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History of Western Art
Part Four – From Neo-Classicism to Impressionism

Assignment Four – Exercise 1

Notes on Chapter 15 – Romanticism to realism

Post-revolution, role, purpose, nature of artists changed. Science, philosophy also changing. Emergence of theory of evolution, classification of species (Linnaeus). Kant changed focus of philosophy. Approach supported by Goethe. However, Kant philosophy led to Romantic philosophy disliked by Goethe.

French revolution instigated further period of unrest. Aim to protect bourgeois society from return to either republicanism or autocracy. Outside France further revolution as middle classes wanted involvement in government.

Rapid population increase, industrialisation, migration to cities, entrepreneurialism, all contributed to creation of a new class of wealth from industry not entitlement (landed aristocracy). Wealth built on back of lower classes, whose lives and conditions wretched, led to Marx/Engels communist manifesto; debate would lead to triumph of proletariat.

Arts in conflict; many belonged to/worked for middle classes; artistic innovation not always in parallel with social change/politically advanced viewpoints. Art/architecture for middle classes harked back to halcyon days; industrialists had large homes on outskirts of city; industrial architecture blunt, plentiful and practical ('dark, satanic mills', cheap housing). Mass over-production led to recession and underemployment. To ameliorate/appease poor, large public parks built in cities (eg. Central Park) to invoke healing power of nature. (pp 636-40)

ROMANTICISM

Romantic broad term, originally for vernacular French literature previously in Latin. Definition defined by views of the individual according to their perception/ideals. Romanticism founded on personal feelings and emotions and response to environment. Sketch epitomises Romanticism as unfettered, but German Nazarenes took opposite direction with extremely structured forms making definition difficult. New art represented revolution but not insurrection (David) (pp 640-42)

The Heirs of David

Mme Benoist's depiction Portrait of a Black Woman personal, individual, divergent from other images of nudity which were of divinities/mythological, personification, scientific/ethnographic. Personal nature (work was kept by artist) perhaps suggests relationship or personal response to discussions around abolition of slavery/emancipation of women. Possibly also response to women not being allowed into art schools.

Gros, pupil of David, pro-Napoleon. Popularised through prints. Many paintings espoused virtues of autocracy, Napoleon near-deified (eg Plague House at Jaffa where he has impression of Christ healing the sick). Paintings intended for moral improvement but essentially propagandist. Napoleon precisely rendered, soldiers less so to focus on general. Later came to have inverse focus on suffering of soldiers. (pp 643-44)

Goya

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Goya a foil to Gros's celebration of Napoleon. Paintings emphasise brutality and cruelty of war and focus on suffering of victims of conflict. (The Third of May 1808) (644) Echoes Horatii in pose but emphasis on victims; not 'heroic' French army shooting unarmed men. Popular as portrait artist in king's court but other works evidence despair at failure of Enlightenment to deliver improvement for people by means of logic and reason. Many works tragic and lacking in sympathy of artistic style (no soft brushstrokes or gentle colour). (pp 644-46)

Gericault

Independently wealthy artists such as Gericault free to paint according to own wishes. Painted with eye to victim, portraying selfishness of rich and entitled at expense of low classes. Raft of the Medusa powerful statement to this effect. Well-received critically due to artistic value of presentation. Victims somewhat idealised as healthy, athletic, not as in reality, emaciated and sick. Compositionally acceptable pyramid. (pp 646-47)

Ingres

Paintings of women as objects of desire; voluptuous flesh sensitively painted. Strong contrasts with sharp colours. Delicate fabrics, opulent surroundings and finery. Many painted later in life (paintings had his age on them) following period of painting commissioned portraits. (pp 647-48)

Delacroix

Large-scale, dramatic, historical paintings after style of Gericault. Played with perspective, spatial relationships, anatomy and colour. Result is bold, voluptuous even in scenes of violence, passionate. (Death of Sardanapalus). Some works challenged sensibilities of Salons (The 28th July: Liberty Leading the People)

Invention of lithography; many more newspapers; saw caricaturists challenging bourgeoisie and press censorship. Sincerity of belief and feelings in art marker of Romanticism.

ROMANTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

Friedrich

Closer links between art, philosophy and poetry in Germany. Art expressed emotions of artists. Friedrich anti-authority, believed in individual judgement, reflection of Protestant upbringing. In landscapes expressed personal struggle with nature and god – art and reality. Figures ambiguous, part of, yet estranged from, reality. (pp 651-52)

Blake

Wrestled with concepts of imagination and reality, creativity and understanding; god versus rationality. Images drawn from diametrically opposed Michelangelo (Newton) and Durer (Nebuchadnezzar). Prints few in number, hand-coloured. Imagination is eternal, reality temporal and limited.

ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Constable

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Painted his own environment coming from a wealthy farming background; farming land, tamed and cultivated by man not wild and at the whim of nature. Everyday scenes, apparently spontaneous but on close examination, painted with real attention to detail. Capturing a moment in time; light, water, skies rendered with truth. Church featured in most paintings, reminder of God's presence. (pp653-54)

Turner

Beginning with realistically portrayed landscapes per Constable, later to adopt a much freer style evincing the powerful forces of nature through the depiction of light, the ocean, mists. The antithesis of 'art conceals art' Turner's palette strokes, splashes of pigment and heavy scumbling give works textural form. Paintings not so much recording nature as recreating effects of light on canvas. Humanity's struggles against the elements. (pp 654-58)

Corot and the Etude

Landscape in France more accepted by conventional academics. Trend was for 'études', plein air studies of landscapes for later use in studio. (Also done by Constable and Turner). Aim was to reproduce reality but instilled with own personality and feelings. (pp 658-59)

PHOTOGRAPHY

The principles of the camera obscura influenced and inspired the development of the Daguerreotype in France and Fox Talbot's negative process in the UK. Emphasis was on recording a moment in time, much as with Constable et al. Became very popular for portraits; much cheaper and quicker than paintings. Rich still bought painted portraits as could be tweaked to adjust features. Also landscapes and cityscapes, buildings. Daguerreotypes one-offs, each print individual, Fox Talbot's allowed several prints from one negative. Produced carefully composed still lifes as well as some spontaneous compositions. Collaborated with artists (Robert Adamson, Octavius Hill) to use photographs on which to base later paintings. Surfaces were rough giving them 'handpainted' appearance, 'imperfect works of man' (WHA p661). Daguerreotypes smooth. Fox Talbot's calotypes superceded by sharper glass negatives but often calotypes preferred as closer to works of art.

