

PAINTING: A STUDY OF ITS
CLASSICAL, ROMANTIC AND DESCRIPTIVE
ESSENCES

by
Allen
Robert A. Lindquist

An Essay

Submitted to the faculty of the
Department of Art
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Graduate College, University of Arizona

1952

Approved:

James G. [Signature]
Director of Thesis

15 May 1952
Date



E9791

1952

49

TO

Prof. James P. Scott

in gratitude for
his deep understanding
of Art.

228131

Can you recall your first day of grade school? I am able to do so for it was on that day, two decades ago, that I knowingly became interested in art. A second-grade boy seated across from me at the table was drawing a scene with the flat end of his crayons which were held vertically. This method of drawing and his creative work seemed to thrill me. Until that day it had been my pastime at home to color assigned areas in a picture book.

Thereupon I tried the boy's method of drawing. It proved to be fun as well as thought-provoking. Thus, the boy had introduced me to art's world of self-expression. This made my first day in school a happy and memorable one.

Throughout the years since I have sought to improve myself in the realm of art through studying and eventually teaching the subject.

This year before choosing a thesis for a master's degree, I read through John Dewey's wonderful book Art As Experience. In it he says that an object is perceived by a cumulative series of interactions. "The eye as the master organ of the whole being produces an undergoing, a return effect; this calls out another act of seeing with new allied supplementations with another increment of meaning and value, and so on, in a continuous building up of the esthetic object."¹ Here he is discussing an individual's reaction

¹John Dewey, Art As Experience, New York, 1934, p. 220.

to an object such as a statue. Dewey goes on to say, "An experience is a product, one might almost say a by-product, of continuous and cumulative interaction of an organic self with the world."²

These thoughts by Dewey concerning "experience" continued to bother me for several weeks. I wished to have a deeper understanding of this basic philosophy of art.

Not until I found R. H. Wilenski's book The Modern Movement in Art did I discover a possible means of digging into this meaning of "experience" as expressed by Dewey.

Mr. Wilenski first of all divides all artists into two groups. These are the original artists and the popular artists. The popular artist, he says, produces art which is within his own or other people's familiar experience.³ On the other hand, the original artist is one who sets out to enlarge his experience by his work, and in fact does so.⁴

Obviously we wish to concentrate on the original artist.

There are three most important kinds of original artists according to Wilenski. These are as follows: the original romantic artist, the original descriptive artists, and the original architectural or classical artist.

²Dewey, op. cit., p. 220.

³R. H. Wilenski, The Modern Movement in Art, New York, 1934, p. 25.

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

Before proceeding, we must understand that all original art is produced without reference to the work's effects on anyone other than the artist,⁵ as the artist was not preoccupied by these questioned effects on others at any stage of his procedure.

It is the belief of Wilenski that the original architectural artist strives to enlarge his experience of formal order; the original romantic artist strives to enlarge his experience of unusually emotive fragments; and the original descriptive artist strives to enlarge his scientific, social, historical or moral experience.⁶

With these ideas in mind it is my thesis that an assumed artist (myself) can enlarge his experience in art in each of the three directions above while producing from one chosen group of natural objects three separate paintings--one classical, one romantic and the other descriptive.

In other words I believe that whatever we see in nature can possess a classical essence, a romantic essence and a descriptive essence. Essence here means that which is essential or indispensable.⁷

To obtain these three experiences I have chosen to study three modern French painters--one for each of the three types of original art.

⁵Wilenski, op. cit., p. xv.

⁶Ibid., p. 231.

⁷Dewey, op. cit., p. 293.

But first let us define the classified types of art. They are as follows:

Classicism--Resembling or modeled after the highest forms of art.

Romanticism--Not conforming to fixed rules but expressive of extravagant feeling.

Descriptive--Having the quality of representing, serving to describe.

