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Modernism and Postmodernism

Although modernism and Postmodernism may sound similar by nature these two subsequent art movements showcased two very different and distinct styles. Both movements demonstrated a need to get further and further from the classical thoughts of traditional art. Artists like Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso and Cezanne paved the way and showcased the emotional power that modernism has to offer. While postmodernist artists including the famous abstract expressionist Pollock, Dadaist Duchamp and Warhol's innovation with pop art attempt to overturn the 'myth of the avant-garde'. Modern art was an extremely pivotal period and a natural and quite frankly necessary step leading to today's contemporary practice. Modern and postmodern art may be drastically different but both have set very significant and historical precedents. The idea of the individual is present in both modernism and postmodernism; everyone sees and mentally interacts with art differently, and every artist has the ability to either create something for an individual or with respect to a much larger group.

Modern art is a time period not easily described. On a very basic level modernism can be described as an art movement from around the 1860's to the 1970's, from which artists were moving further away from the standard or tradition art model. Modernist began to move further and further from realism and began to push their works towards abstraction. Modernism, however, was much more than that; it was a time where individuals were evoking the idea of the "Spirit of Experimentation". Prior to the nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution, art was for the most part something that was commissioned and was only assessable to the rich. A highly skilled artisan primarily produced these commissioned pieces; this is in direct contrast to the ideology of the modernist movement. Modernism is autonomous. Modernism is art for arts sake. Modernism challenges the notion that art needs to accurately depict the world with a sense of realism. The modernist ideology of experimentation would spawn works incorporating the use of non-traditional materials, new techniques, new mediums and the use of highly expressive colors. The use of what would be referred to as modernist colors is evident in the works of Henri Matisse. Matisse's landscape portraits were considered wild and even reckless, this instinctive and spontaneous way of painting was unique and unrivaled by his contemporaries. Colors in the eyes of modernists served a very individual based experience, this being that colors serve the purpose to capture and express emotions. Much like Matisse, Paul Cézanne was never aiming for illusions in his work. The painting titled, Still Life with Apples showcases Cézanne's ability to break down the traditional model of art. In the classical sense, the still life was a way to showcase an artist ability to be hyper realistic, for Cézanne he challenges this notion by keeping his edges undefined and has shifting lines throughout the piece. These line shifts break the rules of perspective. In addition, Cézanne also painted the piece entitled, The Bather, this painting was the first of its kind because it was painted from a still photograph. This novel idea was unheard-of

at the time and became a very common practice, later this technique would also be utilized by Pablo Picasso. Much like Van Gogh, Cézanne explored the idea of letting the very nature of the painting stand on its own.

With a better understanding of what modernism is it takes a lot less effort to see why the movement was so necessary. The notion set by precedent that art is only for the wealthy was a notion modernism would dismantle. During the urban boom of the Industrial Revolution art was finally becoming something for everyone. The innovation of the printing press paved the way in the dispersion of art to the masses, allowing the ability to replicate an image over and over again. This replication process would recognize art printed in the newspapers, including political cartoons and propaganda. The printing and reprinting is a notion postmodernist would also adapt as their own. The underlining aspect that has made modernism so impactful is that it allowed the artist as an individual to have complete and total creative control over the pieces they would produce. The concept of the avant-garde proved to be a driving force behind the modernist movement. Going back to art for art sake and the idea that all artist could be on the forefront of something new pushed the artists of this time period to produce very passionate and innovative works of art. The incorporation of negativity was another aspect that modernism allowed to develop. Art can be negative and also be received by viewers as positive, the ideology that art can be anti-nature, anti-morality, anti-religion and eventually develop into anti-art. Anti-art would introduce the world to the modernist Dada cultural movement. Most notable from the Dadaists was Marcel Duchamp, who pushed the idea of what is art. Duchamp's most significant works was titled Fountain and was simply a factory made urinal turned on its side, this piece would lead the way for many other "ready-mades". What is art? The essence of what is art is the driving point behind the Dadaists and can be extruded from Claes Oldenburg's written piece I am for an Art. Oldenburg's statement is said by many to be his manifesto, however he has personally stated that it is not. The paper is constructed more like a poem with each line starting with the phrase "I am for an art", the idea behind the piece is to show how art can be literally anything as long as you can appreciate the details as artistic.

After the unofficial 'end' of modernism, the unofficial 'beginning' of postmodernism was declared. Much like today and "contemporary" art we cannot attach the works to a direct historical period, modernism and postmodernism have a very hard time labeling their own active time periods. Postmodernism, in contrast to modernism says anyone can make art and unlike the modernists that say that art is autonomous, postmodernism attempts to overturn the notion of the avant-garde. Color for the modernists has almost the polar opposite meaning for the postmodernists; while the modernists say color is present to evoke an emotional feeling in the viewer, the postmodernists say color is just color. Modernism showcases the authenticity of the creator and their originality while postmodern artists like Andy Warhol thrive on topics of popularity that already exist. The pop art movement headed up by Andy Warhol, was an exciting new take spawning from ideas of dada and the ready-mades

and infusing postmodern aspects like the use of concrete ideas as opposed to the abstract principals of modernism. An excellent example of Warhol's genius is his Brillo Boxes he made us feel by painting a box to appear the same as a regular factory made (ready-made) Brillo box he is able to invoke emotions in the viewer much differently than a modernist would.

Both modernism and postmodernism have similarities but it is the differences in the movements that allow us to identify them by what most concerns them. For postmodernists they attempt to deny the existence of any total principles that can be applied to explain everything about everyone. The fact that the movement is called 'post' shows how the movement is able to deconstruct the ideas of the modernist, the postmodernists have the mindset that they are the artistic geniuses and society needs them. While being famous is less of a concern for the modernists, they believe art is art and to be shared. The modernists push the idea of the avant-garde forward while postmodernism and its artists challenged the idea. Modernism was concerned with incorporating the usage of symbols and colors to set a feeling and emotional response from the viewer, this is in contrast to the postmodern ideology. The abstract artists that came out of the post World War 2 era showcased the abstract expressionists including Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Mark Rothko and most notably Jackson Pollock. These artists were on the forefront guiding the movement towards mainstream acceptance of this new art form.

Postmodernism and modernism showcase drastically different artistic styles but both would attempt to show the world why they wanted to create and share their art. Both movements dwelled upon the question, is the art for the creator or for the viewer, this was one of the dividing factor that splits the two movements. Modernism shows how important purity in the art makes for a more authentic and original piece. What is art, this fundamental question has sparked debates between artist from both modernism and postmodernism. This question still goes unanswered today, for me I believe that art is in the eye of the individual. An artist's job is to create a piece that showcases their unique ability's and to demonstrate their full control of the chosen medium. An artist has the choice to either push themselves to create something new and purposefully attempt be avant-garde, or an artist has the choice to go with the flow and be an innovator with popular culture. An individual response to an artist's work is vital to the experience art can have on the society as a whole.

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