Survey Of Romantic Versus Realism Paintings Essay, Research Paper

A Survey of Romantic and Realistic Paintings

Fantasy and reality occupy our worlds everyday. One sees this world around himself and he retreats to what he wishes it was. Why shouldn?t he paint about it? The portrayal of fantastic and realistic notions occupied the activity of painters from the mid 1800?s to the 20th century. The period of Romantic painting lies roughly from the mid 1700s to the mid/later 1800s, while paintings from the movement of Realism are grouped from the mid 1800s to the 1900s.

The aspect of a Romantic composition?s balance is characterized by diagonals and tension. Disproportion, imbalance and a feeling of pushing and pulling within the depth of the composition can also be observed. While movement and activity is characteristic of Romantic paintings, a still, quiet, stationary behavior epitomizes Realism paintings. In Eugene Isabey?s Boat Ashore at Calas (1851), simple romantic elements comprise the piece: diagonals and smoke. A main diagonal line emphasizes the downward slope of a shore lined with beached boats resting upon the sand. A challenging inferior diagonal line of a small group of people and their dinghies cross the main diagonal flow. The two lines of tension resolve at the lower center of the composition highlighting the main, looming subject – a dark massive apparition of a docked, freight boat enshrouded by blackening smoke. This is in contrast to Gustave Courbet?s depiction of sea life in The Calm Sea (1869). The painting resembles a high resolution black and white photograph. Realistic elements are the stationary flatness of the horizon and the solitary presence of two single beached boats. The portrayal of the shoreline, horizon and cloud formation is horizontally stable, thus emphasizing the calmness of the sea. Baron Antoine-Jean Gros? Murat Defeating the Turkish Army (1805) is a composition which presents an overwhelming flow of diagonal tension. Murat is centered in the composition uprightly astride on his horse, while the Turkish army surrounds him in every conceivable contortion of agony. The Turkish general faces Murat, yet he is positioned diagonally right below Murat in an inferior military pose. Compared to Murat, Courbet?s Bonjour Monsieur Courbet (1854) finds a very stable balance in the subject of two men saying good-bye to another man. The subject can be divided by the two men on the left and the backpacked man on the right. Stability is emphasized by the strong vertical presence of the men in direct contrast to the flat planed background. The use of balance and tension in Romanticism and Realism is not restricted to it?s compositional flow but also to the the painter?s use of his palette.

The use of color in Romantic paintings is bold visually and figuratively. It?s usage is implemented to represent a feeling or an ideal. The presence of a color may not be realistically representative. For example, if the blood of a corrupt official is painted, it might be painted black or green, rather than red. There is also a heavy application of paint from the brush. The presence of a blurring smoke is also present in much of Romantic paintings. Blurring smoke has many uses, although it?s usual function is to detach and glorify the main subject from the rest of the background. Color in Realism is highly refined. Color defines the object and is representative of colors in real life – a person?s blood will usually be red. Lighter brushstrokes are implemented conservatively to represent a true visual representation of reality. The use of color representation can be observed in Gros? Murat and Courbet?s Bonjour. The victorious Murat is clothed in blue and white upon a white horse, surrounded by the perishing Turkish swirls of orange and red. Anything that is orange or red around Murat is in a pose of impaled misery. All orange and red is contorted to reveal the imposing presence of Murat. In Bonjour, colors stay inside their lines. The colors used on the men?s clothing are very specific to reveal the texture of the clothing. This restriction of color succeeds in giving the painting a quaint realistic candidness. The contrasting use of clouds and smoke can be noted in the romantic works of Gros? Murat and Francois Boucher?s Venus and Mars (1754) and The Rape of Europe (1732) against the realistic works of Courbet?s The Calm Sea.

In Europe, Boucher?s purpose of the clouds is to make comfortable the reclining baby cherubs. What type of clouds can support one infant baby let alone three? – not realistic clouds, but romantic clouds. Obviously it is an unrealistic perception of the behavior of clouds. Also note the treatment of clouds in Murat and Europe to the Sea. In Murat, clouds conveniently converge identically and symmetrically from the shore and the sea to separate Murat upon the Turks from the fantastic background. The clouds intentionally converge over certain scenes of violence over others. While in the Sea, specific details are stippled to create the lining and forming of a cumulonimbus. The clouds are clearly separated from the horizons of the seashore and sealine. Courbet seeks to recreate perceptually what one would actually see at this dismal sight and persuades convincingly. The contrast of colors in reality and fantasy are also affected by the intensity of their hue.

