

Modern Art - The Evolution of Modernism

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Abstract

The American Movement of Abstract Expressionism, which included the work of Jackson Pollock, Hans Hoffman and Willem De Kooning, is considered one of the most important, with regards to the progression of Modernism. The term Modernism defines the revolutionary concepts, which occurred early in the twentieth century, with regards to Art, literature, and architecture. Modernism rejected tradition and was highly controversial at the time. It was a revolution, as such, one that paved the way for new ideas to take shape, which resulted in many new, and exciting, Modern Art movements to evolve. Even today, the subject of Modernism, within Art, remains a controversial one.



The emphasis of Modernism, within the realms of Modern Art, remains with the freedom to express, emotionally, politically and ultimately, artistically. Some Modern Art forms seek to do this by eradicating expectation, by presenting the

bizarre and therefore, startling the viewer with unpredictability. In this way, all traces of Traditional Art are revoked, forcing the viewer to rethink and abandon any pre-concepts they might have. In the Soviet Union, Modernism was rejected by Stalin's Communist Government, on the grounds that it was elitist. In the same way, the Nazis branded this Art as Narcissist. This may seem a curious way to describe Modernism. However, for many Artists, producing Traditional Art, this has true basis. When an Artist produces Art that wholly represents themselves, not visually, but emotionally, it could be deciphered as self indulgent. Which could also be described as Elitist, or Narcissism. Rather like someone who talks about themselves all the time! Traditional Art places the emphasis upon representing, or if you like, discussing, the world around them. Therefore, the Artist is not wrapped up in themselves, or their emotions. The interest of these Artists lies in showing, representing, the world to others, and in this way, they are regarding that world outside of themselves. Embracing it, and everything in it, as a whole. This was why the Nazis displayed Modern Art (Modernist) Paintings alongside the 'Art' of mentally ill patients.



The Degenerate Art Exhibition, held in Munich, in 1937, has to be one of the most famous in history. The point they were making was that the 'ramblings' of Modernist Paintings were, effectively, no more coherent, or valuable, than the ramblings of a madman.



Modernism did flourish within more capitalist societies, although the Artists themselves claimed to reject those same societies. Modernism gained its pace after the Second World War, reaching a crescendo during the sixties. Modern Art went through many phases, and new directions, during the fifties and sixties. There was a definite, subjectivist, revolt against Abstract Expressionism. Now, these Artists would be regarded as radical, and they would represent the avant-garde.



Art critic, Clement Greenburg, was among the first to approve and admire the Canvas Art of Jackson Pollock. In 1964 he was the curator for one of the most influential Art Exhibitions to tour America, which displayed the work of this new avant-garde. Thanks to this exhibition, Color-Field, Hard Edge Painting, and Lyrical Abstract Art, would all make their breakthrough, into the world of Modern Art.



Around the same time, in 1962, the Sidney Janis Gallery, in New York, exhibited the work of 'The New Realists'. Collectively, they represented another, new, Modern Art Movement, and that was, Pop Art. Sidney Janis opened his first Art Gallery in 1948, and was among the first in New York to exhibit the work of leading European Artists, such as Klee, Mondrian, Miro and Bonnard. His Gallery was also among the first to exhibit the emerging Artists, of the American Abstract Expressionist movement. This included Artists such as, Jackson Pollock, Kooning, Rothko and Robert Motherwell. For this he gained much prominence. In 1958 Greenburg had made tribute to Sidney Janis, commenting that his exhibitions did much to aid the 'legitimacy' of American Artists. The 1962 Pop Art Exhibition sent tremors through the New York Art world, which reverberated right across the Atlantic. Pop Art was a term first used in 1958, by English Art critic, Lawrence Alloway. Like most of the new Modern Art movements, Pop Art was a flurried response against Abstract Expressionism. It enjoyed, no, reveled, in the paradoxes of a consumerist society.



Modernism would also incorporate Minimalism, during the early sixties, and by the end of the sixties, Post-Minimalism and Process Art. Slightly later, Conceptual Art would also emerge.