There was little doubt about whom I should study as the descriptive French artist. For in the middle of the nineteenth century there stands Gustave Courbet, 1819-1877, with the lucid realism of his art conception.⁸ He was heralded by his contemporaries as the initiator of Realism. They are known for their fidelity to nature or to real life. As Castagnary wrote in a manifesto, "the beautiful is in nature and is found in the most diverse forms in reality. As soon as it is discovered there it belongs to art, or rather, to the artist who knows how to see it."⁹

The realists chose to disregard formal composition as well as remote subject matter. Intensely earnest by nature Courbet regarded it as mere frivolity to make pictures out of imaginary incidents in poems when all the pageant and pathos of real life waited to be painted.¹⁰ For example, he said, "Si vous voulez que je peigne

⁸G. Wildenstein, Courbet, New York, 1947, p. 11.

⁹G. Boas, Courbet, p. 50.

¹⁰William Orpen, The Outline of Art, New York, 1923, Vol. II, p. 396.

des deesses montrez - moi - z - en!" ("If you want me to paint goddesses, produce some.")¹¹

Humble people Courbet drew from life and rendered with the fidelity demanded. Thus, he painted the world as it actually was at his time. Art he defined as "an idealistic representation of nature and of ourselves with a view to the physical and mental improvement of our species."¹²

As his paintings were born out of the French Revolution,¹³ Courbet believed that painting should criticize and help to remedy the evils of society.¹⁴ Being a lover of personal liberty he said, "My feeling as an artist is no less opposed to my receiving a reward given by the State. The State is incompetent in the matters of art; whenever it undertakes to reward it usurps the right of public taste. . . . It would be wiser for the State to abstain. The day it will leave us free, it will have accomplished its duty."¹⁵ Thus, Courbet disclosed his great dislike for court painters.

In his manifesto on Realism Courbet sums up a Realist's viewpoint by saying that his aim in life was to be able to represent (see our definition above for "descriptive") manners, ideas, and

¹¹Boas, op. cit., p. 13.

¹²Ibid., p. 51.

¹³Marcel Zahar, Gustave Courbet, New York, 1950, p. 9.

¹⁴Collier's Encyclopedia, New York, 1950, p. 72.

¹⁵Wildenstein, op. cit., p. 31

traits as he perceived them--in a word, to create a living art.¹⁶

My choice of Renoir, 1841-1919, as the Modern French Romanticist was not a difficult one, as his paintings show a quivering, sensuous aliveness¹⁷ which I think is unequalled by any other Romanticist. His nudes are known to give delight with no pornographic suggestion. The esthetic expels the physical and the heightening of qualities common to flesh and flowers ejects the erotic.¹⁸ What is expressed is experience Renoir himself had of the joy of perceiving the world. It is women and children and flowers as the artist saw them with the true eye of the man in love.¹⁹

Renoir said that nature abhors both vacuum and regularity. Regularity, order, desire for perfection destroy art.²⁰ Thus, this concept of art holds true to the definition of the Romanticist.

Choosing the French Classicist was no problem. Could one find anywhere anyone who knew more about the traditions requiring order and regularity than Paul Cezanne? He spent many hours, even days, in the galleries of the Louvre copying and studying Renaissance masterpieces.

¹⁶Zahar, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁷Sheldon Cheney, The Story of Modern Art, New York, 1941, p. 202.

¹⁸Dewey, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁹Cheney, op. cit., p. 202.

²⁰Fiske Kimball and Lionello Venturi, Great Paintings in America, New York, 1948, p. 192.

Cezanne, 1839-1906, was not only a painter but the creator of an entirely new method of looking at the world. His paintings depict mountains and apples that look as passionate as people, and people who look as inert as mountains and apples. Few of his paintings constitute what the average man thinks of as a pretty picture. But nearly anyone who looks at Cezanne's work can sense great dignity and repose in their rugged brush strokes---a feeling of depth, weight and solidity. Part of this dignity and repose arises from the painter's way of transmuting natural objects into abstract forms, so that the observer senses cones, cubes and spheres beneath Cezanne's mountains, houses, and fruit.

