

Artistic movements of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries

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Discuss the artistic movements of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. How does one lead to another and what values conflict and produce the change.

The eighteenth, nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were characterized by four major artistic movements. They were Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism. More often than not, these movements represented clear break with old and transition to new social, political, and cultural ideologies. Through music, literature, and art champions of these movements reflected on most pressing concerns of their time and seeking for a ways to better the world plague by revolutions and wars. Neoclassicism was the most prevalent artistic movement of the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Founded on aesthetic attitudes based on the art, literature and culture of ancient Greece and Rome, it emphasized form, proportion, restrained emotion and simplicity. In a number of ways, the rise of Neoclassicism can be attributed to Enlightenment movement.

The expansion, evolution, and redefinition of the European standard classical education, the rise in commissioned art and architecture and the refinement of arts scholarship, and the general reaction to the exorbitant styles of Baroque and Rococo revived interest in antiquity and necessitated a return to principles of classicism. In part a revolt against aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and a reaction against the scientific rationalisation of nature, Romanticism came to replace Classicism in late 18th century. Rejecting glorification of reason and science, Romantic

artists focused instead on emotions, intuition and mystical feelings. Through their works, they also strived to create a sense of a shared collective heritage and common cultural past as the basis of a nation. These sentiments are best demonstrated by one of the most important French Romantic painters Delacroix in his famous painting “ The Massacre at Chios” that depicts an incident in which 20, 000 Greeks were said to have been killed by Turks. By dramatizing the incident, focusing on the suffering of women and children, and using vivid colors, Delacroix sought to appeal to the emotions of the spectators, and create sympathy for the Greeks. As a result of various spiritual, cultural, and social changes that were affecting Europe in the end of the 19th century, Romanticism began to decline eventually giving way to new ideas.

Influenced by industrialization, increased in strength nationalism, and spread of socialist ideas, the intellectual life began to reflect a different kind of sensibility, moving away from emotional and heroic tones of the romanticism. A new artistic movement that emerged from this shift in the line of thought was realism. Unlike their predecessors, realists focused on contemporary people and events rather than grand, historical, or religious subjects. Instead of dabbling in mythological subjects, they sought to expose the truths and realities of people’s existence. This new trend is best reflected in the journalistic reporting from the Crimean Wars that avoided the heroic and jingoistic language to which nineteenth-century readers were accustomed. The term Modernism is applied to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the arts that emerged from the

middle of the 19th century. The modernist movement took place because the idea of traditional forms of art, social organisation and daily life had become tedious and unpleasing to the eye.

In attempt to move forward and force the old ideas aside, modernists changed the way people looked at existing things. This artistic movement encompasses the works of thinkers who rebelled against nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions, believing the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated. Through their works, Modernists directly confronted the new economic, social and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world. Neoclassicism, romanticism, realism and modernism were four artistic movements that mirrored changes in intellectual thought during 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Reflecting the ideas on the Enlightenment about importance of structured world guided by reason, Neoclassicism emphasized form and proportion. The revolt against principles of Enlightenment brought Romanticism that validated strong emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. Positioning itself against romanticism, Realism revolted against the exaggerated emotionalism of the Romantic Movement and strived to depict subjects without embellishment or interpretation.

Finally, responding to wide-scale and far-reaching changes to Western society in the late 19th and early 20th century, modernism broke with conservative values of realism, questioning all axioms of the previous age.