Photographs with subjects dressed up in 'historical costume' much disliked in artistic community as supplanting art. Photography could never supplant the innate feeling and personal touch of the Romantics' view of art. However, it did provide record of captured moments of reality, in particular in recording earlier works of art and architecture and preserving their images for posterity. (pp659-62)

IN WHICH STYLE SHOULD WE BUILD?

Architecture limited by practicalities of building construction, purpose and demands of patrons. Result was re-invention of earlier styles in some cases, adaptation, use of contemporary materials (Schinkel, cast iron WHA p662) Mixing of styles discouraged, although outside may differ from interior (eg. Houses of Parliament) Constable condemned Gothic Revival as reincarnating dead art. Pugin described successfully as a principle of construction; 2 key rules; features should be necessary for convenience, construction or

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propriety; ornament should enrich essential construction. Supported by Ruskin and widely adopted in English-speaking world. (pp662-65)

HISTORICISM AND REALISM

Throughout 19th century, history predominated over reason in all aspects, art, architecture, writings; history of evolution, historical settings for paintings, accuracy and avoidance of anachronisms by careful research and attention to detail. Late 18th century painters used historical subjects as moral exemplars. Creation of 'juste milieu' (happy medium) continues into 19th century. Avoidance of excess, treading centre ground without extreme politics, religion, opinion. Such works eschewed by Romantics; if reflected Romantic notions of history they rarely met demands for authenticity of artists' feelings and convictions. As result group of artists rebelled. (pp665-66)

The Pre-Raphaelites

Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood espoused return to natural representation, painting in the open countryside. Also produced work with subtle religious allegorical meaning ('Our English Coasts') representing failure of Protestantism to repel Catholic revival in England. (p 666)

Courbet

A Socialist, Courbet sought to distance himself from Romanticism studying artists both old and new then using this to imbue/inform his own practice. In that sense (taking inspiration from within but with understanding and knowledge) he did share some elements of Romanticism. Initially painted portraits, went onto large-scale pieces. Depicted scenes of everyday life, apparently ordinary and unordered but actually carefully composed. (pp 666-89)

Millet

Purported to be from peasant stock but in fact well-educated from wealthy family. The Man with the Hoe echoes Adam toiling after expulsion from Garden of Eden. Millet's fatalistic depictions offset by quality of painting. Downtrodden subjects of paintings later became idealised as belonging to an idyllic past in the advent of agricultural industrialisation. (pp 689-670)

Manet

Confirmed Socialist from upper-middle class family, painted with view to sincerity of expression. Regarded as first 'modern' painter. Strove for acceptance by Salons but also to shock. As result work often debarred from public exhibition due to choice of subject eg. The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian too overt in criticism of Imperial regime. Painting is dispassionate, remote; does not take sides; cold and unemotional; Although photographs in common use, Manet found greater reliability in his own visual observance. Studied old works to test his vision against theirs. Artist was honest in depiction. (pp670-72)

Realists rejected Romantic themes in favour of unconventional, unpicturesque subjects (Menzel's Iron Rolling Mill). Russian Realism demanded arts depict current social and moral problems; abstraction to be

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avoided in favour of the actual, concrete form. Repin's art too political to be exhibited; troubled by society's ills refused to paint other than truthful imagery. (pp672-74)

The USA

Landscapes of America very popular. Paintings sold by lottery with all getting print made collecting accessible. Sketched in open air preferring closeness to source. Many dramatic landscapes on offer eg. Niagara Falls. Some liberties taken with reality in favour of impressiveness of work (Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California) (p673) Yellowstone Park first national park to be designated for preservation. Preference was for landscapes depicting a simple life without challenging social tension. (pp674-77)

1870s America a time of great tension. Post-slavery but denied integration; Homer depicts African-Americans dressed for a carnival but without any air of festivity. Racial tensions high. African Americans became popular as subjects, painted as happy in their subservience. Likewise poor/disadvantaged white Americans. Nothing should disturb myth of stability. Some artists painted to truth (eg Tanner). (pp 677-81)

PHOTOGRAPHY COMES OF AGE

Question of whether photography art. Photographs barred from Salons and Royal Academy but as techniques improved and limited colour introduced, it began to be explored further (eg. Nadar) (p 682) took photographs from hot air balloon and in catacombs of Paris. Originally caricaturist, used skills in expressive portrait photos esp. wife. Nadar stated anyone can learn to take photograph but takes artist to capture an image/expression by understanding the subject. More amateurs take up photography. Cameron most famous for candid imagery of often well-known subjects. Although capturing moment, recognised that photographs do not tell whole tale. Propagandist images of Crimean war deliberately taken to dispel fears of disastrous leadership. American Civil War photographs deliberately emphasise brutality of enemy's behaviour by careful composition of image.

Photography further improves and 'flying gallop' proved to be myth as result of photographic experiments (Muybridge). Documentary photographers record slums and undesirable places to allow rich to be voyeurs on poor without being directly in proximity. Could use 'reality' of images to justify their beliefs as poor are in poverty of their own making.