

The Case for the Arts and Humanities

We begin with the body, our instrument.
We begin with the limbs and torso of a dancer,
the cadenced breath, the voice of a poet,
the eye and dextrous hand of a painter,
the sculptor's skin against sculptor's clay,
the ear where melody and harmony play.
Our long discourse is corporeal, be it
of philosophy or society, law or the psyche,
events physical or metaphysical.
We know by how a thing smells, we learn
by sweet and sour, by rough and smooth,
by every common sense, and by heart, too,
and by brain, that soft-tough muscle,
wherein we seek those truths beyond our Age.
While warships move slowly and world events
sway our conscience and pain our hearts,
let us think what we shall leave to entropy.
We who use the world must revisit it.
Let our works, like our words, express in time
the truth of our nature, for good or bad,
for the jury is out and the foreman has asked
for a fully detailed, illuminated transcript.

Marvin Bell, Iowa Poet Laureate