

Introduction abstract
from it. "the
crucifixion" that was



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Introduction

Painting is considered by many as a realm that does speak first to the eye and thereafter captivates every part of the soul. Usually, formal interest is followed in the viewer's mind as the meaning of the piece of artwork unfolds. Other interests also come in tandem with whatever one attaches to the piece. It must be mentioned that any artistic work is derived from other arts or perhaps from other mundane fields.

Nevertheless, any such work may be fraught with symbolism, story-telling or may contain discursive achievements stemming from philosophy that contribute to the image one can abstract from it. "The Crucifixion" that was painted by Nicolas Poussin, the French artist, is an image that reflects the thinking pattern of the period and a radical rebellion to rationalism and classicism that pervaded the psyche of the 18th century Europeans. The painting also reflects the degree of enigma that the artist attached to the historical episode that he endeavored to reproduce in the form of art.

The paper discusses Poussin's painting "The Crucifixion" as portrayed in Montreal Museum of Fine Arts vis-a-vis other paintings influenced by romantic art movement.

Nicolas Poussin "The Crucifixion"

Nicolas Poussin is considered one of France's gifted sons in the field of painting. He was an instrumental figure during the establishment of classical style in French painting as a style whose distinguishing features were the rational order and stability. Therefore, Poussin's artwork depicts elevated and learned themes with higher degree of formalism and painstaking

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evocation of the antique. Moreover, his paintings demonstrated order, accuracy clarity, discipline ambition, amplitude, certitude and severity.

Poussin learnt this style of art in Rome where he travelled at the age of thirty and ended up living there for the rest of his life. His painting of “ The Crucifixion” can be categorized under the works of fine art done in the nineteenth century. The masterpiece is conspicuous among its contemporaries in the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts given the unique skills and materials that the artist used to produce it. In this piece of work, Poussin in his characteristic style of artistry endeavors to transmedialize the scriptural narrative into a visual picturesque produced by the composition of color and lines. In the painting, Poussin shows the crucifixion of Christ in a Tuscan landscape with characters in the traditional Italian attire. He makes the scene appear as real as possible by placing it in a contemporary setting. [1] The main focus of Poussin was the presentation of historically accurate images of sacred scenes.

Looking at the picture from the left margin one notices an emotional stranger, who is somehow sequestered from the remaining images observing the scene. Perhaps he may have been one of the Jews mentioned in one of the gospels (John 19: 20) as hailing from nearby town having come to read the trilingual inscription on Jesus’ cross.[2] This anonymous bystander could have been used by the artist as a representation of the viewer, given the emotional turmoil that the painting stirs. The figure below shows Poussin’s “ The Crucifixion” adopted from Artsunlight.[3]

The Movement that Influenced Poussin's Paintings

Poussin was greatly influenced by the various philosophical movements of the time that shaped the outcome of his numerous artworks. At the time of "The Crucifixion" painting, romanticism was the philosophy that shaped people's psyches including Poussin's.

However, movements of art such as rococo, naturalism, and realism existed side by side with romanticism for they explicated a common technique. For this reason, they were presented as a common denominator that was underlying the artistic work of the time. It suffices to say, therefore, that all these movements played a role, however insignificant, in Poussin's artistic work. Similarly, realism and naturalism, aside from being constructs of political and social structures at the time, influenced the paintings of this period, which were categorized under "subjects".

Artists who adhered to rococo techniques, on the other hand, used delicate colors and curving forms and beautifully decorated their canvases with cherubs and myths of love. Additionally, portraiture was a popular phenomenon with rococo arts. The extent to which romanticism as a movement influenced "The Crucifixion" is embedded in the salient features that characterized it. Romanticism began in the late eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century. It was an artistic and intellectual movement that stressed radicalism against the established social and religious structures. As such, the movement hailed subjectivism, individualism, imagination, subjectivism, emotions, as well as nature. Artists who subscribed to this movement adored nature, their clairvoyance, passions and inner struggles, among inclinations.

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These artists explored human nature, folk culture, the medieval era, the mysterious, and even the diabolic.[4] “ The Crucifixion” is evidently an expression of Romantic Movement given the imagery that it conjures up in a spectator. From the painting, one can see how Poussin presents the emotional experience of those aggrieved following Christ’s crucifixion such as Mary Magdalene, Mary his mother, the disciple whom he loved, and a host of bystanders who must have been thrilled by the occurrence.

The inclusion of the two thugs who were crucified with Jesus in the piece of artwork depicts the artist’s exploration of the human nature that subjectively reflects his feelings for the victims. Furthermore, the figure of a lone bystander has been used perhaps by the artist to enable the viewer to contemplate his or her conception of the scenario. To this extent, therefore, it can be said that the painting of Nicolas Poussin was influenced by romanticism.

