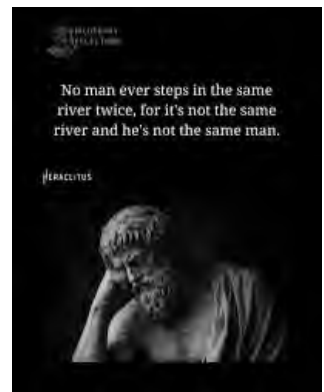


## Seneca, Letters to Lucilius

### Letter § 66.11:

"But, since the virtues of plants and of animals are perishable, they are also frail and fleeting and uncertain. They spring up, and they sink down again, and for this reason they are not rated at the same value; but to human virtues only one rule applies. For right reason is single and of but one kind."

If human virtue is rooted in rational consciousness and ethical judgment, then what gives human beings dignity is not physical strength or instinct, but the capacity for reason and moral discernment. Responsibility and care therefore become essential part of the human destiny and their shared obligations.



## Revealing the Human

The exploration of the human brings together all forms of life: from humans to animals, and even plants, all equally alive. Humanity stands at the crossroads between nature and artifice, between the intelligence of the living and, today, artificial intelligence.

**Georg Bertram** asserts that human practices are "constituted by tradition to be open to revision and criticism. This is what makes up the human form of life." Such openness introduces a fundamental instability: "there is a precarious practical element to human existence... Humans are beings that, in establishing what they are, always put themselves in play." Within this framework, change necessitates negotiation, and art emerges as one of the principal means through which such negotiation is enacted. Art becomes, therefore, a space where humanity continuously tests and redefines itself.

Artistic practice engages both the self and the collective.

What Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel identifies as the individual arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry—actively shape the self and its perception of being within the world. To experience art is to enter into a dynamic process in which the very sense of Being is placed into play, allowing subjective perspectives to be shared and contested.

Existentialist thinkers have made decisive contributions to ethical and aesthetic discourse. Their philosophical reflections were deeply informed by artistic practice, which they understood as inseparable from ethical engagement with the world. Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Gabriel Marcel, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre collectively affirm that each singular vision contributes to a broader human understanding. These perspectives are not competitive; rather, they accumulate and complement one another, forming a plural and interconnected human community.

Kierkegaard emphasises the individual's freedom and subjective responsibility. Sartre, drawing on Hegelian terminology, describes human existence as a "for-itself," an autonomous consciousness that nonetheless exists in relation to others. Creation, in this sense, is an act that transforms both the world and the self. Human beings are thus fully responsible for their imaginative and practical actions.

Existentialism situates existence as the primary condition of being. Each individual inhabits the world in a distinct yet relational manner, defined both in contrast to and in complement with others.

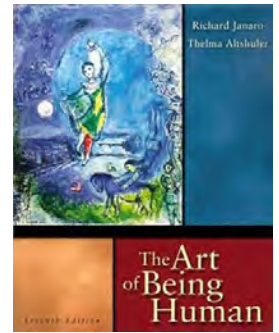
Freedom, therefore, is never isolated; it is always entangled with the freedom of others. This interdependence forms the basis for an ethical understanding of existence.

Such an ontological perspective positions art as a mode of insight, revelation, and critical inquiry. Artistic practices must therefore engage with ethical, aesthetic, and political dimensions simultaneously. Across disciplines, art interrogates the metaphysical foundations of existence itself.



In *The Art of Being Human*, Richard Janaro and Thelma Altshuler examine cultural expressions across time and geography, emphasizing the interconnectedness of artistic forms. The arts function as bridges across temporal, spatial, and cultural divides, enabling a deeper understanding of both self and world.

The Art of Being Human, Richard Janaro and Thelma Altshuler



Within this context, the relationship between multiculturalism and artistic expression becomes evident. The arts reveal the plurality of identities and experiences, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding. By exposing the multiplicity of perspectives, artistic practices challenge stereotypes, resist simplifications, and contribute to social cohesion.

Creation is inseparable from existence.

Artistic expression offers visibility and agency to marginalised voices, contributing to a collective narrative shaped by diversity. The arts serve as instruments of perception, critique, affirmation, and resilience.