The use of light in Romantic paintings presents a stark contrast between light and very dark shadows. The source of light in Romanticism is usually artificial and intentional. It?s purpose is to highlight the main subject. In Realism, many shades of a color are used to present the object as it is truly perceived. The light is a reproduction of a natural source and forms the outline of the object. There is very little blurring or smoke. Gros? Napoleon Bonapart Visits the Plague Stricken at Jaffa can be contrasted to Courbet?s Deer in the Forest (1868). The Romantic technique of stark contrast between light and dark is used to separate Napoleon from the plague stricken. Opposite of Realism?s use of a natural light source, the main subject of Napoleon and two naked men are artificially and purposefully spotlighted in an otherwise very dark hallway. The Deer of Courbet finds an interesting use of light upon the triangle relationship between the two deer and the large tree. The main subject is a dear climbing up a tree, yet, the deer is completely covered in shadow. The interest lies in the use of bright spots of light speckling the deer?s backside from the dense collection of tiny leaves above. The touch is realistically effective. The shadows in Deer are also more realistic than romantic. When one perceives something far away, the blurring of the detail turns into a bluish – green hue. Courbet recaptures that hue in the backgrounds of trees. The picture looks like a high resolution photograph. Also note the realistic behavior of light in John Singer Sargent?s Venetian Interior (1850-2). In this painting two modestly dressed Italian ladies walk toward the painter arm in arm down a relatively bare hallway with two sources of light present: one behind the ladies leading to outside activity and one out of the picture between the painter and the ladies, casting light upon their feet. The women are dark and they somewhat recall impressionist technique, yet the intriguing element of realism is the effect of light upon whatever it touches in the hallway. The light source behind the ladies radiates detail unto an armoire at the beginning of the hallway yet fades. The presence of darkness is not in stark romantic contrast but the effect of less light in a darkened hallway. The figures obviously become more shadowy. Yet as their feet step into the second light source, great detail is placed on the portion of their feet and skirts. This contrast of light, combined with the contrasts of color and balance effect the total composition of the Romantic and Realistic painting.

The subjects of realism are very different. Romantic themes appeal to the emotions and are determined by the ideals of the sublime, or sensual liberation, the fantastic, and a German ideal known as Sturm und Drung or storm and stress. Emotional tension is portrayed dramatically in people?s faces and their environments. Another very popular unrealistic Romantic icon is the presence of nudity. The themes of Realism are reactions against Romanticism. They picture the daily life. Picking up fruit, saying good-bye to a friend and interiors of hallways are examples of realistic themes. The contrast is easy to observe with Isabey?s Wreck versus Courbet?s Calm Sea. The tension of diagonal lines against the tall seashore inn combined with the despair on the beached survivors? faces create an tumultuous effect. Whereas in the Calm Sea, detail is emphasized on the texture of the inactive sand, the glimmering stillness of the sea and the presence of the clouds. Take Gros? Murat and Courbet?s Bonjour. Murat gloriously tramples and impales the Turkish army, while friends say good bye to each other on a dirt road in Bonjour. Observe Boucher?s Daphnis and Chloe (1743) and Adolph William Bauguereau?s The Nut Gatherers (late 1800?s). The bodily outlines of the scantily clad Daphnis and Chloe create diagonals which meet intimately at their faces. Obviously, an overt emphasis on Romance is depicted in this painting: completely comfortable naked youth upon a jagged mountain outcrop. Whereas in Nut Gatherers, two little girls lie down and pick up nuts in a field. Romance is not everyday. Picking up nuts could quite possibly be an everyday activity. Lastly, Boucher?s Venus and Mars to John Singer

Sargent?s Venetian Interior. A naked man and women exchange coy glances in a heavenly state surrounded by eleven cherubs playing with harps and military weapons. This is Romantic. Two discontent ladies with no men walk down a hallway arm in arm. I see this almost everyday at school. This is real.

The ?conflict? between the ideals of romantic and realistic paintings are not primarily at opposition to each other, yet rather a reflection of the time and culture of the people who painted them. There is great appreciation for both styles and an inherent beauty in both. Their lasting beauty is a testament to the continuing practice of each of the styles today.

Romanticism

Francois Boucher (1703-1770)

? Daphnis et Chloe (1743)

? The Rape of Europe (1732)

? Venus and Mars (1754)

Baron Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835)

? Murat?s Defeating of the Turkish Army(1805)

? General Napoleon Visits the Troops

? Napoleon Bonaparte Visits the Plague Stricken at Jaffa

Eugene Isabey 1803 – 1886

? Boat Ashore at Calas (1851)

? The Wreck (1854)

? Court Reception at Chateau (1852)

Realism

Gustave Courbet (1819 – 1925)

? Bonjour Monsieur Courbet (1854)

? Deer in the Forest (1868)

? The Calm Sea (1869)

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)

? Venetian Interior (1850-2)

? Madame X (1883)

Adolph William Baugueareau (1825-1905)

? The Nut Gatherers (late 1800?s)

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