“ The Crucifixion” merits being categorized as one of the artworks of this movement given that it bears the features that resonate with the styles of similar works. It is worthy of mentioning that Poussin’s painting “ The Crucifixion” was also influenced by the works of a renowned renaissance artist who lived between 1483 and 1520 in Italy called Raffaello Sanzio. The painter did admire his mentor, Raffaello, for his characteristic classical forms and balanced compositions that were in perfect harmony consequently divorced of the cacophonous emotions of the contemporary painting. As a matter of fact, artworks such as Raphael’s School of Athens was of particular influence to the artist. Poussin actually struggled to copy this skill by

returning to the piece over and over again as an inspiration for the complex
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and multi-figure compositions.[5] The influence of Raphael on Poussin work was indeed great. The indication of this was reflected in the artist's 1633 painting with his historical and/or biblical subjects, not to mention "The Crucifixion". In "The Shepherds of Arcadia" painting for instance, he invites viewers to contemplate the world.

The painting's main motif is "the comforting gesture of the woman who is placing her hand on the shoulder of the young shepherd. The central theme in Poussin's work is effectively humanism"[6]. Just as Raphael did, Poussin invites the view to meditate on the painting. Poussin became the most respected artists in Roman artistic society. However, the classicism that formed the skeleton of his art contrasted to the excitement and vivacity of Baroque. This artistic movement that occurred in the dusk of seventeenth century and the dawn of eighteenth century was distinguished by freedom of forms, the hunger for movement, the abundance of ornamentation, and finally, the growth of passion. It is worthy of noting at this point that the founding of Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture[7] broadened the span of influence of Poussin to subsequent generations.

"The Crucifixion" and other Paintings of Romantic Movement

The most defining feature in "The Crucifixion" painting by Poussin is its landscape layout besides other characteristics. Landscape painting was common in romantic artworks where focus was on nature and its immensity as compared to people. The moods of nature were frequently used to show the varying states of mind and moods of people. A closer look at the

Poussin's piece of artwork shows that the painter used the mood of nature, <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-abstract-from-it-the-crucifixion-that-was/>

the dark background in the painting, to symbolize the somber mood that characterized the crucifixion of Christ. A comparison can be made between Poussin's "Crucifixion" and John Constable's "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden" that was painted in 1820. In this painting, the picturesque created by the landscape in the background compares well with that in the "The Crucifixion" which was pioneered by Poussin. John Constable framed the cathedral with trees and people walking about the paths and cattle grazing beside the stream.

The picture below from PaintingHere. com[8] shows Constable's painting with the landscape resembling that in the Poussin's work save for the different messages that they relay. Another painting that compares with "The Crucifixion" as far as the theme is concerned is Theodore Gericault's "The Raft of Medusa". Melancholic theme as a feature of romantic art movement pervades both artistic works. While in Poussin's work Christ is ignominiously crucified with sympathizers looking on in sorrow, Gericault's painting expresses a scenario of pandemonium with instinctive impulse to survive after a shipwreck.[9] The two paintings also share the historical approach in which their subjects are stricken with agony; that is, they report historical events in the form of images that replicates the feeling of the time upon contemplation by the spectator.[10] All the above paintings were considered part of Romantic Movement because of the impressions that they created. The themes that they expressed such as sorrow resulting from the exploration of human nature that the movement advocated.

Moreover, their historical contexts that make the spectator re-live the events and experience similar feelings that occurred at the time indicate their romantic background.

Conclusion

“ The Crucifixion” artwork by Nicolas Poussin was a masterpiece of art that the artist worked on with finesse thereby bringing into existence landscape painting that would be emulated later by subsequent painters. The outstanding nature of this painting among its contemporary at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts ensues from the materials that were used to produce it together with the rare skills that Poussin employed in its production. The landscaping style that he invented in this painting gave it the high rank compared to other artworks by different painters. The painting conformed to the features of romantic art movement given its overt presentation of emotions, sorrow, use of landscaping, subjectivity, and historical contextualization. Similarly, other works by Theodore Gericault and John Constable share in the influence of the romantic art. Poussin was also influenced by the grandeur paintings of Raphael who practiced during renaissance period.

Bibliography

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com/painting/Salisbury_Cathedral_7014.html> Fried, Michael. Manet’s modernism, or, The face of painting in the 1860s. Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 94. The painting shows the wreckage of a ship christened Medusa that went down and the captain together with senior

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officers save themselves with six lifeboats and abandoned the remaining 149 passengers and other crew members.

The captain though left them a raft that floated for almost a fortnight killing all but fifteen people due to extreme weather, starvation, and revolt.