As political theorist Song suggests, culture encompasses not only high art but also everyday practices, beliefs, languages, and rituals. These elements define identity, belonging, and social structures. Living within pluralism requires recognising others not as oppositional, but as complementary.

Living within pluralism requires openness to others as complementary beings.

Art and culture embody a vast accumulation of knowledge—scientific, technical, and conceptual. This accumulation constitutes a historical record of human development. Artists, alongside scientists and scholars, participate in an ongoing process of observation, interpretation, and transformation.

Emotions play a central role in this process. They are inseparable from human experience, yet often insufficiently examined. A truly ethical engagement with the world requires acknowledging emotional dimensions as integral to knowledge and action.

From prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary practices, humans have continuously expressed their understanding of existence through creative acts. These processes of disruption and integration sustain social systems and cultural evolution.

Prehistoric humans buried their dead, crafted tools, created jewellery and figurines, and decorated caves with images of animals, humans, and abstract forms. A continuous process of disruption and integration shapes human societies, sustaining social systems.

Theoretical frameworks—ontology, epistemology, sociology, ethics, and aesthetics—serve as tools for structuring human knowledge and experience. Yet the human mind must move beyond binary thinking, transcending finitude in order to engage with complexity and relationality.

As Blaise Pascal observed, “Man infinitely surpasses man.” This statement underscores both the limitations and the potential of human existence. It calls for a continuous process of self-critique and ethical responsibility.



In contemporary contexts, many experience profound disillusionment when witnessing global tendencies toward violence and injustice. The foundational values of care, respect, and coexistence remain essential to any meaningful conception of humanity.

Hannah Arendt suggested that extreme misfortune does not create misery but reveals it. Thought is both a right and a responsibility. Yet

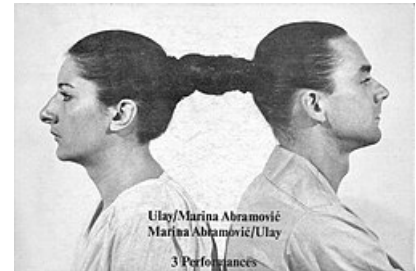
Hannah Arendt, photographed on New Year's Day, 1944. © Fred Stein/dpa/Corbis ; “There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is a dangerous activity.” Hannah Arendt

many leaders seem unable or unwilling to think at this deeper level, where ethics and aesthetics converge.

## Artists

Artists occupy a critical position within this framework, uniting aesthetic exploration with ethical inquiry. Through their work, they reveal tensions, contradictions, and possibilities within the human condition.

**Marina Abramović's** performances explore identity, endurance, and vulnerability through audience participation. In one work, she offered 72 objects that could bring pleasure or harm. Over six hours, the audience's behavior shifted from passive to extreme. She later stated, "If you leave it to the audience, they can kill you."

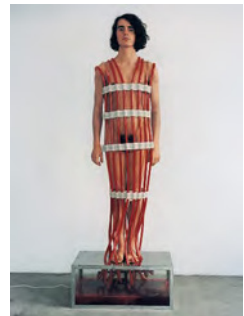


Kunstenarsboek. Marina Abramovic ; Ulay. - Uitgever: Innsbruck : Galerie Krinzinger, 1978

The art of **Leo Tolstoy** is grounded in the expression of reflection, emotion, and human feeling, seeking to convey them, to enter into relation with others, and to reveal a shared experience of being. Tolstoy emphasises the ethical and deeply aesthetic scope of art, beyond passing trends. Aware of its power—capable both of uniting and of provoking violence or moral decline—he questions the responsibility of the artist. In his view, the value of art lies in its impact on the journey of all living: a true work should foster empathy, care for others, critical thinking, and a sense of brotherhood that transcends individual, cultural, and social boundaries.

In 2023, *Revealing the Human Form* at the Arts Council Collection in London featured sculptures by Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Sokari Douglas Camp, and Antony Gormley, exploring and depicting the human body and its meaning across time.

**Rebecca Horn** expanded the boundaries of the human body with her work—exploring feelings, desires, and fears—using performances, films, drawings, poems, kinetic sculptures, and installations: a web of objects evoking themes that reveal the human and nature, using cultural references ranging from traditions to fairy tales, demonstrating how symbolic languages, realities, and fiction merge and flow together.



