CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND IMPLICATIONS OF STYLISTIC CHANGES IN ART

MORTON WAYNE THIEBAUD
A. B., (Sacramento State College), 1951

THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

AT THE

SACRAMENTO STATE COLLEGE

Approved:

Paul D. Beckman, Chair
Baxter M. Geeting
Harold B. Roberts

Advisory Committee

Date May 11, 1953
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of terms used</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary art</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern art</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic arts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF STYLISTIC CHANGES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTING ART PHILOSOPHIES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF ART</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

For some time the writer has felt that art could have greater meaning for all individuals. It is evident that people are neglecting esthetic decisions that are rightfully their responsibilities in such things as home planning and decoration, landscaping, choice of dress and selection of colors. Individuals today are too dependent upon magazines and fads. Commercial artists direct the public taste. No longer do people, confidently and happily, make their own art choices. Yet; this is only a minor tragedy compared to the fact that they do not comprehend and appreciate the beauty around them.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. The problem is to present the purposes and objectives of art today. The problem has a simple premise. It is this: the writer holds that art styles do not oppose each other. Many History of Art books point out the evident need for stylistic change.¹ We will show that every possible

¹ Morris Davidson, An Approach to Modern Painting. (Coward-McCann, New York 1948)
manner of artistic expression has the right to exist.
Each style is equally important.

Importance of the Study. The wide possibilities reflected by this concept can make possible the unfolding of a more complete realization of better and more meaningful Art experience for a greater number of individuals.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Contemporary Art. This term is to be considered as the identification of all qualitative creative work that is practiced today by living artists. In some cases this term will overlap the term "Modern Art".

Modern Art. Specifically, Modern Art will be considered in this writing as a period in time. Sheldon Cheney defines this period as starting around 1840 and continuing up to the present time. In the opinion of the writer, the term "Modern Art" has never been any more specifically defined.

Plastic Arts. The writer shall refer to "Plastic

Arts" as art work that deals with the artist's response to, and control of, spatial organization and design. This paper will refer generally to drawing, painting, sculpture, and architecture.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF STYLISTIC CHANGES

The significance of the problem will become clear as we review the following outline of stylistic change. In order to fully qualify its importance it is necessary to trace a recurring and obvious pattern of Art Style development. The pattern is related mostly to the history of Western Painting. Within this heritage of art, the Western World has had a comparatively rapid turnover of artistic styles and many different tendencies have presented themselves. Compared to the Chinese Culture, which succeeded in maintaining itself on a fairly stable basis for more than four thousand years; Western Culture has developed many widely different methods of expressing the environment surrounding it. Within the period of three or four thousand years, that can be defined as Western Man's history, there has been a constant change from one stylistic tendency to another. This is an actuality that any Art History book will maintain. It is important to note how and why these changes occurred.

In the Egyptian Culture, which is another vital example of a long stable culture, there seemed no such need
for changes. Their Art forms bear out the fact that there was a dictatorship of artisans who made carefully chosen demands of their fellow artists. Apprentices and students in this situation were taught to achieve specific objectives in line with a perpetuated dogma. Absolutisms were apparently imposed upon all related arts to obtain definite moral and spiritual responses from the populace. This is a typical art historians summary of Egyptian Art:

"by the beginning of the Old Kingdom, those conventions had been established which controlled, with but one important break at the time of the Empire, the long course of Egyptian art. The builders of the Old Kingdoms were primarily tomb-builders, and their stone mastabas and pyramids are still massive, static, and enduring, thoroughly in harmony with their site and function. Into them fitted the imposing portrait sculpture that was required by religious belief, conventional in form and conception, but filled with an intense vitality. Painting and painted reliefs, chiefly in the chapel of the tombs, were based upon conventions which evolved from mental rather than visual concepts of the world."3

There was no revolt because there was no opportunity for it, since all practices had to be sanctioned by the Official Order. This is not to claim that there were no variations in Egyptian Art. There were style modifications and subtle variations but they were always based

upon the fundamental traditions set and standardized by the selected patterns of the times.

From the era of the Egyptians onward, the story is quite different. Stylistic changes begin to accelerate. Times changed and the original basis for Art changed with them. New demands came with reforms and at the period of the Italian Renaissance, we discover a highly competitive atmosphere within the arts. This competition inevitably led the artist to develop personal mannerisms or styles. It is true that this is not the first time that Individual Masters and their styles were recognized. But, within the tradition of Western History, it is the first time we recognize the pattern which plays such an important role in establishing the endless story of reaction and revolution in Art. Here we find the finest of examples that can be schematically traced.

