

# The shimmering substance by jackson pollock essay sample

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One of his highly acclaimed works located at the Museum of Modern Art is Shimmering Substance. Shimmering Substance is a masterpiece in oil on canvas and measures 76.3 x 61.6 centimeters. The artist is Jackson Pollock, an American painter, a prominent figure of the Abstract Expressionist Movement. It is one of Pollock's earliest works and was acclaimed for exploring the substance of a painting. The painting employed paint that emphasizes physical materiality.

The Artwork. As you can see, the painting has a dominant color which is yellow, with a variety of scattered colors, placed randomly in the canvas. There is an evident movement in the artwork as you look at it, there is a pattern of yellow spiral originating from the upper part of the picture to the middle portion. This yellow strip denotes movement in the artwork, a common characteristic of Pollock's work.

This artwork also plays with the focus of the viewer's eye, because of three dominant red dots at the center of the painting. It represents a sort of focal horizon, a spot where you can focus your gaze. It is placed at the middle, also at the center of the spiral. It is almost a dominant feature in this painting because the more abundant colors are lighter ones, mostly different shades of yellow. This elevates the sense of individuality among the dots in a canvas filled with yellow colors ("Elements of Art", 1998).

Pollock also employed outlining, although it's not that much noticeable in this artwork. He made use of dark colors as outlines where he places it on the sides of the artwork, creating a figure with dark exterior and light interior. The close up of the painting is like a conglomeration of feather-like

brush strokes, a variety of dark and light colors crisscrossing each other, some placed at the top, partially covering one another. The topmost parts are dominated by light colors; yellow, white and lighter shades of yellow and red. There are dark colors at both sides, but only in very small amounts.

The middle part is the most diverse part, with almost equal amounts of light and dark colors. This is the part with the predominant red dots in the whole painting. There is also a separation of the light and dark colors, the darker ones are mostly packed in the left side while the lighter colors are found on the right and the middle parts. One more noticeable thing here is that the brushstrokes in this part is much more varying compared to the top, where the brushstrokes are almost in a single direction only. In this part, brushstrokes are overlapping each other, in a seemingly destructive fashion.

The bottom part is the contrast of the topmost part, wherein it has dark colors as a dominant theme. Here, just like in the middle part, the brushstrokes are also in much disarray, having no common pattern or direction. It still has light colors in this part but are all dominated by dark ones. Also incorporated in this part is Pollock's signature, scribble of a "J Pollock" in black color. You won't find it easily if you don't look at the lowermost left part of the painting.

The idea behind the artwork. The painting up close is mainly an explosion of colors and shapes, with no real meaning at first glance, just a play on the colors and figures, one might see. But if you look at it closely, there are a lot of possible interpretations in this artwork.

Pollock employs a lot of movement in the artwork. The first evident pattern of movement is the yellow spiral line which signifies a continuous flow in the painting. Here, it could be interpreted that this flow is the transition from an orderly fashion to a disorderly manner, of such destructive disarray in the pattern, form and movement of the painting.

This means that the pattern and form upon which the lines occur in the painting reflect on something greater than being obtuse. What we see as a great and expensive doodling is actually something reflected by the subconscious. Pollock thought about his creations and his subconscious directs him to create - believe it or not - symmetrically coordinated lines in Shimmering Substance. Though not visible to the eye, especially the untrained eye, it has been found on data imaging that this particular painting has proportional use of colors and geometrical distance. It was believed that the freedom allowed to him working unhampered on a canvas has a great affect on how his work was composed, aside from being a naturally talented and gifted artist (" Shimmering Substance (sounds in the Grass Series)", 1998).

When Pollock placed the red dots or marks at the middle portion of the painting, he is like creating a center of attraction. If you view it from a distance, three dominant red spots are in clear view. This three red spots could be interpreted as a representation of Jackson Pollock himself, an expressionist that regards himself unique from the others, just like his artworks and like how he created these artworks. It simply sets him apart from the others.

When the painting is divided in three parts, it somehow shows a transition in each part, depending on how you interpret it. The topmost part, having a calmer, lighter aspect, is composed of light colors, with consistent brushstrokes and little dark colors. It is dominated by light colors, especially yellow, giving a mood that seems calm and serene. If you would compare this to the life of Jackson Pollock, this is the time wherein he was not yet into arts, where he was just a kid, before actually being able to create masterpieces like this one.