Rebecca Horn, Überströmer, 1970 Tate Collection, London© 2019 Rebecca Horn\_ ProLitteris, Zurich.



Modern artists, inspired by **Cubism**, transform the way we perceive the "other" through a process of abstraction, reducing forms to their essential elements—line, shape, and colour. In doing so, they translate reality into expressive and personal interpretations. Proto-Cubists depict objects, figures, and spaces through geometric structures—cubic and conic forms—seeking not to reproduce appearances, but to reveal the fundamental, *constructive essence of being* and of the physical world, not as it is seen, but as it is.

David Shillinglaw Only HUMAN 2025

In *Letters to Lucilius*, Seneca explores ethics, mortality, and how to live meaningfully. In Letter 58, he reflects on Heraclitus: we step into the same river, yet it is always different. Human life is equally fleeting.

In Letter 59, he writes that humans are burdened by vices, difficult to cleanse. In Letter 65, he refers to Plato's idea of forms, suggesting that while individuals perish, the idea of humanity endures.

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In this exhibition dedicated to revealing the human, six visual artists from diverse backgrounds come together to offer a range of perspectives:

**Patricia Bourgeois'** approach is rooted in the New Caledonian context. Questioning how coexistence between humans and nature—seemingly incompatible—is possible. In *Empreintes et Territoires Glissants*, she explores environmental responsibility in the context of the Anthropocene, demonstrating the irreversible human impact.

**Natalie Mei**, with her *Little People of the Streams*, gives birth to anonymous hybrid beings—half animal, half human—giving voice to the unnamed, exploring life and death; her organic sculptures, composed of bird bones, evoke how the living and the dead coexist.

**Véronique Menet** works on non-verbal heritage—gestures, silences, traces—a portrayal of an intimate feminism rooted in overlooked female histories; using thread as a metaphor for a slow time of lineage, and linocut to demonstrate incisions and scars that endure. Between thread and cut, she reveals buried wounds, strengths, and impulses—intergenerational inheritances; creation becomes an act of transmission.

**Mathieu Scoetti** investigates the impulse that drives the Cro-Magnon—a primitive and innate urge. Humans produce as a child plays, targeting progress—a testimony to a fleshly motion that transforms childhood passions into adult ways of seeing.

**Jean-Pierre Sougy**, in his drawing series *Les Dix Petits Nègres* and *Strange Fruit*, adopts a provocative stance deeply shaped by powerful images of victims and their executioners: men, women, and children who were lynched, presented as if in a Sunday spectacle. In doing so, he enters into a dialogue with the discourse on Négritude articulated by Léopold Sédar Senghor. His choice of the title *Strange Fruit* is borrowed from a song written by Abel Meeropol and performed by Billie Holiday.

**Izumi Ueda Yuu** observes that people experience intense moments, as many are not socially advantaged. The *Yomise* series depicts individuals in an open-air night market — goldfish fishing, small shops, and street games — with people wearing yukata or prayer kimonos. In *The Night Market*, the gap between rich and poor, social divisions, and meritocracy become even more apparent. Her masks seem to listen to the night and its people. She asks: have we missed something? Everyone is an equal citizen, yet we live in unequal societies.

## CONCLUSION

I will conclude with the words of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jewish writer whose diaries and letters, written during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam, provide both a historical testimony and an account of inner transformation, revealing the essence of humanity.

In one passage, she reflects on the First Letter to the Corinthians (chapter 13), written by the Apostle Paul in the first century, addressing love — rendered here as care or “charity”:  
“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not charity, I am nothing... If I love beings with such ardour, it is because in each of them I love a part of You, my divinity.”

She was interned at the Westerbork transit camp and, in 1943, deported and murdered at Auschwitz.



Etty Hillesum (Photo courtesy of the Etty Hillesum Research Centre, Middelburg, the Netherlands)

Aimé Césaire wrote that the artist cannot remain indifferent but must engage fully with society. And as Robert Filliou stated, “Art is what makes life more interesting than art.”

Because ultimately, as Jules de Gaultier observed, every reality that becomes aware of itself knows itself as other than what it is.



Motherhood, Mandy Havers, 1977.jpeg

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