

The themes and purposes of art



The Themes and Purposes of Art During the visit at the National Gallery of Art, I was enthralled specifically by Benton's 'Trail Riders' that is aesthetically laden with the theme of 'static dynamism'. Simply I became aware, for the first time, of that art is dynamic also, though an artist communicates with his or her audiences through static visual objects. Though Benton's work includes a particular space-time matrix, it seemed to me that 'Trail Riders' has exceeded the limitation of time and proves to be timeless. Benton's 'Trail Riders' includes a set of themes that serve him with the scope to convey a versatile and multifaceted meaning in his work. However, as to the purpose of a work of art, I have often been confused whether art is for art's sake or art is for man's sake. Now, the online visit to the National Gallery of Art (NGA) helped me a lot to resolve much of the conundrum of the purpose of art. I found that whereas Benton's visionary appeals value a human being's sake or art's aesthetic purpose, its static dynamism is for art's sake, which is for eyes that are more skilled. After reviewing Thomas Hart Benton's Trail Riders, I realized that his iconography is too simple that its naturalistic majesty can be exaggerated in no way. Amid the three-dimensional landscape of heartland America, the iconographic presence of the horse riders who are seen from a remote panorama conveys the static dynamism of his theme. The vantage point of the artist is such that it turns the remote objects and horse-riders almost into abstraction with the use of contours in implied lines. Though the use of light and shadow clearly contributes to the realism of Benton's work, the glow of the light surpasses the reality of its atmosphere and adds to its surrealism to a great extent. It is the surrealism that evokes motion of spirit in the minds of the viewers. Remoteness is also a prevailing theme and perspective of this

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piece of Benton's artwork. It has thoroughly been maintained through the manipulation of shapes of the contents within the works. Even the nearest objects such as the flowers, the bush, and the stones do not have the individual clarity. Remoteness as well as the zenith of the mountain contributes to the silence of the artwork in which the motion of the riders refers to the fourth dimension, Time.

Also Benton's work can be interpreted from atmospheric perspective. From this perspective, human being's kinetic smallness has been contrasted with the vastness of the universe. Though the overlapping of the objects proves the farthest position of the mountains, they have brighter contrast in the value of light that adds an aura of nearness in respect with the riders. In contrast, the vastness of the mountain lines highlights the nihilistic smallness of human beings.

After encountering Thomas Hart Benton's Trail Riders, I realized that a work of art could also be constructed to convey principles as a purpose. The principles a piece of work conveys signify the subconscious and conscious beliefs of the artist, and therefore make the elements of the piece of art carefully chosen to reflect that artist's view of reality. Looking at the pictures one can understand the artist's thoughts and feelings. As a result, the thematic content, or form, of the piece of art serves a normative function. In other words, what the artist is trying to do is help his audience see the world in a similar way and to then approach the world from that new, perhaps superior, perspective. Using art in such a way, the artist gives himself the opportunity to seemingly make arguments but in an indirect, passive fashion to his audience.

When one looks at Benton's Trail Riders in particular, one is struck by the

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majesty of the image he constructs of heartland America. It communicates a theme of purity and dignity. Benton's work is very naturalistic, but at the same time elusive, with the respect to the world it is depicting. At the time of Trail Riders, America was in the grip of the Great Depression. Instead of moving into social realism and overstressing and over-representing poverty, Trail Riders looks at the decency of a majestic scene. Benton's painting thus gives his audience a new perspective, perhaps one that is hopeful, on the potential for human existence outside of the cold economic realities of the time.

Works Cited

Benton, Thomas Hart. ' Trail Riders', National Gallery of Art. 1975. 42. 1. Washington D. C., 1964/1965.