After this generalized study was consummated, other work was completed before my touching a brush to the canvas. Many different compositional sketches were executed so that the subject matter would fit all three types of art and yet be effective. I wanted one scene of objects and background as the thesis requests. An outdoor scene was chosen to provide for trees of each type of art. Each of the above artists painted trees, so this offered a means of comparison.

Then after much thought it was decided that there should be a woman or two included in the composition as women were used as subjects in many of the paintings of each artist. This was another means of objective and subjective comparison.

I chose to use two women in my composition. One woman is standing and the other lying down forming a simple L-shaped composi-

tion in the foreground. To provide added texture a fallen, curved log or tree trunk is placed in the foreground between the women, and a building of timber and rock is placed at the right between the foreground of the women and the background of the trees or forest.

Two rows of brush are placed on the ground between the women and the building to break up the monotonous sweep of ground on the left.

Finally, above and behind the forest are several patches of sky showing through denoting depth.

The principles of balance, rhythm or movement and contrast were added to produce unity or harmony. Simultaneously areas for patterns were formed in a simple manner to please each of the three types of original painting.

Next, several studies were made of the anatomy of the women. And for greater detail in the realistic painting, a fallen tree trunk and the materials used in building a rustic house such as rock and timber were studied. These studies were comprised largely of small sketches on $8\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11" paper.

While studying the anatomy of the women I used several photographs as aids in order to obtain better realism. These photographs proved insufficient so I employed Victor Perard's book Anatomy and Drawing.

Then, after these preliminary sketches were completed, a small somewhat finished sketch was executed. This small sketch was next enlarged on tracing paper to fit each of the three 30" x 40" canvases. Thus, each canvas possesses similar patterns and shapes.

Let us note that the above studies did not constitute all of my sketches, as such items as grass, leaves, a foot and a hand needed further study later on.

Damar varnish plus turpentine was used as the vehicle for the oil pigments in order to provide faster dryings and a more rapid execution of the descriptive and romantic paintings. However, the use of damar varnish was discontinued in the architectural painting in order to give more transparency. This turpentine wash technique of Cezanne used much in his later years proved to be facile. But my technique is nearer that of Cezanne's earlier paintings. That is when thick pigment and wide brush-strokes were apparent.

The realistic painting was approached after that of Courbet's advice to his pupils. He recommended that they start from darker values and work up by degrees to the lighter details.²¹ The hues used in this painting were toned down with earth colors, primarily yellow ochre and raw umber. This was effected to produce better realistic qualities while omitting any emotive aspect brought on by color itself.

²¹Zahar, op. cit., p. 13.

Note that the subject matter chosen carries a meaning which is expected of a realistic painting. The present younger generation is symbolized by the young women. We see one young lady in wonderment as to what will happen in the near future. She is looking beyond--almost into the sun. We may wonder why the other young lady is unconcerned. Has the subject matter then a political or social significance? It has.

The scientific perspective and chiaroscuro methods of Courbet's paintings were followed in order to obtain depth. Although I was manually incapable of translating faithfully the objective perfection acquired by Courbet, my painting is a sincere attempt toward objective perfection.

As mentioned previously, the choice of Renoir as the French Romanticist seemed fitting. But my selection of the period of Renoir to be stressed was a troublesome one. To obtain the best results from this study I decided to apply the technique which Renoir utilized somewhat near the middle of his life. He then began to fill the canvas with small strokes of color. So everywhere on his canvases one finds these minute brush strokes--some depicting the local color of an object, others showing certain reflected colors, and yet others displaying the atmospheric color. Thus, Renoir's paintings appear to be aglow. And together these colors make a fuller harmony²² than one could by itself.

²² Alan Clutton-Brock, An Introduction to French Painting, New York, 1932, p. 128.

My painting is physically void of earth colors and black. That is, I have omitted the siennas, ochres, umbers and black in the romantic painting to produce much of the desired quality of warmth, which I shall discuss below, and a purity of spectral colors.

