

EVOLUTION OF ART & CRITIQUING

The study of art history, its movements and painters will vastly enrich how you develop as an artist. Following is a very brief overview of art history. Changes in movements were often based on artists rejecting or expanding on old methods and philosophies. This is by no means an exhaustive list and experts can vary greatly on defining both the movements and their influences. If you find a period that interests you, do your own research and interpretation.

Classical Art (1400's – 1850)

Renaissance

Artists of this time experienced an era of great creativity. They studied anatomy and perspective, perfecting their understanding of the natural world. Sandro Botticelli was part of the Early Renaissance. The High Renaissance, particularly in Italy brought renewed interest in Greek and Roman art and design. This period brought about three of the most noted artists in all history... Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael.

Mannerism

Artists began to reject the calm, orderly style of the High Renaissance and exchange it for a style full of emotion and distortion. Mannerism is characterized by elongated figures in complex or unbalanced poses, collapsed perspective, and theatrical lighting. It was considered a period of great technical achievement, though formulaic. The Mannerism movement took place between 1520 and 1600. The most notable name associated with this period is Michelangelo as he pioneered this style.

Baroque

Artists reacted to Mannerism's intricacy and formula with the Baroque movement. It is less complex, more realistic and emotionally evocative. It was encouraged by the Catholic Church (the most important patron of art at this time) because it was perceived as a return to tradition and spirituality. Great names of this movement include Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Velazquez, and Vermeer.

Rococo

Artists rebelled against grandeur, symmetry, and the strictness of the Baroque movement. Rococo was a more ornate period that utilized pastel colors, asymmetry, curves, and gold. As the name suggests stone (*rocaille* in French), and shells (*coquilles* in French) were common motifs. It was also sometimes very playful and witty. Portraiture was considered important in painting at this time. The movement lasted from 1715 to 1774. Jean-Antoine Watteau was considered a great painter of this period.

Neoclassicism

Artists and society in general began to look to the past for lessons in harmony, simplicity, and proportion perhaps due to the overbearingness and excess of the previous movement. Today it does not seem like an exceptionally inspiring period and to get a better sense of the movement one should look to sculpture and architecture. The movement spanned the mid-18th to the early 19th century. A painter of note from this period is Jacques-Louis David.

Romanticism

Artist once again rejected the preceding movement in favour of individuality, beauty, and emotion. This movement overlapped quite a bit with the previous, with many artists influenced by and utilizing elements of both movements. This movement spanned from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century. Great artists of the Romanticism period include J.M.W. Turner and John Constable.

Realism

Artists began to portray their subjects simply as they appeared and without adhering to prior formal theory. This was both a reaction to the previous period, but also to oppose the influences of the Salon and the Academies. This began in the mid-19th century, though you will see earlier examples of it. Edward Hopper, Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, and James McNeill Whistler are all great realists of this period.

Modernism (1850 – Present)

Impressionism

Artists began to reject the strict academic art standards and officially sanctioned (and controlled) exhibitions. They instead began to develop their perceptions of light and how it affects color. Some of the artists headed outdoors to do so because due to developments of the industrialized world they were no longer confined to their studios. They loosened their brush strokes to work quickly with the changing conditions, and expanded their palette to capture what they truly perceived. The movement was French in origin and lasted from the late 1860's to early 1890's. It is one of the most widely recognized movements with names such as Claude Monet, Mary Cassatt, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissaro all being associated with it.

Post-Impressionism

Artists began to vigorously react against Impressionism's interest in the external observed world as their subject matter and turned inward for content. This led to explorations in symbolism, coupled with form and pattern. It was never a cohesive or singularly defined movement. Paul Cézanne was probably the most influential in this time period as he bridged the gap between Impressionism and early 20th century movements by articulating underlying structures in simple geometric form.

Art Nouveau

Artist reacted against the clutter and ornateness of the Victorian era and adopted modern decorative design into their work. It was short-lived from about 1890 to 1905, and was probably most influential in architecture. Gustav Klimt is best known for this style.

Expressionism

Artists began to respond to the anxieties of the modern world and began to see art as coming from within rather than depiction of the world. The measure of art was now about how well the artist expressed his/her character rather than compositional analysis. It emerged in Germany in 1905 with a group of architects turned painters and endured until mid-1930. Common names associated with this movement are Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

Fauvism

Artists reacting against impressionism embraced vivid color and impactful gestural strokes as a means of personal expression. The movement began in the early twentieth century with the artist whose name is synonymous with the Fauvism... Henri Matisse.

Futurism

Artists amidst war in Italy began to celebrate the speed, movement, violence, and mechanism of modern day. Futurism was a blend of realism and other forms, resulting in very dynamic and forceful images.

Cubism

Artists sought a new way to describe space and mass resulting in Cubism. Form was fragmented and then resynthesized with a variety of materials. This movement paved the way for abstract art. It originated in Paris in 1907 with artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque.

