated output to address government concerns about the threats posed by the misuse of AI.

When you browse the internet, make use of AI Detectors and Fact-checking Websites such as:

- Copyleaks
- Decopy AI
- GPTZero
- Originality.ai
- Scribbr
- BBC Verify

- FactCheck.org
- Media Bias/ Fact Check
- PolitiFact
- Snopes

Increase of ethical and privacy concerns. As AI collects and analyses data, concerns around privacy escalate. The potential for misuse of data, accidentally or maliciously can be minimised by:

1. Awareness of AI privacy risks, strong passwords, mindfulness of data permissions and updated software - at a personal level.
2. Regulatory compliance and risk management - at an organisational level.

While it remains to be seen whether machine intelligence will ever truly surpass human intelligence, given that it lacks human intuition, one thing is clear: AI is here to stay. As a society, we must learn to live with AI—embrace its benefits, seize new opportunities and remain vigilant about its risks.

In this context, it is important to understand how older adults use digital tools and engage with technologies like AI. A collaborative research initiative I'm involved in— between RMIT University and the University of the Third Age— (not associated with U3A Online), has developed a survey questionnaire to explore current attitudes of U3A members toward AI and related topics.

The information collected will help identify patterns of use, digital aspirations and potential barriers—ultimately guiding the development of better support systems, inclusive technologies and stronger digital inclusion for older adults. Too often, the needs and wisdom of senior members of our community are overlooked in the digital age.

If you wish to participate in the survey, (with guaranteed anonymity) it can be found in the Technology Services section of the U3A Network Victoria News May 2025 at: https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=3cff2c97535bdf273894eedaf&id=1c2e38ac69#technologyservices

Siew Kennedy

Committee Member

Critical thinking is more important than ever.

How can I improve my skills?

Peter Ellerton - Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Education; Curriculum Director, UQ Critical Thinking Project, The University of Queensland

There is a Fox News headline that goes like this:

Transgender female runner who beat 14,000 women at London Marathon offers to give medal back

Read about the event elsewhere and it turns out the athlete was also beaten by thousands of people and it was a participation medal. While the Fox News headline is true, it is framed to potentially elicit a negative reaction.

Misinformation is on the rise. We're told we need to think critically when we read things online, but how can we recognise such situations? And what does it mean to think critically anyway?

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is based on the idea that if all ideas are equal, then all ideas are worthless. Without this assumption, there can be nothing to be critical of.

When we think critically, we focus on the quality of our reasoning and the factors that can influence it. In other words, thinking critically primarily means being critical of your own thinking.

Importantly, critical thinking is not strongly correlated with intelligence. While some believe intelligence is basically fixed (though there is debate around this), we can learn to think critically.

Other factors being equal, there's also no evidence thinking critically is an innate ability. In fact, we have evidence critical thinking can be improved as a skill in itself, and it is transferrable to other contexts.

The tools of argumentation

Many factors can affect the quality of your thinking. They include things like cognitive biases (systemic thinking errors), prior beliefs, prejudices and worldviews, framing effects, and how much you know about the subject.

To understand the quality of our reasoning, we can use the concepts and language of argumentation.

People often think "arguments" are about conflicting views. A better way to understand argumentation is to view it as a way of making our thinking visible and accessible to each other.

Arguments contain premises, those things we think are true about the world, and conclusions, which is where we end up in our thinking. Moving from premises to conclusions is called inferring, and it is the quality of these inferences that is the concern of critical thinking.

For example, if I offer the premises

P1: All Gronks are green

P2: Fred is a Gronk

Then you have already inferred the conclusion

C: Fred is green

You don't even need to know what a Gronk is to make that inference.

All our rational judgements and decisions are made up of chains of inferences. Constructing, evaluating and identifying types of arguments is the core business of critical thinking.

Argumentation is not about conflicting views – it's making your thinking accessible. John Diez

How can we improve our critical thinking skills?

To help us get better at it, we can understand critical thinking in three main ways.

First, we can see critical thinking as a subject we can learn. In this subject, we study how arguments work and how our reasoning can be influenced or improved. We also learn what makes for good thinking by using ideas like accuracy, clarity, relevance, depth and more. These are what we value in good thinking. By learning this, we start to think about how we think, not just what we think about.

Second, we improve our critical thinking by using what we've learned in real situations. This helps us build important thinking skills like analysing, justifying, evaluating and explaining.

Third, we can also think of critical thinking as a habit or attitude – something we choose to practice in our everyday lives. This means being curious, open-minded and willing to question things instead of just accepting them. It also means being aware of our own biases and trying to be fair and honest in how we think.

When we put all three of these together, we become better thinkers – not just in educational contexts, but in life.

Practical steps to improving critical thinking

Since critical thinking centres on the giving and taking of reasons, practising this is a step towards improvement. There are some useful ways to do this.

1. Make reasoning – rather than conclusions – the basis of your discussions with others.

When asking for someone's opinion, inquire as to why they think that. And offer your thinking to others. Making our thinking visible leads to deep and meaningful conversations in which we can test each other's thinking and develop the virtues of open-mindedness and curiosity.

2. Always assess the credibility of information based on its source and with a reflection on your own biases.

The processes of our thinking can shape information as we receive it, just as much as the source can in providing it. This develops the virtues of carefulness and humility.

3. Keep the fundamental question of critical inquiry in mind.

The most important question in critical thinking is: "how do we know"? Continually testing the quality of your inquiry – and therefore thinking – is key. Focusing on this question gives us practice in applying the values of inquiry and develops virtues such as persistence and resilience.

You are not alone!

Reasoning is best understood as a social competence: we reason with and towards each other. Indeed, to be called reasonable is a social compliment.

It's only when we have to think with others that we really test the quality of our thinking. It's easy to convince yourself about something, but when you play in the arena of public reasoning, the bar is much higher.

So, be the reasonable person in the room.

That doesn't mean everyone has to come around to your way of thinking. But it does mean everyone will get closer to the truth because of you.

Use online resources

There are many accessible tools for developing critical thinking. Kialo (Esperanto for "reason"), brings together people from around the world on a user-friendly (and free) platform to help test our reasoning in a well-moderated and respectful environment. It is an excellent place to practice the giving and taking of reasons and to understand alternative positions.

The School of Thought, developed to curate free critical thinking resources, includes many that are often used in educational contexts.

There's also a plethora of online courses that can guide development in critical thinking, from Australian and international universities.

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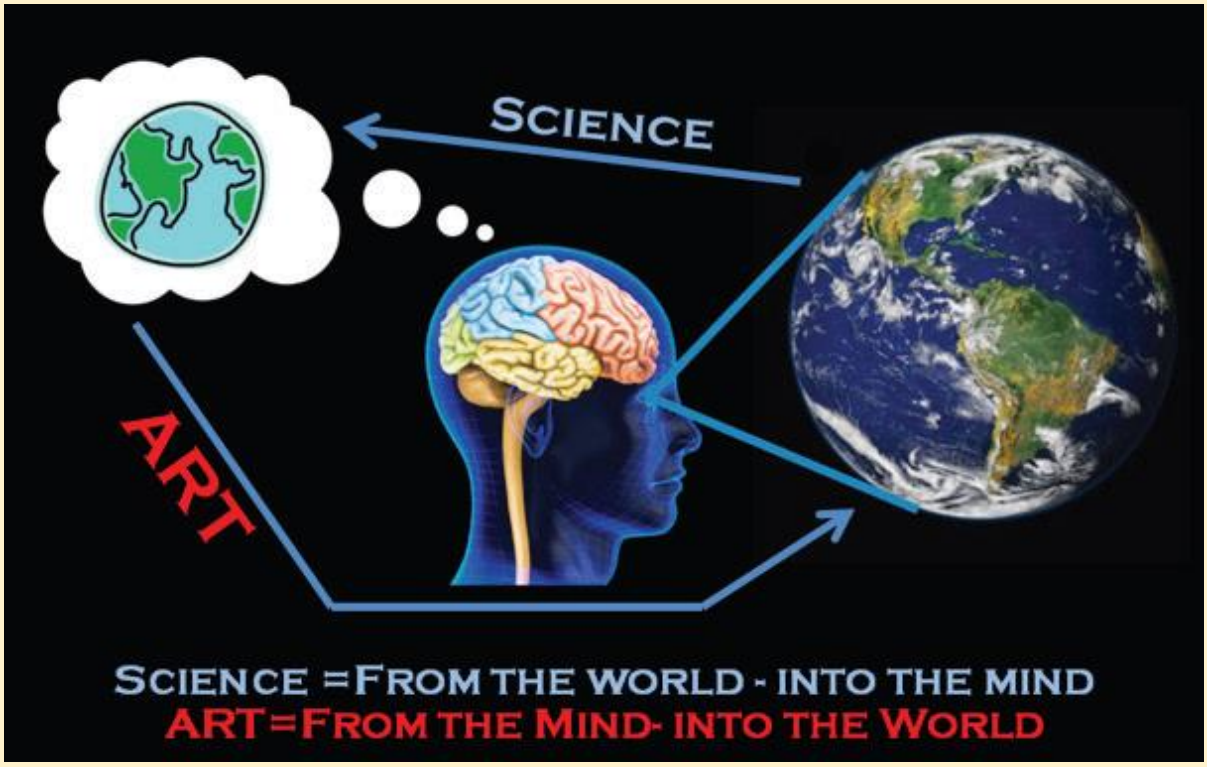
Coffee Break

Definition of Art



We each perceive the world from our own position or perspective and from that perception we make a mental image of the world. Science is the process of turning perceptions into a coherent mental picture of the universe through testing and observation. Science moves concepts from the world into the mind. Science is vitally important because it allows us to understand how the world works and to use that understanding to make good predictions. Art is the other side of our experience with the world. Art moves ideas from the mind into the world.

We need both art and science to exist in the world. From our earliest age, we both observe the world and do things to change it. We are all both scientists and artists. Every human activity has both a science (observation) and an art (expression) to it. Anyone who has participated in the discipline of Yoga, for example, can see that even something as simple as breathing has both an art and a science to it.

This definition of art covers the wide variety of objects that we see in museums, on social media, or even in our daily walk to work. But this definition of art is not enough. The bigger question is: what art is worthy of our attention, and how do we know when we have found it? Ultimately, each of us must answer that question for ourselves. But we do have help if we want it. People who have made a disciplined study of art can offer ideas about what art is important and why.

What did Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675, Netherlands) show us about the quiet dignity of the domestic space in his painting *Woman Holding a Balance*?

Woman Holding a Balance Artist: Johannes Vermeer Author: User "DcoetzeeBot"

Source: Wikimedia Commons License: Public Domain

The Distinction of Fine Art

From our definition of art proposed above, it would seem that craft and fine art are indistinguishable as both come from the mind into the world. But the distinction between craft and art is real and important. This distinction is most commonly understood as one based on the use or end purpose of an object, or as an effect of the material used. Clay, textiles, glass, and jewelry were long considered the province of craft, not art. If an object's intended use was a part of daily living, then it was generally thought to be the product of craft, not fine art. But many objects originally intended to be functional, such as quilts, are now thought to qualify as fine art. (see below)

Quilt Artist: Lucy Mingo Author: User "Billvolckening" Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: CC BY-SA 4.0

So what could be the difference between art and craft? Anyone who has been exposed to training in a craft such as carpentry or plumbing recognizes that craft follows a formula, that is, a set of rules that govern not only how the work is to be conducted but also what the outcome of that work must be. The level of craft is judged by how closely the end product matches the pre-determined outcome. We want our houses to stand and water to flow when we turn on our faucets. Fine art, on the other hand, results from a free and open-ended exploration that does not depend on a pre-determined formula for its outcome or validity. Its outcome is surprising and original. Almost all fine art objects are a combination of some level both of craft and art. Art stands on craft, but goes beyond it.

Taken from *Introduction to Art.* Sachant. P.J. Ed. Creative Commons Attribution- ShareAlike 4.0 International License. https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/introduction-to-art-design-context-and-meaning

Soothing the Respiratory Blues

Keri Hogarth B.A., N.D., D.B.M., Dip. Hom.

Many customers have enquired as to how they can obtain a decent level of Beta Carotene in their diet, wanting to support their respiratory health. I always refer to 'carrots' as a great 'superfood'. Studies have shown that carrots can be useful in respiratory infections and in the treatment of minor skin and eye disorders. Russian research in 1960 identified a compound in carrots called daucarine, which assists in the maintenance of peripheral circulation.

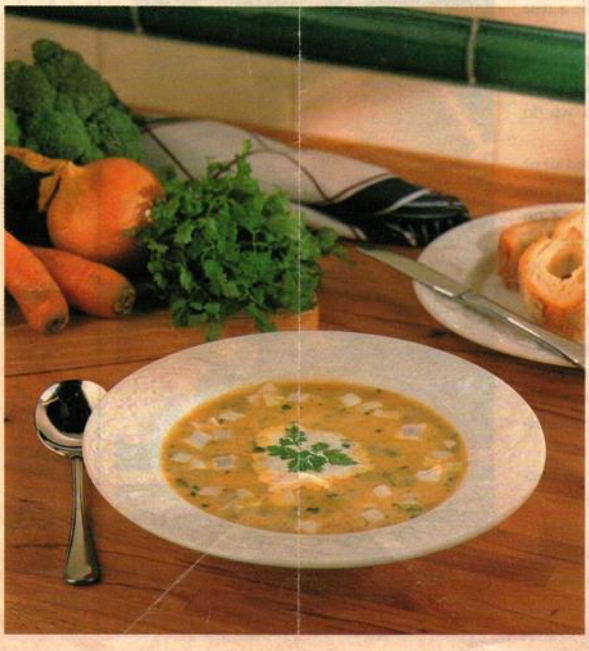
Leeks, on the other hand, are a member of the same great healing family as onions and garlic, and have much the same therapeutic properties, though in a milder form. In French traditional medicine they are prescribed for respiratory problems. They are rich in potassium and are also valued for their ability to assist in the temporary relief of arthritis.

Ginger is a warming, antiseptic spice, widely used in Eastern cooking. Ginger aids digestion and helps maintain optimum peripheral circulation. Added to any winter soups or broths this spice helps clear the sinuses, thus is useful for respiratory infections.

Using these three components, I have outlined here a very simple winter soup which will be most beneficial for your respiratory, circulatory and skin health.

Carrot, Leek and Ginger Soup

2 large leeks
2 large carrots
1 tbs oil
piece fresh ginger root
900 mL vegetable stock (includes:- 2 carrots, few tops of celery, 1 onion, 2-3 garlic cloves, bay leaf, thyme)
1 bay leaf
2 tbs cream
a little fresh coriander, chopped



1. Prepare vegetable stock. Peel and slice carrots, peel and chop onion and garlic, clean and chop celery. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a big saucepan, melt the onion and garlic (until soft), add the carrot and celery, stir and cook gently for 5 minutes. Add the herbs and 900mL of water, bring to boil and simmer for about an hour, covered. Drain vegetable stock, keeping the liquid.

2. Prepare soup vegetables. Clean and finely slice the leeks, including some of the green part; scrub and thinly slice the carrots. Heat the oil and melt the leeks (until they start to soften), but on no account let them change colour. Add the carrots, stir, grate in the peeled ginger, add the vegetable stock and the bayleaf. Bring to the boil, and simmer for 30 minutes.

3. Blend ingredients. Remove the bayleaf and puree in a blender or food processor. Reheat and serve in individual bowls with a swirl of cream and a sprinkling of coriander.

To contact us about any relevant matters, please click on ‘Contacts’ on our website: https://www.u3aonline.org.au/ and share your thoughts with us.

Alternatively, you could write to us at: enquiries@u3aonline.org.au.

I am also quite happy for you to write directly to me if you would prefer at: colbull@bigpond.com

Colin Bull

Newsletter Editor