The middle part is somewhat a continuation of the top part, but it has started to have a disarray of brushstroke and colors, wherein the dark and light colors are of equal amounts, with the distinction made by the red spots. The transition is from a somewhat serene environment, to a more complicated mixing of light and dark color aspects with already the variations of the strokes. When you compare it to the life of Jackson Pollock, this is the part where he is starting as an apprentice painter under the wing of Regionalist painter, Thomas Hart Benton. This is the awakening part, where he discovers himself as a painter, his uniqueness and abilities. In the artwork, this is the part where the red dots are found, so maybe this is an indication that this is the part that Pollock realized himself as a painter.

The bottom part is the final stage of the transition, wherein it is dominated by dark colors, with a great disarray of brushstrokes. This could mean that in this stage, it is where Pollock really found himself. This is the part of Pollock's life where he is at his best in creating his masterpieces, where he is not just a mere apprentice to a certain art master, but a master himself.

The artist and his art. Pollock, just like his artworks, lived a colorful life. He started working with his art as early as 17 years old, under the supervision of a master Regionalist artist. Pollock started doing his own stuff in the late 30's, wherein he started a new style, the drip and splash style of painting.

Pollock's work is more of an expressionist movement, rather unique than those of other painters. He creates his artworks by placing them on the floor or the up in a wall. He then literally splashes and spills the paints on the canvas on the wall or on the floor, where he employs his freedom in this method. Because of this, he was renowned and known as the " Jack the dripper."

Jackson Pollock is also associated with the rise of a new All-over style of painting, wherein it avoids any points of highlighting or identifiable parts within the whole canvas, thus giving a general view towards the artwork itself, not as an artwork with its distinct parts. The designs of his paintings doesn't relate to the size or shape of the canvas. He goes on with his artworks, and soon after he finishes, then that is the time that the canvas is trimmed to suit the painting. This became a prominent style in painting during the late 40's and early 50's, all started by Jackson Pollock (Pioch, 2002).

In the Shimmering Substance, Pollock gave enough time in conceiving the image, wherein it was made in the floor, the design definitely an out of the blue experience, just like his other artworks.

Pollock's critics. While some embraced the Shimmering Substance with open arms, and believed that it was definitely genius, others say that it was a manifestation of Pollock's turbulent childhood and disturbed personality. He was referred to as the "American van Gogh" not only for his genius but also his personal struggles with alcoholism. His life and career, though productive was shadowed with struggles that ended in a tragic car accident. Some say that his untimely death, which also happened during the height of his career, gave him immortality. Abstract expressionism was not yet a household name at the time but due to his death people became more aware with it and overnight, Pollock's paintings doubled in price.

More than anything that Pollock represented during his brief and extraordinary career, his paintings gave life to abstract expressionism. As more people became aware with his art and bought it at surmountable prices, other artists were discovered in suit of Pollock's style. There was Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman. Many critics advocated and polarized Pollock's work which contributed greatly to his popularity and the advancement of abstract expressionism in general.

Pollock was described by Harold Rosenberg as someone who revolutionized painting into something dramatic. Rosenberg also described it as liberal and well suited for the times - rebellious and political. Another critic and supporter, Clement Greenberg, declared Pollock as "the epitome of aesthetic value". He believes that Pollock's work is reflective of abstract art's history where the efforts of early artists such as Monet and Cézanne were

finally realize. He described Pollock as a “purist” as well as a fighter for his art.

It is evident in his creation the Shimmering Substance, wherein he showed a sense of rebellion, showing the transition in the painting, from a calm and light top portion, to a disarray of light and dark at the bottom. Surely, Pollock’s work is a good example of expressionism in him.

As a consequence of these voices for Pollock and Abstract Expressionism, the impact that it generated among circles of artists was more forceful. Though not easily assimilated (especially in utilizing it as part of decorations for public spaces), it eventually gained due recognition and became a means of strengthening modern art. Artists who followed Pollock’s techniques have added further insights on the art and expanded, even extended its limits to be more influential, daring and allusive. More than fifty years ago, an art movement was started almost single-handedly by Pollock; today the whole movement is known and appreciated as Modern Art (“Shimmering Substance (sounds in the Grass Series)”, 1998).

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