

This lecture concerns my ongoing intellectual and emotional struggle with the most provocative essay against the value of art ever written--the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theatre* (1758). As an artist (and until recently, a longtime professor of painting) with a background in political philosophy, I've always been intrigued by the question of how art and artists fit into society. I'll begin with an outline of Rousseau's powerful arguments against the arts, and conclude with my painter's rebuttal to his case.