





Module 4 : 'Art for Art's Sake'

Lecture 9 : Modern Art, French Revolution and Freedom of Expression, What is Modern Art

The Lecture Contains:

-  'Art for Art's Sake'
-  Modern Art
-  French Revolution and Freedom of Expression
-  What is Modern Art

 **Previous** **Next** 

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Art for Art's Sake

'Art for Art's Sake' is a term that has swiped through the world changing the philosophy of man's dream. It is considered as one of most remarkable social movement that began with a group of artist and creative people but affected the entire social life in Europe. In order to understand 'Art for art's Sake' one needs to clarify the role of Modern Art that gave birth to the modern thinking. Before we discuss about the philosophy and the style of art that proposed the spirit of Art for Art's Sake, we need to understand the genesis of such movement starting from the concept of Modern Art.

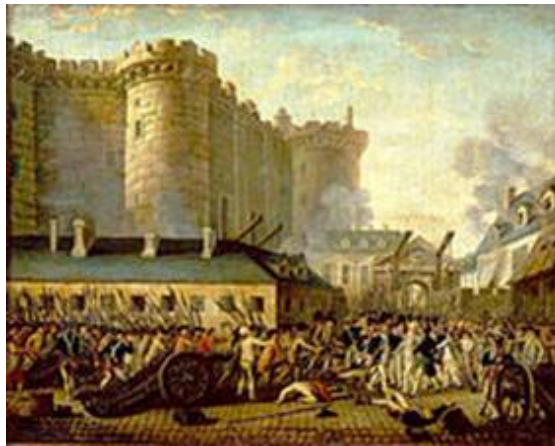
Modern Art

Modern Art includes artistic works produced during the period extending roughly from the 1860s to the 1970s, and denotes the style and philosophy of the art produced during that era. The term is usually associated with art in which the traditions of the past have been thrown aside in a spirit of experimentation. Modern artists experimented with new ways of seeing and with fresh ideas about the nature of materials and functions of art. A tendency away from the narrative, which was characteristic for the traditional arts, toward abstraction is characteristic of much modern art. More recent artistic production is often called Contemporary art or Post-modern art.

Beginning of the 19th Century in Europe, French Revolution brought a new concept in art. Instead of royal patrons, the middle class society started dominating the social picture. They were landlords, businessmen, lawyers and journalists. They were rarely bold, challenging and adventurous. Rather they appeared to be conservative in their opinions and politics.



Plate 1 Caricature of the Third Estate carrying the First Estate (clergy) and the Second Estate (nobility) on its back



1B The storming of the Bastille, 14 July 1789 (French Revolution)

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution ; Dec. 17, 2012)

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French Revolution and Freedom of Expression

"The French Revolution (French: Révolution française; 1789–1799), was a period of radical social and political upheaval in France that had a lasting impact on French history and more broadly throughout the world. The absolute monarchy that had ruled France for centuries collapsed within three years. French society underwent an epic transformation, as feudal, aristocratic and religious privileges evaporated under a sustained assault from radical left-wing political groups, masses on the streets, and peasants in the countryside. Old ideas about tradition and hierarchy—of monarchy, aristocracy, and religious authority— were abruptly overthrown by new Enlightenment principles of equality, citizenship and inalienable rights." (Read more ref. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution ; December 17, 2012)

Because of the social injustice 'common men' (the Third Estate) had to carry the burden of the other higher society people (plate 1). Naturally the enormous injustice became the flash point for the bloody social revolution. The revolution spread through Europe and engulf the monarchy and bourgeois classes demanding the freedom of thought and share of the wealth (plate 1B). The rise of Modern Art philosophy gave birth to the future generations.

What is Modern Art?

"The whole history of art is a history of modes of visual perception: of the various ways in which man has *seen* the world. The naïve person might object that there is only one way of seeing the world- the way it is presented to his own immediate vision. But this not true – we see what we learn to see, and vision becomes a habit, convention, a partial selection of all there is to see, and a distorted summery of the rest. We see what we want to see, and what we want to see is determined, not by inevitable laws of optics, or even (as may be case in wild animals) by an instinct for survival, but by the desire to discover or construct a credible world. What we see must be made real. Art in that way becomes the construction of reality."

-Sir Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting*, pp.12-13, 1974

◀ Previous Next ▶

Module 4 : 'Art for Art's Sake'

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Under the shadow of French Revolution creative community including artists, poet, writer, philosopher, musicians, etc. spearheaded to liberating their freedom of expression. Some of them took political attitudes and added to their own pleas for 'justice' to the appeals of the revolutionary ideals. The Romantic Movement became the most powerful philosophy to rediscover their ideals. Goethe, Byron, Keats, Beethoven and Wagner took part along with painters and sculptures. Violence, passionate feelings, and a love of individual liberty were all part of the Romantic ideals. Exploration of the 'romantic spirit' of the natural world was expressed through the creative writings of Wordsworth and the great English and French landscape paintings of the 19th C.



Plate 2A Execution of 3rd May



2B Ancient Days



2C Delacroix's The Liberty



2D Ingres's Turkish Bath

(Source: https://www.google.co.in/search?hl=en&q=romantic+period+paintings&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.&bpc=39967673&biw=1318&bih=600&um=1&ie=UTF-8&tbn=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=XPXOUKzIC4nPrQfPz4HYAw ; December 17, 2012)

Romanticism to Realism and Impressionism opened up the new virtue of creative expressions. Francisco Goya (plate 2A), 1746-1808, The Executions of the 3rd May 1808, William Blake's (plate 2B) Ancient Days 1757-1827, Eugene Delacroix (plate 2C) 1798-1863, Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), etc. were engaged in expressing the spirit of romantic ideals. Each artist has applied their own choice of expressions. Goya's reality based on fact, William Blake's mystic philosophy, Delacroix's novelty in spirit of liberation and Ingres's social statement of Turkish Bath have took opportunity to explore various avenues of artistic creativity.

◀ Previous Next ▶