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

Assignment Four – Exercise 2

Annotation of two paintings – Painting one

Third of May 1808
Francisco de Goya
1814
Oil on canvas
266cm x 345.1 cm
Museo del Prado, Madrid

Sources

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To create illusion of depth, foreshortening used on dead victims, darkness deepens into background, use of scale with smaller buildings in background. Less detail as objects recede into distance.

Use of oils allows visible, sketchy brushstrokes. Creates immediacy, capturing a moment in time

Setting at night makes victims seem more hemmed in and at mercy of soldiers. Darkness is intimidating and creates feeling of dread

Guns pointing toward victim take our eye toward him and make him our point of focus

Face of figures loosely drawn, creates immediacy.

Central character posed as Christ on cross. Also shading to suggest stigmata on hands



Victim is civilian, labourer, rough shirt and sunburnt skin

Diagonal line recedes soldiers into distance

Use of bright white for shirt draws focus. White also colour of innocence. White shirt and yellow trousers same as colours in lantern.

Use of chiaroscuro to create 3-d figures

Use of earthy dull tones, highlights on victim and lantern.

Only victims' faces are visible, making us identify with them, sympathise with them. Expressions are loosely drawn but clearly show fear, shock, horror. Soldiers' faces are hidden, perhaps in shame, or to indicate callousness, lack of emotional involvement, automatons obeying orders.

- Larger than lifesize painting for dramatic impact.
- Oils for depth and intensity.
- This is the second of a pair of images depicting the uprising of the Spanish against Napoleon and his brother King Joseph. Second of May 1808 depicts the battle, Third of May the brutal assassination of unarmed Spaniards, presumably captured during battle. This painting completed first.
- Possibly part of 4-part series. Two missing paintings may have been destroyed as not acceptable to government (Tomlinson)
- Characteristic of Romantic period – capturing a moment in time, expressing the feelings of the artist. However, uncharacteristically brutal and lacking in stylistic beauty
- Rejects conventions of Baroque and Neo-Classicism – no heroes, no noble cause, no brave deeds to celebrate.
- Painting funded by interim government following expulsion of French.
- Lantern, usually light signifies illumination of God, here only serves to illuminate the scene to facilitate the execution (Licht)