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Finding Meaning in Neuroaesthetics

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Abstract: How might neuroaesthetics move beyond beauty and begin to study meaning? While neuroaesthetics is broadly concerned with the brain's role in processing art, it has typically focused on perceptual preferences concerning the question of beauty. To cut deeper ontologically the field might consider exploring other basic kinds of meaningful categorical judgments people routinely make about artifacts, including those related to an object's purpose and status as art. Providing a point of entry for an empirical approach, a methodology is described where participants judge objects (chairs) for higher-order qualities beyond beauty, including functionality, and art-objecthood. Results suggest that artifacts can be used for probing deeper empirical questions concerning the neural basis for aesthetic judgments and object processing. In this manner, we can begin to understand the meaning of art with respect to both its form and function.