

Analysis Paper 1

Modernism, a movement of art taking place in the aftermath of the many shifts resulting from the Industrial Revolution, encompasses many styles of art in the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century. Changes in transportation, economy, and advances in science and thinking shaped this rapidly changing society. The works of Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx radically altered how people viewed the world, and as a result, art evolved to keep its place in a world of the photograph. Departing from the accepted techniques and subject matter, artists experimented with light, content, materials, and approaches to their materials. Realism no longer served its purpose, as a camera could render reality more perfectly than a canvas ever could. So, artists had to split from tradition in order to reflect the disillusionment the Industrial Revolution and its advances brought. Such divergences can be seen in the pieces “Water Lilies” by Claude Monet and “Street, Dresden” by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, painted in the Modernist styles of Impressionism and Expressionism, respectively.

“Water Lilies,” created from 1914 to 1926 by Claud Monet, a French artist, is a shining example of Impressionist style. Impressionism, one of the first movements of Modernism, steered away from tradition in that it was not meant to be a literal translation of reality to canvas, but rather an abstracted perception of how Monet understood nature to be, typical of French Impressionism. It is important that this is a natural scene, and not religious nor mythological scenery, which was the canon of subject matter deemed acceptable prior to Modernist style. Large, visible brushwork coupled with non-naturalistic color choice (i.e., the blue of the pond is not the actual color of the water). The painting completely immerses the viewer in the scene of the pond, journeying from a dark far left, to a bright center panel, to a dark far right. There is no edge to the scene, only dabs of deep turquoise and evergreen amidst blotches of a lighter green meant to evoke lily pads. The center panel, comprised of a richer turquoise also bears pale blush and medium pinks patches meant to imitate the reflection of clouds upon the pond’s surface. The far right is similar to the far left panel, but with shades of brown tinting the

colors used. The light seems to radiate from the center, an experimentation on Monet's part, as he was interested in the light can affect visual perception in his artwork. Monet wanted to create the sense of endlessness by not including boundaries like the shore or sky, instead making the sky and pond one and the same. Inspired by his Giverny garden, this abstracted representation is not the result of his poor eye-sight, but rather a desire to toy with light and space. There is no story to tell, only a drowning in visual stimuli, an experiment in illumination and perspective.

"Street, Dresden," painted in 1919 by Ludwig Kirchner, a German artist, is exemplary of Expressionism. This movement within Modernism was primarily concerned with how art could be used to portray emotion solely, paying no mind to any realism or message other than simply the feeling. The bold lines and colors are not meant to mirror truth as it exists in the outside world, but rather the inner truth of the artist creating the piece. The figures in the painting are flat, two-dimensional beings, as this is not an attempt to translate the three-dimensional world to a level canvas. The colors are explosive and non-naturalistic in the most incredible sense, as they include lime green, cobalt blue, blood red, and complete black to compose the figures, and odd shades and tints of pink dabbed with strange green to compose the street. Despite such bright pigmentation, the scene of the crowd walking down this avenue is eerie, as there is no life in the faces of the two women facing the viewer. The first woman, dressed in dark emerald green and an ornate orange, has a hand that resembles a claw more than a human body part, and her eyes are but two dark, lifeless circles. Her face looks more dog-like than human. The woman behind her, in a neon green coat and deep royal blue skirt, bears a zombie-like face, as her skin is green instead of a naturalistic hue of sand for human skin. There is no doubt that this is Kirchner's commentary on the aristocratic elite found on this street, as life after the Industrial Revolution brought with it a hollowness and isolation felt by the crowd despite being among people. The sense of community felt during pre-revolution days has disappeared, replaced with the thrum of more and more things to do. It is important that this painting is German because it is easy to distinguish between this work's origins and Monet's origins. France was a unified country, a hub of culture at this time (particularly Paris), so Monet's work bears

that fluid beauty the country was experiencing. Kirchner's Germany, on the other hand, was not a truly unified country, but rather large city-states, and so, the work has a mildly fluid, but discomfiting disjointed air to it because of its hyper-stylization. Both pieces, though, are examples of Modernist masterpieces.

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The Effects of the Industrial Revolution on Impressionism and Expressionism

Modernism is a movement from the late 19th Century to the early 20th Century in which the artists tried to distance themselves from the traditions of the Renaissance. There was a transition of subject matter from religious and mythological themes to people, places, or things which they had experienced. The movement was initiated by changes in all aspects of life due to the Industrial Revolution and subsequent urbanization. Advances in technology, especially the photograph, exacerbated the movement. At the same time the railways rapidly changed the access to ideas and subject matter. Furthermore, the trains provided artists with a different view of the world because they were traveling at faster speeds. This exposed artists to blurred lines and dissolution of form. Both *Water Lilies* by Claude Monet and *Street, Dresden* by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner express the change in style of artwork congruent with the modernist movement.