In order to break down the steps in this development it is necessary to describe the development of Art Genius and to show the aftermath of its influence.

The pattern is always basically the same. First of all there is the Master or Art Genius. Because he is not practicing within the recognized limits of accepted art activities of the day, he is best understood by
people close to the art world. Students, apprentices, lesser artists, craftsmen and art theorists are among the Avant Garde Art Intellectuals. They accept the newcomer and sing his praises.

Sometimes unconsciously, and sometimes not, they begin to attach themselves more directly to the master by styling their own work after his. The thing which makes this so possible is the fact that their work is mediocre, weak, and lacks a real basis for execution. Therefore, they pattern their work after the Master's in order to fit into the advancing trend. Students are particularly guilty of this malpractice.

These practitioners or performers, are major influences in popularizing the Master's style. The public or lay groups are the recipients of this practice, and the more active ones even enjoy pushing it further forward, believing that they are being progressive. They begin to demand its repetition and insist upon its furtherance. Art schools, which are really the servants of these middle groups, write into the curriculum those projects which they believe will best prepare the students to work in the newly accepted manner. The pattern is now set and the commanding groups request that this formula
be repeated over and over again. Judgement of all art is then made on the basis of formulated concepts, growing out of the first Master's style.

Remind yourself, however, that the artist has not had a direct hand in this planning. The artist had no intention of establishing these canons. The formalizing of his contribution has depended upon a watered down version of officialdom.

Cezanne is an excellent example in this case when he said "If they establish an academy after me, do not believe that they have the real truth." He was, throughout his life, fearful of an absoluteness in art.

In the next step, when the latest official dogma is integrated into every possible avenue of the existing order, a new Master presents himself and is immediately resisted by the official judgement. The Art World demands his credentials and when he cannot present them, his right to practice individually is not granted. This does not stop the Genius. It may temporize his immediate position, but eventually he is the one who becomes the leader of an active revolt against the exist-

---

ing criteria. It is unfortunate that this is usually a time-consuming revolt draining away the Master's time and energy. Eventually, of course, he gains an equal stature with the preceding Master.

It is now apparent how this pattern can repeat itself continuously. It is not yet obvious as to why it had to happen so often in the five hundred years between 1450 and 1950.
CHAPTER III
AN ANALYSIS OF EXISTING ART PHILOSOPHIES

The early Greeks in their concept of ideal beauty state that there exists somewhere, probably not on this earth, standards of perfection. In order to achieve these standards they proceeded with a set of arbitrary values. Today the Experimentalists hold that art is meaningful only when it grows out of human experience. The capacities, and consequently the responses, of the viewer differ from individual to individual. The essential difference between these two major points of view seems to be in the way in which they believe beauty can be achieved and evaluated.

Whether beauty is a fixed set of values, such as Aristotle's "Mean proportional," or something that is evolutionary in character, is important in one particular relationship, -- the manner in which it affects the teaching of art. It seems that Aristotilians have had adequate time to try their philosophy and have failed to meet the basic requirement for a Democratic Education.

According to the Aristotilian, we must set aside Art as something spiritually above the mean practices of mankind. The standards must be high and are set by the order of a farseeing God who may withhold the greater grandeur from us, allowing participation only in a limited sense.

The following is a statement from an Art Education pamphlet:

"... anyone with even a casual acquaintance with the place of arts in American life and education, today realizes that such justification is seriously needed. For the grim truth is that many, if not most, people in positions of power in American life and education, do not agree with the convictions which I have expressed above. They do not agree that activity in the arts is essential to human development and to the continued healthy growth of our people and our culture. The arts are still general "fads and frills" in the American community, as they are in the curriculum of the average American school. They still represent resources to be provided and supported after the "really serious" business of life and education is taken care of."6

If the Aristotilian had his way Art would be a business for specialists only. There would be no real purpose for having it in the curriculum of every school.

The Philosophy of the Experimentalist holds that esthetic experiences are common to all men. It is not only a part of his spiritual being, but it fills an

---

essential need in his everyday life.

