

Reflection: The throwing back by a body or surface of light, heat, or sound without absorbing it. OR serious thought or consideration.

Reflect on this: Road reflectors are there to keep you alive, they fly under your radar, and you obey them without thinking.

In this installation, the road reflectors act as both the subject and a medium. You could say my artistic process is free flowing... a dance between canvases, paint, hot glue, markers, and spray paint... and reflectors. I would like to think that this installation implies the vast possibilities of an overlooked medium. My diamond in the rough: road reflectors.

There must've been a first time I picked up a reflector. I'd always been a collector of sorts, and reflectors always seemed to always cross my path. It felt like a sign that I was going in the right direction. I started hoarding. I was going out of my way, dodging cars, to collect them. This Final Project seemed like a good time to keep working with them. As an artist who thrives on the experimental process, once I get the ball rolling, it's pretty easy for me to make something. Usually I'm satisfied enough to keep what I make. If I don't like it, I can always destroy it. I have more fun doing that. I'm not so attached to it all. I make stuff and try to stay positive about all of it.

I hope my art makes you smile. I ask that you question the material world and begin to ponder reclaiming what is around you and recontextualizing it.

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Abstract Expressionism: The Inside Out Art

Asa K.



In this paper you will learn about: the origins of Abstract Expressionism, major Abstract Expressionist artists and their work, and key concepts to abstract art. You'll also read about my experience and opinions around abstract art, as well as the psychology related to this artistic style.

Introduction

Oxbow has been an awakening for me. Suddenly, I became aware of the many gifts that I have been fortunate enough to receive. I am aware of the importance of taking opportunities, and realize Oxbow has been a major convenience for my personal, social, and artistic growth. Here, I have the resources and freedom to pursue new things and not be worried to fail. For this assignment I was drawn to art as a means of expression. I was interested in spiritual art forms and found abstract art. I studied the Abstract Expressionist movement, I began to use paint in new ways, and played with the idea of the psychology of making art.

History

Following abstract art can be in the form of a painting, sculpture, or graphic design. Abstract art, also known as non-objective or nonrepresentational art, tends to be geometric and does not represent specific objects, people, or other subjects found in the natural world. Instead, form, color, line, tone, and texture are elements of the art form. An early pioneer of abstract painting, Wassily Kandinsky, is recognized for his soulful style and innovative theories on non-figurative art. In 1910, his in-depth commentary “Concerning the Spiritual In Art,” Kandinsky was acclaimed for his belief that abstract colors and forms can be used to express the “inner life” of the artist.

All art can be considered abstract because it is not the object itself. Rather, it is a representation of something and is not the same as what we see in our tangible, viewable, reality. Before the 20th century, rather than it being an outlet for expression, art consisted strictly of works describing nature or human civilization in great detail.

World War II created a political conflict in Europe forcing many artists to emigrate to the United States. A number of American artists looked to the Surrealists for an approach to the material in their work. The Surrealists thought that the unconscious and the ancient imagery were universal symbols that could speak to everyone while creating a distinctly American style. Adolph Gottlieb, for example, combined his work with imagery inspired by Native American sources. Others, like Clyfford Still, were so embittered by the horrors of war that they chose to avoid European tradition altogether. As Barnett Newman said, “After the monstrosity of the war, what do we do? What is there to paint? We have to start all over again.” The Relationship between artistic expression and historical events seem inevitable. We will look into the early 20th century “modern art” movements, and later, how they morphed into a response to WWII and how the Abstract Expressionist movement was brought about.

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850. The period of Romanticism strayed from the idea of imitation and idealization, instead put emphasis on imagination and creativity using the unconscious as a tool. Over time we see more and more painters coming to terms with this new idea of creative freedom and form of expression.

Maurice Denis was a French painter, decorative artist and writer. He was an engaged artist during the transitional period between impressionism and modern art. Maurice Denis’s statement of 1890, “It should be remembered that a picture—before being a war-horse, a nude, or an anecdote



Figure 1 Wassily Kandinsky
“Colour is a means of exerting direct influence on the soul. The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul. There is no must in art because art is free.”

of some sort—is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order,” Maurice summarizes the feeling among the Symbolist and Post impressionist artists of his time. The Early 20th century included art movements such as Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, and Futurism.