Claude Monet painted *Water Lilies* from 1914 to 1926. Contrary to many impressionist artwork, Monet painted *Water Lilies* inside of a studio rather than outside in the elements.¹ The water lilies in the paintings were located on Monet's property in France.² *Water Lilies* was painted on oil on canvas on three different panels each 6' 6 3/4" x 13' 11 1/4" for a total size of 6' 6 3/4" x 41' 10 3/8".³

In this landscape painting, Monet portrays water lilies in a body of water, with clouds reflecting off of the water. He uses very vibrant and natural colors to accurately portray the scene. The painting has no horizons and is so large that the viewer is engulfed by the painting. The viewer feels as if he/she is in the water. Monet was interested in changes in light and the changes affected appearance. This is seen in the clouds reflected off of the water in the middle of the painting. When viewed up close there are clear brushstrokes that do not appear to culminate into anything significant. Monet was a revolutionary in art because he didn't use strict lines to outline objects. He was more concerned with the way light changed perception of images rather than portraying an image as accurately as possible. This style is in direct contrast to that of the Renaissance.

¹ http://www.moma.org/explore/conservation/monet/monets_method.html

² <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/films/963>

³ http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=80220

In his paintings, Monet tries to separate himself from the traditional style of painting. He eliminates the use of perspective and uses strong coloring for shadows rather than the traditional brown or gray.⁴ In this matter Monet was significantly influenced by the Japanese woodblock print. Monet uses clear brush strokes and colorful shadows in contrast to the previously accepted norms in painting.⁵ These changes in style were introduced mainly because of the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution introduced many new inventions many of which allowed painters to expand their subject matter. The invention of the photograph caused many painters to question their role in society because they were no longer needed to document history. At the same time urbanization was encroaching on traditional agrarian culture. There were also discoveries in science which allowed paint to be carried in a tube which allowed artists to paint outdoors while viewing their subject and the different effects that light had on these subjects. The impressionist artists were fascinated with the middle class, leisure and time, all three of which are products of the Industrial Revolution.

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner painted *Street, Dresden* between 1907 and 1908. During this time period Kirchner was living in Dresden, Germany. In this painting Kirchner expresses his view the city street of Dresden using bold colors and fluid outlines. In the painting, there is a crowded city street with many people walking around. In the center of the painting there is a little girl with a very large hat on standing on the train tracks. There are women on the right side of the street with expressionless faces. He used oil on canvas to paint the 59 1/4" x 6' 6 7/8"⁶ painting of a packed street in Dresden. The painting is life size, so it gives a feeling that the viewer is standing in the middle of this street in Dresden, observing the post-Industrial Revolution Germany.

Kirchner is grouped into a style of art known as expressionism. Expressionist artists were more concerned with the emotion given from a painting, rather than conveying a naturalistic representation of a particular scene. They were more interested in representing our true nature as animals, and the fact that we act on instinct, rather than rational, calculated thought.

⁴ <http://www.monetpainting.net/biography.php>

⁵ http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/imml/hd_imml.htm

⁶ http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=78426

In this painting all of the visible faces are emotionless, while the colors of the faces are very non-naturalistic. The colors give a very creepy and unwelcoming feeling to the city. Kirchner is expressing feeling and emotion through color rather than through facial expressions; he wanted to express how the people felt, rather than how they looked. There is also a sense of insecurity in the picture because the two women to the right of center are both holding their skirts and the woman closest to the center is holding her purse. Although the street is very crowded every person is alienated; there is no interaction between the people. The Industrial Revolution led to the isolation seen in this painting. During this time, Germany was trying to catch up with the rest of England and France, so they experienced a lot of change quickly. Artists such as Kirchner tried to explore new cultural norms that existed in the newly industrialized Germany.

After the Industrial Revolution, people began working long hours in factories rather than on farms. In these factories products were created using an assembly line so the final product did not reflect the imagination or creativity of any individual worker; this also meant that the workers were separated from one another with no interaction. This changed society greatly. There was no longer a sense of pride in ones work; workers were treated as machines, and this change was reflected on the entire society.

Water Lilies and *Street, Dresden* are great representations of modernist art. Both of these paintings contain subject matter of modern life and nature. This is in direct contrast to the subject matter that was acceptable during the Renaissance. Also both works use bright colors without a consistent light source. However, Monet used naturalistic colors consistent with a more realistic painting, while Kirchner used non naturalistic colors to express his perception of Dresden. Furthermore, both paintings have visible brushstrokes consistent with modernist painting. Although both of these paintings are modernist, they are different in style. *Water Lilies* is an impressionist work that shows the effect of light on the subject. Monet, as most impressionist artist, painted to demonstrate the impression created by a specific scene. On the other hand, *Street, Dresden* portrays a feeling without trying to accurately portray the subject matter. This was a period in art called expressionism where the art was intended to express emotion rather than describe how things occurred in nature. Although both paintings are

modernists, they have specific differences which distinguish them between Impressionism and Expressionism.

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