Surrealism

Artists began to challenge reality. They sought to channel their unconscious to unlock the power of imagination and were greatly influenced by the theories of Freud. The movement began in Paris in the mid-1920 and endured into the 1960's. The most notable artist of this movement was Salvador Dali.

Abstract Expressionism

Artists began to express emotion, universal theme, and personal experience through their work. Early on it was influenced by an influx of European modernists. The movement was broad and encompassed the spatial work of Jackson Pollock, the color field work of Mark Rothko, and the gestural abstraction work of Willem de Kooning, to name a few. The success of this movement led to America's dominance in the modern art world on an international scale. It was one of the most influential post-war movements and centered on New York, in the 1940's and 1950's.

Minimalism

Artists began to discard the excesses of abstract expressionism by using things such as simple, geometric shapes. They sought to remove all signs of the artist's hand and rejected medium-specificity, attempting to erase the lines between painting and sculpture. The movement emerged in the 1960's in New York, with Donald Judd being a notable.

Conceptualism

Artists began to focus of art in terms of presentation of ideas using a range of diverse media rather than pure traditional visual content as the primary form of communication. This was with the intent of having people consider the nature of art rather than pieces of art. They abandoned skill as a traditional measure of art. The movement developed in the mid-1960's and is still seen today. Marcel Duchamp is often considered the pioneer with several works ("Readymades") having predated the actual movement by decades.

Pop Art

Artists began to reject the internal process of abstract expressionism by using materials and processes that were about culture, not the artist. This was done to a large extent, by using pre-existing (popular) cultural imagery. It developed in the 1950's in America and flourished in the 1960's around New York with artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. Its influence can still be seen today.

Neo-Expressionism

Artists rejected the intellectualism of the conceptual and minimalist movements and returned to expressionism in which the artists asserted their own creative intellect. This was demonstrated by interest in everything from primitivism to the revival of historical styles. The origin of this movement can be traced to the late 1960's and German artist Georg Baselitz. It flourished world-wide in the 1980's.

Critiquing

- A critique of a work of art is not about personal opinion (though it can be part of it).
- When critiquing, it is important to know what questions to ask (see below).
- A successful critique relies on an understanding of many elements and using an art vocabulary to express your thoughts.
- Art vocabulary and understanding have historically followed the evolution of art. It would have been impossible to appropriately critique a Jackson Pollock with an 1850's understanding and vocabulary. This is important to think about when looking at historic works.
- Skill can be gained in critiquing by studying art history to develop you art vocabulary, and by studying the great artists of the past and what made them so.
- Critiquing art (that of others and your own) will assist you in growing as an artist.
- When critiquing the work of others, focus on what works and why. Respect those that have put their time and effort into creating a piece.

Critiquing Art – Some General Questions

1. What is the style of the piece?
2. What is the purpose of the piece?
3. When was the piece painted, and what were the influences of this period?
4. Does it have a pleasing composition and if so, why?
5. What elements/principles of design can you identify and how do they support the work?
6. What appeals to you (color, value, texture, mood, marks, etc.), and why?
7. If it was your piece what would you have done differently?
8. Would you buy this piece? Why or why not?

Art Vocabulary

Here are some descriptors for use when viewing art.

Style – Realistic, tonal, impressionistic, expressionistic, abstract, primitive, surreal, modern, romantic, stylized, simple, complex, detailed, exaggerated, distorted, geometric

Composition – Foreground, middle ground, background, symmetrical, asymmetrical, balanced, unbalanced, structure, layout, position, alignment, arrangement, negative/positive space, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, angled, cluttered, organized

Mood – Calm, serene, peaceful, romantic, happy, cheery, energetic, exciting, stimulating, aggressive, angry, dark, frightening, gloomy, depressing, sad, sombre, boring, dull, insipid, thought-provoking

Color – Cool, warm, muted, soft, intense, brilliant, pastel, monochromatic

Value – Dark, light, mid-tone, flat, uniform, varied, graduating, contrasting

Texture – Smooth, rough, flat, raised, uneven, soft, hard, shiny, glossy, reflective, matte, patterned, distressed

Marks – Impasto, blended, smooth, thick, thin, bold, vigorous, timid, precise, refined, heavy, light, irregular, uneven, glaze, wash, hatch, splatter, stipple

Michael J. Downs on Art

As you may have concluded, my influences are **Impressionism** and **Realism** (not photo). My philosophy in art is mostly aesthetic, choosing to portray the world as I visually perceive it as an artist and to do my best to share that beauty as accurately as possible. History has given us many great tools in art, but the greatest in my opinion is the practice of **visual perception** from the Impressionistic movement. I believe that this supersedes any formula or system for drawing and painting and no matter what style you develop it will serve you well. That is why it is the focus of my teaching.