Fauvism is the style of les Fauves, a group of modern artists whose art emphasized painterly qualities of color, stroke, or texture over the representational or realistic values maintained by Impressionism.



Figure 2 Green Stripe by French Painter Andre Derain

Cubism is another early-20th-century avant-garde art movement that revolutionized European painting and sculpture, and inspired related movements in music, literature and architecture. Cubism has been considered the most influential art movement of the 20th century. The different style of abstraction is quite evident from say fauvism, although similar in subject matter, cubism played with interlocked planes and later a collage approach. Below is a piece by Pablo Picasso called *Guernica* illustrating the cubist style.

First seen in poetry and painting, Expressionism is a modernist movement originating in Germany in the early 20th century. Its typical trait is to present the world solely from a subjective perspective, distorting it radically for emotional effect in order to evoke moods or ideas. Expressionism focused primarily on expression of emotional experiences rather than a response to the images of the external world. A good example of this is, *The Old Guitarist* by Pablo Picasso.

It depicts an old, blind, worn, man with tattered clothing weakly hunched over his guitar, playing in the streets of Barcelona, Spain.

Lastly, Futurism was an artistic and social movement that originated in Italy. They were accentuating aspects from their lives such as speed, technology, youth, violence, and objects such as the car, the airplane, and the industrial city. View how well Giacomo Balla is able to express movement in their piece *Dynamism of a Dog*.

All of these movements in some way highlight the difference between art and natural appearances.



Figure 3 Guernica by Pablo Picasso

However, it is evident they are doing different things to obscure an image. Either, one abstracts appearances to the point of unrecognizability, or, uses forms which are not taken from our natural world. Two very different methods that add a substance of abstraction.

During WWI we see groups form such as the De Stijl and the Dada group. De Stijl, Dutch for "The Style", also known as Neoplasticism, was a Dutch art movement founded in 1917 in Leiden. De Stijl included artists and architects.



Figure 4 *The Old Guitarist* by Pablo Picasso

was the first art movement that started in America making New York the center of the art world. Robert Myron Coates was an American writer and a long-term art critic for the New Yorker. He used the term "abstract expressionism" in 1946 in reference to the works of Hans Hofmann, Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning and others. The 1950's allowed abstract art to be widely recognized and respected in America and Europe, with practices in painting and sculpture. Abstract art has indeed baffled and bewildered many, but to those who accept its mysterious expression, there is no doubt of its extent and significance.

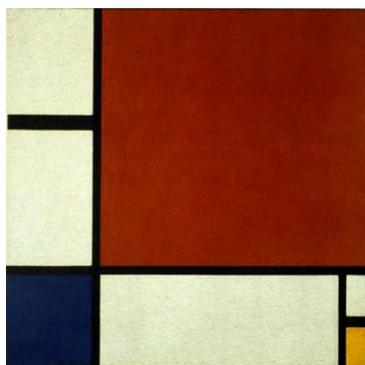


Figure 5 *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, Painting by Piet Mondrian

Dadaism was an art movement of the European avant-garde. Their goal was to mock the worthlessness of the modern world. The movement began in Zürich, Switzerland, circa 1916 and further expanded the spectrum of abstract art.; New York Dada began circa 1915, and after 1920 Dada flourished in Paris.

Abstract art did not peak between World War I and World War II. With authoritarian governments in place and art movement renewed the focus to imagery such as Surrealism and socially critical realism, abstract art was given little attention. Although, after World War II, the American school of abstract painting called Abstract Expressionism appeared on the scene, which made a huge impact on abstract art. It



Figure 5 Giacomo Balla *Dynamism of a Dog*

Abstract Expressionism can be divided into two phases. The early phases occurring in the 1940's and the later phase which developed in the 1950s. The 40's included artists such as Willem De kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Jackson Pollock who painted biomorphic shapes on their canvases. Biomorphism uses elements of design from the natural world like recurring patterns or shapes reminiscent of nature or living organisms.

While the 50's comprised of Action painting and Color Field works. Action painting sometimes called "gestural abstraction" is a style of painting in which paint is dribbled, splashed, or smeared onto the canvas, rather than being carefully

applied. The term Action Painting was first used in 1952 by art critic Herland Rosenberg to describe the work of painters Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Willem De Kooning. According to Rosenberg, the canvas was an arena in which to act.

