

 Smithsonian
SECOND OPINION**HOW TO HOST A SECOND OPINION DISCUSSION IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

Action begins at the local level, so take part in a discussion about “What it means to be an American” at home

The goal of the Smithsonian Institution’s Second Opinion website is to be a catalyst for a national conversation on critical issues facing the nation.

To that end, we invite you to host your own conversation in your community, and share the results with us at SecondOpinionReact@si.edu. We’ll post selected responses from individuals and groups as part of the Vox Populi area of the website.

To host a conversation is simple:

- Invite a group of friends, acquaintances and others who have a variety of differing opinions about the issue being discussed.
- Set aside 90 minutes or so for discussion
- Use the questions below (or download the PDF) and use them to guide your conversation
- Have as a goal not for any one person to “win” a debate, but rather that each point of view is understood by the others, even if they disagree with that point of view.
- Capture your ideas, conversation, and common ground in writing, audio, or video
- Reach out to us at SecondOpinionReact@si.edu and share your experience

Thanks so much for your participation in this Second Opinion conversation!

The overall theme we are exploring in this edition of *Second Opinion* is the Arts:

In 1965, upon signing the act that founded the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, President Lyndon Johnson said, “Art is a nation’s most precious heritage. For it is in our works of art that we reveal to ourselves and to others the inner vision which guides us as a nation. And where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Today, many people still agree with this sentiment. Yet there are others who question the utility of the arts to society, and the wisdom of using public funds to support them.

To discuss these important issues and more, we we’d like you to consider the following questions:

Questions

ON ART INSTITUTIONS

1. Should art museums have a neutral point of view? Is that possible, and is that something to which we should aspire?
2. What makes an arts institution successful? What is the most important role that art museums can play in society? How should we judge their performance?
3. What are the major challenges for arts institutions today? How can they improve?
4. What does it mean for an art museum to be “relevant”?
5. Are art institutions “elitist”?
6. What is the role of the artist in society, and how is it changing -- and how is this tied to the role of institutions that support and display the artist’s work?

7. How has social media changed the way we interact with art?
8. Are blockbuster movies and TV shows good or bad for the public appreciation of art?

ON ART EDUCATION

1. Why is teaching the arts important? How does it fit into an economy that prioritizes skills like coding or other science and engineering knowledge?
2. Should teaching the arts be part of a STEM education?
3. A growing body of evidence shows that arts education has broad benefits to learning. Given the time constraints in school curricula, how can formal and informal education foster a needed understanding, appreciation, and appetite for the arts?

ON ART ACCESSIBILITY

1. Is it the artist's responsibility to advance equal representation, diversity, and other values?
2. What are the best ways institutions can broaden their reach and find new audiences?
3. Is there a cost to increasing the diversity of art audiences?
4. Many people are intimidated by art or feel they don't understand it. Is there a value to widening the world of the arts to them as well as the people who seek it out on their own?

ON THE ECONOMICS OF ART

1. To what extent should government fund the arts? How much has this changed over time in the U.S.? Can we learn lessons from the way other countries support the arts?
2. Does government arts funding open the door for censorship?
3. It is sometimes hard to quantify the value of art, so how can we ensure society is getting the most value for our investment in the arts?
4. Is the art world today overly commoditized and consumed with celebrity?

5. Should the focus of government-funded arts projects be art that appeals to a wider audience?

ON ART AND IDENTITY

1. How has the growing recognition of “identity” influenced art and vice versa?
2. How should we regard art that is controversial and by its nature divisive? (anti-religious, obscene, culturally appropriated, etc.)
3. How much does the artist's intent matter when it comes to public interpretation?

ON ART AND MORALITY, POLITICS

1. Art has been used to foster understanding, establish power, and express dissent. What moral obligation does an artist have when creating art? What moral obligation does an institution have in presenting that art?
2. Has art ever mattered more in societies than it does now?