It is also revealing to point out one other important difference between the two philosophies. Aristotle attempted to list, in order of their relative importance, the varying art forms. He ended up with a standard of esthetic degree. Artifacts, weaving, flower arrangement, tapestry, and other useful objects were on the bottom of the pyramid. Carving, pottery, ceramics and figurines were in the middle of the list, but still considered lesser arts. At the peak of this Art Graph reigned the "higher" arts of painting, architecture and sculpture. The latter three are still commonly referred to as "the Fine Arts".

The Experimentalists agree on quite a different plan. They contend that the quality of beauty exists in all things. Basic life activity is included in this plan. They further explain that the response of each person is dependent upon his capacities and upon the degree of his abilities. The Experimentalists believe that every individual may have an art response. Not so much one of an imposing degree, but one of completeness.

---

in relationship to his readiness for acceptance. The response does not significantly differ in character, whether it is a Master Painter's reaction to a great work of art, or a housewife's reaction to a flower arrangement. They are the same responses, but in differing relationships. Art then, according to the Experimentalists, cannot be separated from everyday living. It is a vital and essential part of it.

Contemporary Art philosophy, more closely parallels the philosophy of John Dewey and the Experimentalists. It is a program based upon the identification of art with the everyday experiences of each individual. It is this point that convinces us of the right of Contemporary Art to influence the method of presenting art activities in a Democratic Society.

---

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Let us return now to the pattern of change which was developing in the Italian Renaissance. Since this time in history, Art has undergone the pattern of reaction and revolt many, many times. While the Renaissance Artists were great ones and their influence was bound to be tremendous, it is generally agreed that the contributions of the Italian Renaissance were evaluated for many years far out of proportion to their intrinsic worth.9

For nearly five hundred years, the methods of teaching drawing, painting and sculpture in the majority of art schools, were dependent upon the same methods employed in the academies during the Renaissance. It is not difficult to convince ourselves as to why this course maintained its plodding pace. In Western Thought, Aristotelianism perpetuated itself as the major philosophy of Western Man. It is logical on this basis to assume that here is the reason for the over-extension of what

was considered to be the official judgment of beauty. The Academies were closely aligned with the idea of this particular kind of esthetic virtue. These schools also discerned that this philosophy gave them a sounder reason for existing. Basic principles did not change according to this philosophy, and they had their own interpretation for all existing information. This, too, is the real reason why they resisted every new creative find. All new truths were at first repelled. It took much time for them to accept new findings.

During the time that the Southern Renaissance commanded this superior position, many other movements in art were taking place. Geniuses were presenting themselves and practicing their art. In Germany, Holland, Flanders, England, China, India, Japan, Africa, Pacific Oceanic areas -- the list is endless -- people were producing art of great stature and masterful beauty. Much of it was simply overlooked or ignored until recently.

The majority of these arts were considered, as Aristotle projected, to be the "lesser" arts. It is true that a few isolated Art historians appreciated Eastern art. But, in the main, only the curators looked
lovingly at the qualities of Bosch and Brueghel, and African Negro masks were "tastefully" relegated to the Museum of Natural History.

But gradually the trend was to change. Scholars were awakening to the challenge of official judgment. They began a systematic research on the qualities that make up the works of the Masters. They began to define the existing canons and found them narrow, limited and antidiluvian.

Paralleling this activity is the dynamic story of Modern Art, an exciting drama of independent men, reacting against the new dictatorship of Neo-Classicism. Following the French Revolution, the ripples became a tidal wave, and from the middle of the 19th Century to this day, that wave is still challenging the right for any narrowly defined set of rules to command the response of millions of deep-feeling people.

Perhaps, too, this is the principle fault of Modern Art. In revolting against commonly recognized Official choice, it has sometimes unintelligibly challenged the Masters of art. In attacking dogma, it has, without critical and scientific analysis, lumped into a
general heap, the Master who incited the formulation of standards unintentionally. This is an unfortunate error due to lack of maturity on the part of the disciples of Modern Art. But it is the fault, more basically, of the philosophy of narrow limitation which is in reality the original catalyst agent.

If this is the weakness it can also be the ultimate strength. It is this important signpost which will always point out the dangers of limitations on creative impulse. Contemporary art, in its broadest sense, should be defined as a wide basic premise which allows the projection of all stylistic tendencies in art and encourages experimentation in them.