Jackson Pollock explored abstract expressionism through his splatter pieces, which involved pouring paint and other media directly onto the canvas.

Franz Kline, influenced by his friend Willem De Kooning, was an Abstract Expressionist who is known for his large black-and-white gestural paintings. Kline viewed his action painting not as an expression of his emotions but as a means to create a physical form and presence that could be felt by the viewer.

Willem De Kooning's work embodied the intense gestural style of the movement and he conceivably did more than any of his associates to develop a radically abstract style of painting that fused Cubism, Surrealism and Expressionism. Although he began creating entirely abstract pictures, he felt a strong pull towards traditional subjects and would later become most famous for his pictures of women. Later he turned to landscapes.

"I'm not interested in 'abstracting' or taking things out or reducing painting to design, form, line, and color. I paint this way because I can keep putting more things in it - drama, anger, pain, love, a figure, a horse, my ideas about space. Through your eyes it again becomes an emotion or idea." -Willem De Kooning



Figure 6 Jackson Pollock



Figure 7 Willem De Kooning



Figure 9 Woman I by Willem De Kooning



Figure 8 Mark Rothko

Color field painting was inspired by European modernism and closely related to abstract expressionism, while many of its notable early proponents were among the pioneering abstract expressionists. Color Field is defined as large fields of flat, solid color painted or stained into the canvas to create a flat unbroken surface. Mark Rothko an American painter of Russian Jewish descent, is well known for his Color Field paintings. His paintings can be described as huge blocks of two to three colors next to each other that attempt to engulf their viewer and seek to convey universal human emotion. "If you are only moved by color relationships, you are missing the point. I am interested in expressing the big emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, doom." -Mark Rothko

Hans Hoffman a German-born painter and Arshile Gorky an Armenian-American painter were essential in calling attention to the potential for expression in abstraction and the basic physicality of paint. Hans Hofmann was a crucial figure of postwar American art. Acclaimed for his exuberant, color-filled canvases, and esteemed as an influential teacher for generations of artists. Hofmann played a pivotal role in the development of Abstract Expressionism.

Arshile Gorky also known for his deep effect on abstract expressionism. Gorky expanded on principles of Surrealism with a wide range of painterly brushwork and distinctive forms. "The stuff of thought is the seed of the artist. Dreams from the bristles of the artist's brush," he once mused. "As the eye functions as the brain's sentry, I communicate my innermost perceptions through the art, my worldview."

Here is an assortment of abstract expressionist work that I admired but also thought were good representations of the each artist's style.



Figure 13 *The Gate* by Hans Hoffman



Figure 10 *Garden in Sochi* by Arshile Gorky



Figure 11 Robert Motherwell. No. 4'



Figure 12 *Mahoning* by Franz Kline



Key Concepts

Meaning - Abstract art does not attempt to represent an accurate portrayal of a visual reality, but instead use shapes, colors, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect. Artists were generally less concerned with revealing the subject of the painting and more the the act of creating it.

Abstract painting is mysterious and illusory because it's not obvious what intention the artist has put into their work. In this case, each viewer can assert their own connotation to the art work. Understanding abstract art is easy: all it requires is an open mind and a big imagination.

Ingredients - Abstract expressionists did not like the considered unemotional work of geometric abstract painters such as Mondrian. They believed in universal emotions such as; outrage, sorrow, and joy. They hoped to bring these universal emotions into their work by communicating them powerfully



using shapes, colors, and lines. Most painters of Abstract Expressionism preferred large works on canvas, vivid colors, and loose brushwork. The movement is the blend of the emotional earnestness.

“I want to be very intimate and human, to paint a small picture is to place yourself outside your experience. However you paint the larger the picture, you are in it. “ -Mark Rothko

My Experience

Through suffering comes wisdom. I have recently come to a realization with influence of discomfort. Stepping out of one's comfort zone is crucial to growth. In fact failing is a central component to developing any skill. I have learned the abundance of opportunity that this state of mind can bring, and observed how others have trained their minds in order to accomplish goals they set up for themselves.