A desire of mine in this painting was to embody the foreground objects with a great feeling of warmth . . . approaching the emotion of love. This warmth, accentuated by a cool background, being felt by me is the emotional factor desired. And it appears as if this emotion dissolves into reveries that come between myself and the world.

To sum up my study of Renoir, it seems as if he could not emphasize the structure of his images without losing the vibrations of light, nor could he stress depth without accentuating a composition of lines. Thus, he laid his emphasis on the surface, where his objects are luminous, immersed in a vibrating atmosphere created by colors and lights rather than plastic form.

The study of Cezanne was by far the most laborious and difficult. This is emphatic to a student who is just beginning to "understand" Cezanne.

Sheldon Cheney helps to clarify the complexity of Cezanne in his book The Story of Modern Art. He relates that the experience of the thing "realized" in a Cezanne picture is of a sort beyond exact analytic terms. For this reason the wiser writer on modern art have insisted that the student should have art works familiarly with him

before attempting analysis. He should live with paintings of Cezanne. . . Exposed continually and open-mindedly to such works, the beholder cannot but respond to the rhythm or order or spiritual vitality hidden within them.²³ (I followed this advice by using reproductions.)

Cezanne saw in objective nature a chaos of disorganized movement and he set himself the task of putting it in order.²⁴ A complex vivid organization of things grew gradually in Cezanne's mind.²⁵

According to Cezanne each surface in nature is to be translated by the artist into a plane of color before form and depth can be obtained. Great depth is achieved by a carefully calculated shifting of these color planes.²⁶ And he was able to build up solid-volume effects through modulations and graduations of warm to cool colors.²⁷

As to technique, Cezanne quite early developed his own characteristic "handwriting:" a system of elongated brush-strokes,

²³Cheney, op. cit., p. 232.

²⁴Willard H. Wright, Modern Painting, New York, 1915, p. 147.

²⁵Adrian Stokes, The Faber Gallery, London, 1947, p. 13.

²⁶G. Wildenstein, Cezanne, New York, 1947, p. 35.

²⁷Erle Loran, Cezanne's Composition, Los Angeles, 1947, p. 130

which at first ran in approximately the same direction over the whole surface of his canvases--generally from upper right to lower left. But in his later pictures he adopted a more flexible arrangement of smaller areas or patches . . . the different areas were slanted in various directions.²⁸

"The painter," Cezanne said, "must rely on his vision. He must do everything according to nature with much reflection, because every color touch must contain air, light, the object, the character, the drawing and the style; in a word, all that which constitutes a painting."²⁹

Essential to the fabric of Cezanne's paintings is his line. For to him the line became the means of distinguishing each area definitely from adjacent areas. He knew that the simplest form of line, in painting as in nature, is produced by contact of two areas or by their intersection.³⁰

When Cezanne's line extends into the object of which it is the contour it is often important to modeling; when the line lies outside of the object defined, it affects more directly the location of the object in space; but in each instance it contributes both to modeling and spacing.³¹

²⁸San Francisco Museum of Art, Paul Cezanne, San Francisco, 1937, p. 13.

²⁹Wildenstein, Cezanne, op. cit., p. 35.

³⁰Albert C. Barnes and Violette De Mazia, The Art of Cezanne, New York, 1939, p. 31.

³¹Ibid.

Cezanne, as we have mentioned, suggested recession by varying the color and tone of each object to stress its relation to other objects. Thus, the light wall in my painting is made dark at the left edge against lighter forms beyond and becomes lighter and lighter till it reaches the over-hang of the roof, the edge of which is dark; and against the darker log in front the wall is light.

I discovered that Cezanne used a restricted palette in much of his work to obtain simplicity. So only a few hues--blue, green and tan--are predominant in my classical painting.

This classical type of art, exemplified by Cezanne, is referred to as architectural art. Why? Because the classical artist, as an architect, can imagine formal relations to the point of symbolic concrete form.

