

# Modernist painting

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



Modernist Painting Modernist Painting Clement Greenberg, in “ Modern Painting” (1963), says that Modernism includes the aspects of our society which are alive. Greenberg, like many formalists, emphasizes the importance of the visual elements. According to Greenberg, the essential nature of modernism lies intrinsically in the determination of each piece of art’s (painting or sculpture) unique and irreducible character. To him, this process would render the art ‘ pure’, and it is this purity which would establish its standards of quality and independence. In the article he tries to portray purity as self definition, and this boils down to an issue of the medium used. In painting, he adds on, this limit is made up of the flat surface, the properties of pigment and the shape of the support. However, it is the laying of emphasis on the ineluctable flatness of the support which remains most vital in the course of the pictorial art. As a result of this, the picture plane becomes the point of focus, all the senses of illusional depth is reduced to a point where background and the foreground are compressed into one. Due to the limitation brought about by the medium because of the two dimensional plains of the picture, the reality of the painting becomes somehow plain. The space becomes purely pictorial and not sculptural. Whereas the old painters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine being part of, the creation created by a modernist is one into which one can only look, and can travel through, only with the eye. Greenberg reasoned that the transposition of three dimensions into two survived in even the most abstract paintings.

He maintains that the first mark which is smudged on a canvas immediately destroys its literal as well as utter flatness and the result of the marks made

on it have a sort of illusion that implies or suggests a sort of third dimension. At issue for Greenberg is not modernism's specificity but its perpetual renovation, a reformation of what had always been inherent to painting, whether "the flat surface, the shape of the support, or the properties of the pigments." With modernism, he contends that these factors become overt. The strategy having not been create a new medium but to transverse the terms that were already implicit within it, that is, to call attention to art rather than to "dissemble" it and make a painting or picture first and foremost a painting.

#### References

Greenberg, C. (1982.). Modernist Painting. In F. Frascina, & C. Harrison, Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology.