John Berger's Ways Of Seeing And The Nature Of Reproductions

The first episode “Ways of Seeing: Reproduction” is one of the most discussed and influential films about art. It explores the fundamental principles of understanding modern art and explains how humans’ perception of artworks depends on modern technologies. As the English writer, painter, and art critic John Berger (1972) believes, “reproduction makes works of art ambiguous”. Indeed, there are two sides of a coin: the various contemporary contexts distort our perception of classic works of art because people are able to see much more than an author initially wanted to transmit, for instance; and, at the same time, people do not always capture a whole range of messages that are obvious to contemporary works. In other words, the reproduction can demonstrate the viewers another side of a piece of art, depending on what tools have been used, from what angles the frame was captured, either the scene was accompanied by some music or not.

The author wisely points out that before looking at a thing and making a conclusion about it, a person should know its history. Otherwise, the person may get an ambiguous impression about it. A completely separate story about the vision of the author is devoted to the video images. With the advent of cameras and the ability to see the movement of objects, the perception of vision has become easy to manipulate. Previously, in order to see the performance, the viewer needed to come to the theater, immerse himself in the surroundings. The reproduction allows perceiving that work of art beyond the framework of the situation accessible to the original. The same performance is now available not only in the theater but also in the cinema.

By creating reproduction, the process of borrowing the motives of the original masterpiece indicates intentions to preserve the authenticity of the object, as accurately as possible to transmit even the most sophisticated details. On the one hand, reproductions are lifeless, since there is no true idea and value in them, there is no “here and now” of the original. On the other hand, reproduction is an ambiguous combination of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, which are mutually complementary, and can be perceived in a different way. In particular, every piece of art deals with a personal ability to interpret things.

In conclusion, nowadays, the art has lost its former influence and power. A person, looking at the original picture, perceives it mostly in the manner of previously seen numerous reproductions, without its fabulous value and initial meaning, whereas the original meaning that the author brought in, is not a subject of people’s concern anymore. Nevertheless, the creation of camera has significantly influenced the human’s ability to see the object from a diversity of sides and angles, the piece of art still remains ambiguous and is a matter of interpretation.