Abstract artmaking for me is an experimental process, trying different ways of applying paint and combinations of textures and colors that arise. I see it as an uncharted journey for me, one in which I have just begun to realize I want to embark on. I think about the interconnectedness artmaking has to spirituality. That the components abstract art holds, color, line, form, texture, all have the capability of expressing so much, together or as separate media. I have realized how much of a communicator artwork can be. I reflected on work I made here at Oxbow. What did It mean to me? What was I communicating?

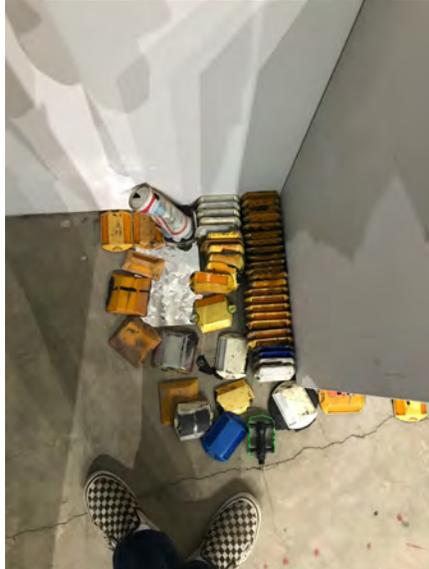
I decided all the art I made was an exploration of myself emotionally. Whether I was highlighting the dark side of me, things that were hidden to others. Or the light side of me, things I already express. During the creation I was posing questions to myself; What do I want to call attention to? Is there a difference in my perspective of the work versus my viewers? I began exploring these questions in my artwork without even being conscious of it. I soon came to learn I was communicating aspects of my id, ego, and superego.

The Psyche, easier understood as the place where your thoughts come from, has three distinct yet interacting agents in the psychic apparatus that is your mind. Defined in Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche, the three parts are the theoretical constructs in terms of whose activity and interaction our mental life is described. They are the three parts of our personality, and together make up the complex behavior of human beings. One piece I made was expressing my wishes and desires. I admire the outlaw lifestyle. Motorcycles gangs, tattooing, danger and thrills. First, I built and customized a model chopper from the hobby shop down the street from Oxbow.



Then, I gathered all my found objects including road reflectors, stickers, old beer cans, plastic skulls..that sort of stuff. Things I found on the street and knew I could use later. My sister actually drove up a lot more road reflectors, random found objects, and childhood toys from home when she came to visit. As I finished the small scale motorcycle, I began arranging all the objects I was working with, trying to represent something as a whole.





I ended up with this, people later told me the piece resembles an altar and I thought hm...ya, I am almost making an offering for or to myself, or the viewers about my yearning for the outcast way of life. This jumble of things represents my longing for this foreign lifestyle that I have come to be aware of through past experience and enthusiasm, but is mostly a construct in my head.

Another piece is made, a sculpture in which I explored the Jungian psychology idea of the “shadow aspect/archetype” referring to the unconscious in the shadowed aspects of the mind. Parts of my consciousness which are suppressed and hidden. Things that I may not consider to be a part of me but are possibly somewhere in my unconscious. I expressed this idea as violent, sexual, and

gory, borderline offensive. In Jungian psychology, the "shadow", "Id", or "shadow aspect/archetype" may refer to an unconscious aspect of the personality which the conscious ego does not identify in itself, or the entirety of the unconscious, i.e., everything of which a person is not fully conscious. In short, the shadow is the unknown side.



“All profoundly original art looks ugly at first.” - **Clement Greenberg**

This next piece was made during a time when I was exploring buddhism.



Majority of the materials such as the flowers, leafs, sticks etc, I collected from the streets of Napa.

I've heard criticisms towards abstract art. People tease the artwork with "Oh, my cat could do that". But the truth is the way the looks is artwork is fully intentional and personal to the artist. If you're one of those people doesn't have broad mindedness to value abstract artwork that's ok. What really matters is that an artist created their work and put it out their for us to judge and question and appreciate the art. They felt the need to express something from within themselves.

"He who thinks he knows, doesn't know. He who knows that he doesn't know, knows." - Joseph Campbell (who was heavily influenced by Carl Jung)

The mind and Abstract art

Abstract art should be ambiguous and elusive. Much like philosophical questions, abstract art emphasizes the mysteries of life that we may never be able to solve. It takes us away from our everyday lives and reminds us to feel emotions that we as humans share.