The fundamental reason for change and revolt lies in the restriction of independent thought. Today, Contemporary Art has the broadest possible platform for performance. Any style and tendency may present itself if it suits the needs or temperament of the practicing artist. For the very first time in history, it is easier for a new and completely independent Genius to be accepted and shown under this light. A vast audience stands ready to look at any new discovery. There is no need for the time-consuming revolt.
It should be the aim of all democratic educational systems to safeguard this principle. The battle against "Officialdom" is not yet won. To complete the process, we must basically stimulate all individuals into active participation in the Art of Living. We must have, in our society, the means for helping all men to recognize these esthetic feelings, allow him to make decisions regarding them, and let him recognize these feelings as a part of his total makeup.

In a larger sense, this controversy has its impact upon World Culture. For too long a time the Western World has held out for an arbitrary superior position in World Art. We have been critical of other cultural patterns. Worse yet, we have tolerated them. Many of our so-called qualified Art History books have seen fit to judge that certain "lesser" cultures should not be treated in the History of World Art,¹⁰ our Renaissances being considered the high-water marks of all World Art.

With a clearer, more critical viewpoint, re-evaluation has proven that Western Culture had its high-water marks like every other culture. There are many of these

commonly overlooked Masterful Achievements in the History of World Art.

Today we can see the majority of World Art for ourselves through excellent reproductions of art work. Here we have another unique situation. Malroux terms this new situation as the "Museums without walls". We can visit any place in the world viewing art treasures which, even fifty years ago, would have taken a lifetime of travel to accomplish.

Fortunately and finally there is the awakening to a World of Art. Many art objects of many different cultures which had been shelved as "minor arts" or considered not "spiritual" enough for our museums have found their way back into prominence. Many outstanding art items are being seen by man for the very first time. If this trend continues, if the planning is broad, suiting the purposes of all men, it can be a most tremendous and enlightening factor in the study of Cultural History.

---

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS OF ART

Today art teachers need an open minded attitude to encourage art expression in everyday living.

First, the art-teacher should establish in his own mind and in the mind of his pupil, the fact that art activity is not a special phenomena, disassociated from real life, but on the contrary, that it is a part of life, a way of life in itself, and that the life of an individual can be enriched by his creative activities and in turn, his art may have more meaning.

The emphasis heretofore placed upon the judging or grading of art products must be pushed aside in the acceptance of this philosophy. Primary concern must be shifted to differing capacities in relationship to individual needs. This, of course, is the axis of all learning processes.

Merely teaching techniques and rules and tricks in drawing, coloring, modeling, designing and so on, and then grading on final craftsmanship as based on a general class standard, can no longer be recognized as an honest way to nurture the production of good art.
Laying the foundation for the fertile, creative state of mind, the art teacher must begin by stimulating the student into really feeling his life about him. He must learn to see and observe and react to what he sees. His mind must be alert to the importance of feeling, and all of his senses must be brought into sharp focus so that he feels with all of his being.

A good exercise in preparation for learning to feel would be to revert now and then, as much as possible, to the mental attitude of a child, where a mere lady bug crawling on a blade of grass, or a bit of colored glass can be the most important thing in the world for a brief moment. This can be a thought provoking and very refreshing experience where one recalls that as a child, a walk down the street was not merely a locomotive accomplishment in transporting oneself between two points, but that a whole world of delight was discovered in the space of a city block. Patterns of light and shade from the trees, textures in bark, jagged sidewalk cracks, grass, fences and flowers, life in a nest of birds, death in a pile of ants.

When this state of mind is reached, then the atten-
tion of the teacher should turn immediately to the accurate recording of the individuals progressing awareness. This should be accomplished in relation to age groups and with a knowledge of social backgrounds, cultural heritage and mental and physical differences.

Long before the teacher begins to extend help with techniques and methods of manipulative skill, he must learn what can be used and assimilated by his students, both as individuals and as a group. This calls for careful study on the part of the teacher and is concerned only with his students and their status sociologically, physiologically and psychologically.

We are not recommending that teachers lower standards, but only that they get them in order. Actually, very fine results may be expected and obtained from any level of performance, but a readiness of acceptance of these works as qualitative, sensitive, and intelligent expressions must be developed competently at the discretion of an understanding and sympathetic teacher.

This attempt to personalize the teaching of art does not mean that the teacher should be a person who praises each and every scribble, lump or blob by the
student. Rather he should encourage each try, he should stimulate the attempt, and he should help the student to enjoy what he is doing. At the same time, he should in-still in him a feeling of responsibility about the im-portance of his creative work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Dorival, Bernard, Cezanne, Continental Book Center, New York, 1948, p. 143.