A brief architectural analysis of my composition is that each side of the picture is built up to hold the canopy of the trees which seem to reach out to the sides and toward the picture plane. It is important to note that the entire picture revolves around the standing figure. This motion should satisfy the classical concept of volumes circulating in space around an imaginary central axis.³²

³²Loran, op. cit., p. 23.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this project I have proved to myself that each painting involves an obedient surrendering to the underlying experience through intense concentration. Therefore, one has to plunge into each subject and steep oneself in the pertinent matter. If we are at all passive, the subject matter overwhelms us.

This method of producing each type of painting confers to the student a glimpse into the thoughts of the artists studied. In the reading of Cezanne's letters to his long-time friend Emile Zola, for example, one almost feels Cezanne's sorrows brought on by his misunderstanding of others. And it is obvious that Renoir's paintings reflect his joyousness, and that Courbet's work radiates his pride and confidence. Thus, one obtains a deeper understanding--even greater respect--for the masters through such a study as this.

In the many ramifications of art it is not as easy for the perceiver and appreciator to understand the intimate union of doing and undergoing as it is in the case of the maker. I now know, as Dewey explains, "A beholder must create his own experience. And his creation of experiences must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent."³³

The experiences in this study have proved to be intellectual and practical, rather than distinctively esthetic. For my

³³Dewey, op. cit., p. 54.

insatiable interest kept me going on and on to deeper meanings of each art type studied, and these deeper meanings seem to impel me on to further studies of artists of all ages in a similar manner.

Other than a personal feeling that I have succeeded in accomplishing my goal of drawing out the three essences of art from nature, it is not easy to prove in words that I have done so. Only if a trained individual who has traveled through similar passes of experience accepts them, can we say that this study is verifiable.

If apprehended by the spectator, the classical painting should give him an appreciation of the formal order; the romantic work should give him an appreciation of the emotive fragments; and the descriptive work should give him a better appreciation of facts pertinent to living.

Of the three paintings my favorite by far is the classical attempt as it appears to possess the most long-lasting qualities. Of the other two I may grow tired.

One purpose of this program of study was to satisfy somewhat my sudden curiosity of "experience" in art as related in my introduction.

For me this study is not an end but a beginning for deeper studies into the philosophies of art.

It is hoped that this essay may be useful to some art students and art teachers who are unmindful of what may be gained by a study of the philosophy of their art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Books

- Barnes, Albert C. and DeMazia, Violette, The Art of Cezanne, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1939.
- Cheney, Sheldon, The Story of Modern Art, New York, The Viking Press, 1941
- Clutton-Brock, Alan, An Introduction to French Painting, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1932.
- Dewey, John, Art As Experience, New York, Milton, Balch and Co., 1934.
- Kimball, Fiske and Venturi, Lionello, Great Paintings in America, New York, Coward-McGann, Inc., 1948.
- Loran, Erle, Cezanne's Composition, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1947.
- Orpen, Sir William, The Outline of Art, Vol. II, New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923-4.
- Perard, Victor, Anatomy and Drawing, New York and Chicago, Victor Perard, Publisher, 1928.
- Pijoan, Joseph, History of Art, Vol. III, New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1928.
- Rewald, John, Paul Cezanne, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1948.
- San Francisco Museum of Art, Paul Cezanne, Exhibit San Francisco, September 1 - October 4, 1937.
- Stokes, Adrian, Paul Cezanne, London, Faber and Faber, 1947.
- Wildenstein, G., Cezanne, Exhibit New York, March 27 - April 26, 1947.
- Wildenstein, G., Courbet, Exhibit New York, March 27 - April 26, 1947.
- Wilenski, R. H., The Modern Movement in Art, New York, Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1934

Wright, Willard H., Modern Painting, New York, John Lane Company,
1915.

Zahar, Marcel, Gustave Courbet, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1950.

B. Encyclopedia

Anonymous, Courbet, Collier's Encyclopedia, First Edition, Vol. VI,
New York, 1950.