Abstract Expressionism and Psychoanalysis-Like the Surrealists before them, many Abstract Expressionist painters were interested in psychoanalysis and the theories of Carl Jung, who identified certain myths and archetypes indicative of what he called a collective unconscious. In the 1940s, artists like Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock believed that they could use universal symbols to evoke certain emotions in the viewer.

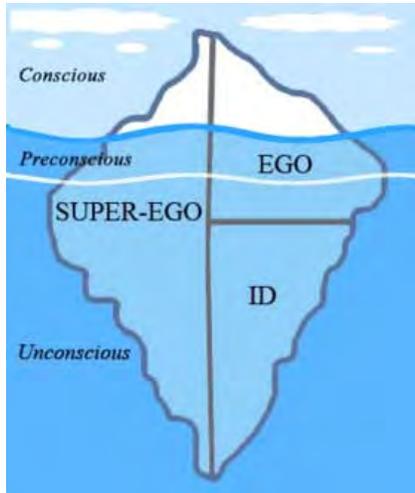
Abstract art is often considered to be a visual language of shape, color and form, there is something very particular in the attraction to an abstract work of art. Abstract expressionism is a form of art which draws on the inner subconscious of the artist rather than the artist extracting an image from the world outside of themselves. I assume most artists are putting forth an array of feelings, emotions, and reactions during their creations. Only the artist really knows what they are conveying. Furthermore, they aren't able to articulate that in which they are expressing. Another factor, the viewer of the artwork, has their own attitudes, assumptions, opinions, which they will likely force onto the work.

Freud's psychoanalytic theories: Sigmund Freud is considered to be the founder of the psychodynamic approach to psychology, which looks to unconscious drives to explain human behavior. Freud believed that the mind is responsible for both conscious and unconscious decisions that it makes on the basis of psychic drives. Freud felt that humans are subconsciously driven, emotional beings, unique in ourselves.

Action painting, abstract expressionism, surrealism, automatic drawing and a host of other twentieth century movements exposed these same ideas of uniquely personal expressions of the artist's subconscious emotion. A lot of what's going on behind the Abstract art is the searching for answers to the questions of human existence. Many artist's face personal psychological battles. Some are confronting the struggle between the industrial world we live in and nature. Others are in pursuit of spiritual comfort.

I am also deeply interested in interpreting dreams as conduits for unspoken feelings and desires. The works explored here did not begin with preconceived notions of a finished product; rather, they were provoked by dreams, or emerged from subconscious associations between images, text, and their meanings.

“In popular writing about psychology, the division of the mind containing the sum of all thoughts, memories, impulses, desires, feelings, etc., that are not subject to a person's perception or control but that often affect conscious thoughts and behavior (noun). The Surrealists derived much inspiration from psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's theories on dreams and the workings of the subconscious mind.” -Wilhelm Worringer



German art historian Wilhelm Robert Worringer was known for his theories about abstract art and its relation to avant-garde movements such as German Expressionism. “According to Worringer, what seems to be fundamental to the urge towards abstraction in general...is a desire – perhaps even a compulsive need – to access and hence find a measure of psychological security and wholeness via an inner image rather than an outer image. Such an image does not have its roots in the directly observed natural world - Worringer writes, ... the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions. We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space...(Worringer, 1997, pg. 15)”

Worringer suggests artists have a compulsive need that comes from within them to create abstract artwork. They don't really understand where this comes from but they can feel that abstract art is helping them communicate something lying deep within themselves that just isn't easy to explain in words. Rather a visual language allows them to express those inner feelings.

“I have no fears about making changes, destroying the image etc. because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through.” Jackson Pollock

In conclusion, Abstract Expressionism was a 20th century movement which spawned from previous modern art movement. The artists were attempting to express universal emotions through color and form and some were using non-traditional techniques. For example, Jackson pollock who created the revolutionary splatter paintings and Mark Rothko conveying emotions simply through a few rich blocks of colors. Artists also used spontaneity the subconscious to their advantage and to express the riddle of life. They encouraged us to question our consciousness and remind us that there is more information about our universe to be understood. I encourage you to take a moment to breathe and appreciate the present moment. I hope that you will continue to be moved by the new things you've learned and by what is to come. I wish that you accept who you are currently and embrace all of your emotions because they are all part of you. And to enjoy life and the wonderful gifts within it.

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