

Department of Philosophy Colloquium

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3-5pm



HIB 55



Appreciative Understanding

A common trope about art is that we shouldn't try to understand it; instead, artworks are to be appreciated with wonder, awe, or a sense of mystery. Bob Dylan gives voice to this trope when he writes, "Whether it's *Dogs Playing Poker* or *Mona Lisa*'s smile, you gain nothing from understanding it." My hypothesis is that this view arises in part from a tendency—explicit in some recent accounts—to locate artistic understanding as a species of theoretical understanding, the paradigm exercise of which is scientific explanation. My argument starts with the observation that the parallel trope about persons is much less compelling, because we are not tempted to hold that theoretical understanding is the only way of cognitively relating to others. I introduce some desiderata for a non-theoretical view of understanding persons and motivate the claim that they are also desiderata for understanding artworks. Ultimately, I argue that both are forms of *appreciative* understanding, which is distinct from theoretical and practical understanding both in terms of its content and in terms of what a grasp of that content enables.

If you have any questions, please contact philos@uci.edu

BIO

Robbie Kubala works in the philosophy of the arts and aesthetic practices, and those areas of value theory and practical philosophy that help us to make sense of them. He has published papers on aesthetic value, reasons, appreciation, obligations, and blame, as well as on crossword puzzles, literary interpretation, the relation between valuing and believing valuable, and the themes of love and desire in the novels of Marcel Proust.